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Titel: German decision-making during the outbreak of World War One

## German decision-making during the outbreak of World War One

### Introduction

The emergence of the First World War is one of the most complex issues in history of how and why a major war started. In the summer of 1914 an international crisis amongst the major powers in Europe culminated into the outbreak of an armed conflict that would cost millions of lives. Basically three stages can be distinguished. In stage one Austria-Hungary launched a war against Serbia. In the second stage, this war escalated into a continent-wide conflict involving Germany, Russia and France. In the third stage, Britain gets involved as Germany attacks the neutral states of Belgium and Luxemburg. The Great War, as the First World War is often called, lasted until the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1918. Since then, there has been discussion about how and why the situation could have gotten so out of hand, leading to four years of death and destruction.

This thesis will analyse the origins of the First World War through a perspective of the theories in the field of International Relations. One of the main perspectives in the theories of International Relations is realism. In the realist corner of IR-studies, Dale Copeland has set up a theory about the origins of major war: Dynamic Differentials Theory. Copeland has applied his theory upon the outbreak of the First World War. In this thesis I will introduce Dynamic Differentials theory and I will investigate whether the theoretical assumptions of Copeland are plausible enough to explain the outbreak of World War One.

The central research question in this theses is about German decision-making in 1914. Is the theory of Dynamic Differentials plausible enough to certify that German decision-makers were actively seeking war during the summer of 1914?

This question will be answered by first working out the theory. After that, the hypotheses that come forth out of Dynamic Differentials theory will be systematically reflected. The work of scholars in the debate around the origins of the First World War, like Christopher Clark and Max Hastings, is used for this. At the end a conclusion will follow containing the answer to whether Copeland's theory is plausible enough to advocate that German decision-makers actively sought war in the summer of 1914.

## Chapter 2: Dynamic Differentials Theory explained

### Realism

One of the main perspectives in theories of International Relations is Realism. Realism claims to offer an account to world affairs that is 'realistic', in the sense that it is hard-headed and devoid of wishful thinking and deluded moralizing (Heywood, 2014, 56). Realism is based upon two core assumptions: First, people are essentially selfish and competitive, meaning that egoism is the defining characteristic of human nature. The second assumption says that anarchy rules the international system of states. There is no authority higher than the sovereign state. A 'government of the world' doesn't exist and it never will. This results into a system of 'self-help', because states cannot count on anyone else to take care of them. Next to that, relationships between and amongst states are always characterized by uncertainty and suspicion. This results into the 'security dilemma'. States build up defensive forces to ensure their survival, but this build-up in force is interpreted by other states as threatening, causing these other states to build up defensive forces as well, causing an arms race (Heywood, 2014, 63). Another characteristic of realism is that states focus on 'relative gains'. States are always concerned about improving their position relatively to other states. This is devastating for any kind of cooperation.

The realist perspective developed over time. Classical realism, sometimes called 'human nature realism' dominated the study of IR from 1940 till 1970. It is led by the assumptions that states are led by human beings who have a 'will to power' hardwired into them at birth (Mearsheimer, 2001, 6 19). This causes states to have an insatiable appetite for power, or as Morgenthau calls it 'a limitless lust for power'. States always are keen on the opportunity to enlarge their power and to dominate over other states. In Classical Realism, theorists yet do acknowledge the anarchy in the international system. At the international level, there is no such thing as a conflict-regulating mechanisms as is the government over its civilians in a sovereign state.

In 1979 Kenneth Waltz published his 'Theory of international politics'. Waltz assumed that states merely aim to survive. Above all, they seek security (Waltz, 1979). Waltz founded a revised realism, called structural realism, or more known as 'neorealism'. Waltz ignored human nature and the ethics of statecraft, but used systems theory to explain how international anarchy determines the actions of states. Waltz maintained that the structure of the international system forces states to pay careful attention to the balance of power. He also was one of the first theorists to claim that a bipolar system is more stable and provides a better guarantee of security than a multipolar system does (Heywood, 2014, 63). In chapter two the differences between a bipolar and multipolar system will be worked out. Waltz argued that states behave defensively so that they maintain rather than upset the balance of power. Mearsheimer distinguishes 'defensive realism' and 'offensive realism'. Defensive is based on Waltz assumptions, that states mainly care about maintaining their position in the international system (Mearsheimer, 2001, 20). Offensive realists, however, don't believe that a status quo in power can be found. The balance of power is always shifting because states always look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals. When benefits outweigh the costs, states will act offensively. The ultimate goal of each state is to be the hegemon of the system (Mearsheimer, 2001, 21).

Next to these key-assumptions of the realist perspective, a less-known variant of realism exists. Dale Copeland published his 'Origins of Major War' in 2000. In the first chapter, titled 'Rethinking Realist Theories of Major War', he introduces his 'dynamic differentials theory'. As declared in the title of the chapter, Copeland's thinking is based upon the realist perspective of International Relations. After working out classical realism and neorealism, he states 'yet we still lack a theory that can explain, without invoking ad hoc unit-level factors like "lust for power" and "dissatisfaction with the status quo" why preponderant states in multipolarity attack the system in the face of the staggering risks and costs' (Copeland, 2000, 15). And thus Copeland brings up his own theory.

### Dynamic Differentials Theory

Copeland's Dynamic Differentials Theory focusses at explaining why great powers start major wars. He mainly addresses the likelihood that states go to war and does so in bipolar and multipolar systems. Next to the three main assertions as described above in the introduction, his theory consists of three propositions. The first is that because major wars are so costly, and because they risk the survival of the state, it is more likely that the initiator of the war is a dominant military power. A smaller military power simply lacks the capability to take on the system. More importantly however, it would be irrational for a great power to attack while still growing. Waiting with the attack would mean greater power when the moment of the strike comes, and thus an easier victory. A great power will be much more likely to attack when the peak of its growth is in sight. When decline is in the prospect, the great power is willing to prevent that. When deep decline and inevitable decline is the future-prospect, the likelihood to go to war increases even more. Therefore, all major wars must be preventive wars (Copeland, 2000).

In the second proposition we assume that a near equality exists between the individual great powers. Copeland states that in a multipolar system, this is likely to be a stabilizing feature. No state will make a bid for hegemony against the system, because of several reasons. First, a war with another – more or less equal – military power is costly and devastating. Even if the offensive state would win, it would put itself relatively in an inferior position to the remaining great powers. The states sitting on the side-lines will emerge in a stronger position. A second reason would be that the other military powers in the system would unite against the aggressor, resulting in an even lower probability that the aggressor could come to a stronger position than before his offensive actions. A third and fourth reason are more related to the international system. A declining but still equal state in a multipolar system has no reason to think that a rising state would be threatening, because if the rising state would act offensively, the remaining states will unite against it. The fourth reason is vice-versa, the declining power can form alliances against the state that is rising, so it doesn't need to fear that it will be overtaken (Copeland, 2000, 16). Altogether, in a multipolar system, major war is not very likely, as long as no state is clearly superior to any other individual state in military power. As long as the states are equal, no state will wage a war for hegemony.

This is completely different in a bipolar system according to Copeland. The main difference is that near-equal states realize that there is only one other great power that has to be defeated to achieve hegemony. In multipolar systems the states at the side-lines would profit from two states decimating each other in a war, but in bipolar system these bystanders have only marginal military power. Because of the relative low military power of other states, alliance forming won't be a threat to the declining state as the coalitional partners simply have far too few weight to throw against the initiator of major war.

Copeland even states that the second-ranked state in bipolarity can initiate major war when in steep decline. It knows that it is its only chance to prevent losing its position, and there is only one power to beat. Waging war is more likely in that situation, even if the initiator knows he is not the strongest.

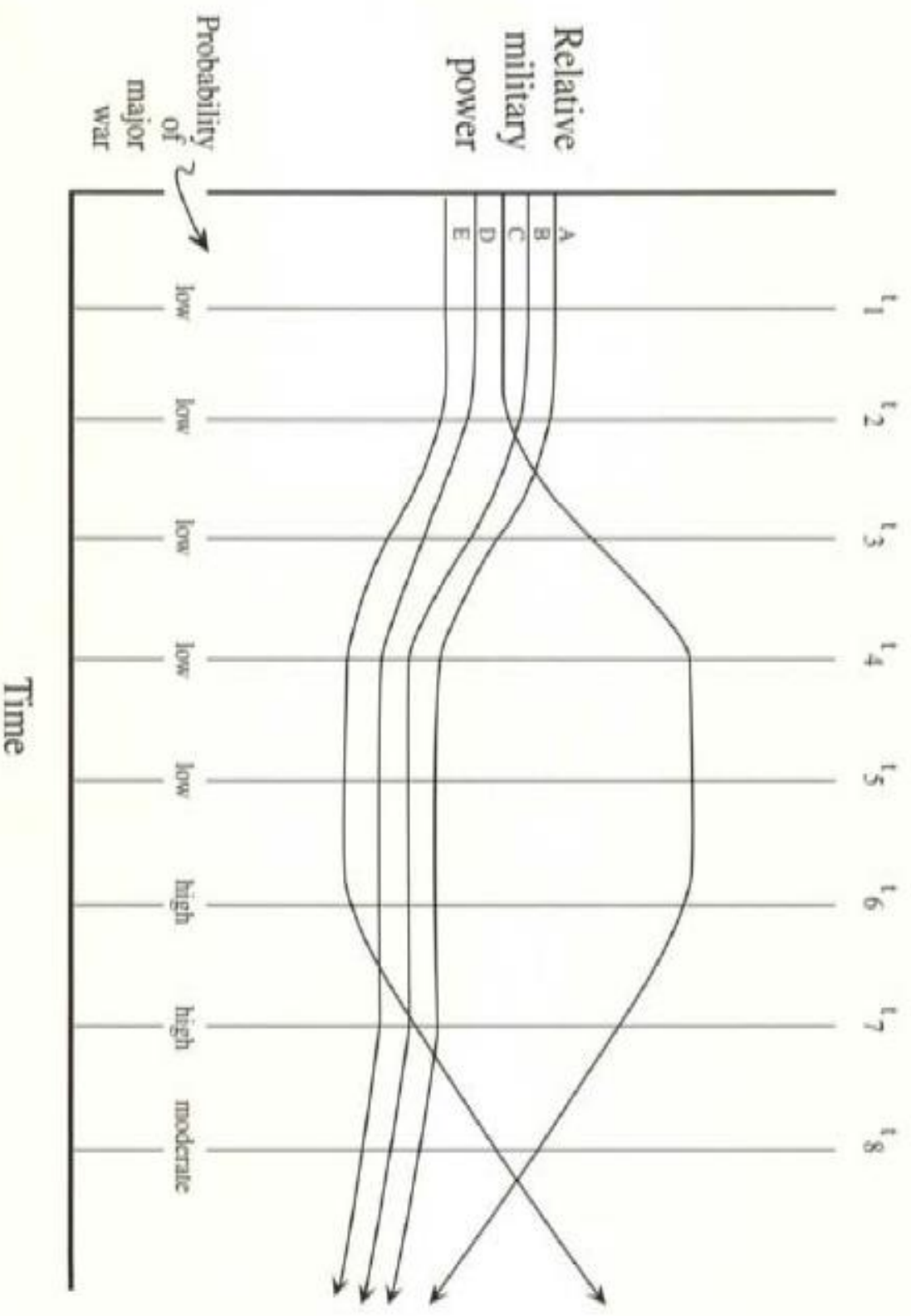


Fig. 1. Relative military power curves and the probability of major war: multipolarity

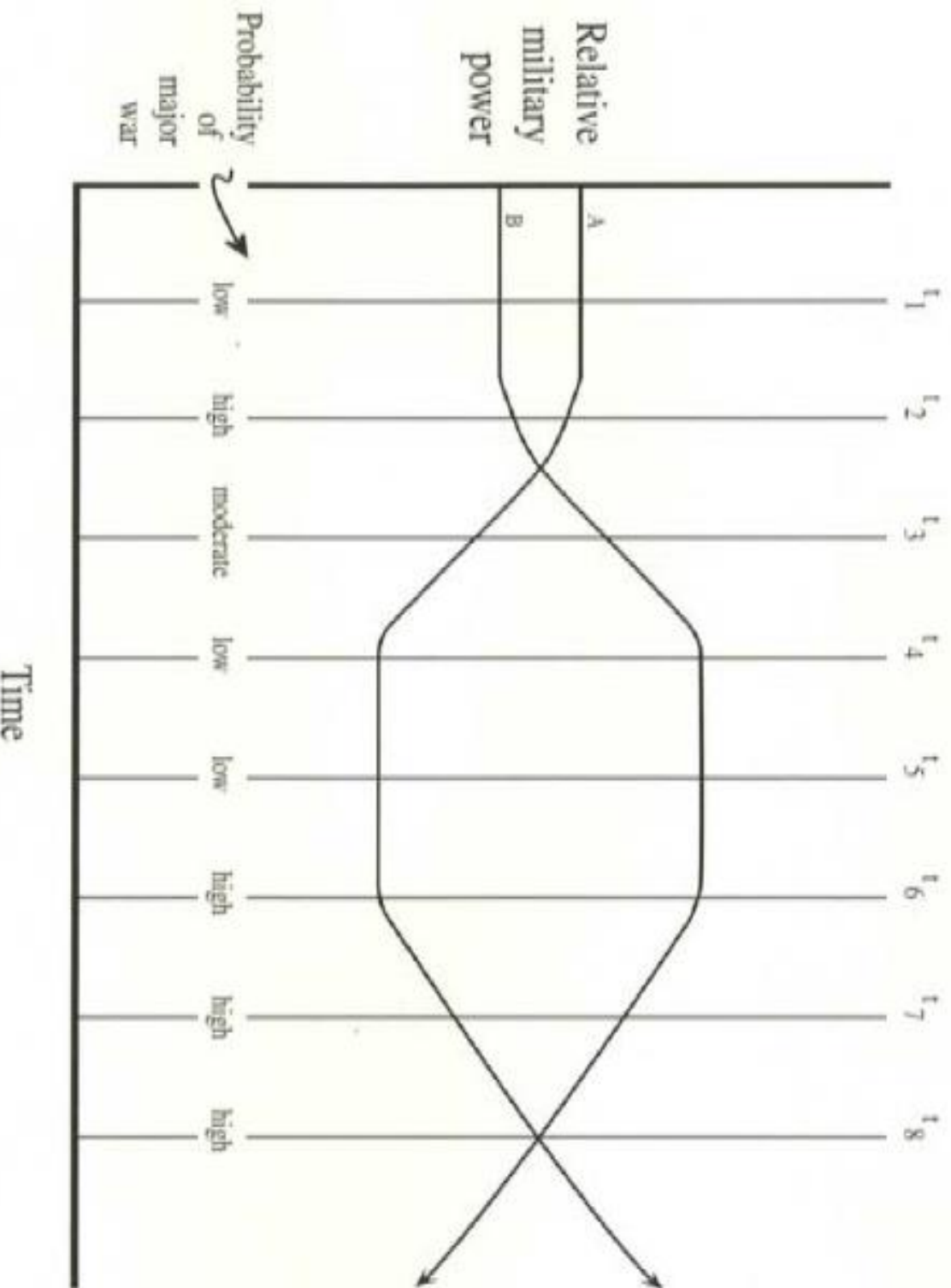


Fig. 2. Relative military power curves and the probability of major war: bipolarity

Copeland summarizes his arguments about bipolarity and multipolarity in the figures that I have copied above (Copeland, 2000, 18-19). In the figure it is possible to see that at times t1, t4 and t5, the probability of major war is low in either a multipolar or a bipolar system. The trends in military power are stable. No state is experiencing a decline, and thus there is no state that has a motive to go to war. At t2 in the bipolar system, the dominant military power is facing a decline, causing a high likelihood that this declining power will start a war. In the bipolar system however, the likelihood for war remains low because of the presence of other equal powers. As explained above, those would be the states sitting at the side-line, that would come out in a stronger position when two other states fight a costly war. At times t6 and t7, likelihood for war in both systems is high because there is a decline in prospect for the strongest military power. Because the inequality in the multipolar system is great, the dominant power will dare to wage a war and take up against the system.

Based upon this theory, Copeland sets up two hypotheses, and these two hypotheses can be applied upon the origins of First World War. The first one is that a declining state, with a deep and inevitable decline in prospect, will attack an upcoming power to prevent losing its position. Applying this to July 1914, would identify Germany as a state with a deep and inevitable decline, or at least it perceived itself as so, and thus would be seeking war, according to Copeland's hypothesis.

The second is that in a multipolar system, a state must be a preponderant military power to dare to provoke a war. Looking again to 1914, Germany was the strongest military power in 1914, or at least perceived itself to be strong so. Copeland's theory thus states that Germany would be daring to take on the system and seek war.

So the two applied hypotheses are, first, that Germany was facing deep and inevitable decline, thus triggering it's leadership to wage to costs of war against the costs of losing it's position in the system and second, that Germany was the superior military power, putting the Germans in the position to be able to take on the system if needed. Copeland states that these two preconditions have motivated the German leadership to actively seek war in the summer of 1914, and thus blames them for the choices they have made, as they have led to war. In the next chapter, I will work out how German acted and adapted its policies during the years 1912-13 and 1914 and how Copeland interprets these actions and the behaviour of German leadership.

### Chapter 3: *The dramatic change between German decision-making in 1912 – 13 and 1914*

#### German Security and Preparation for War

In his chapter about German Security and how Germany prepared for World War 1, Copeland focusses at how the German leadership more and more developed the feeling that a preventive war was a necessity. Next to that he covers the significant differences between German Policy during the four Balkan-crises in 1912-13 and the dramatically different attitude adopted by Germany in July 1914. As he claims in his Dynamic Differentials Theory, Copeland states that in a multipolar system major war is likely when the militarily significantly superior power faces deep and inevitable decline. Furthermore, as this states reaches a peak in its relative military power, the likelihood of risky behaviour increases. Copeland attempts to prove that Germany came to this peak in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and acted very self-controlled to wait till the right moment to provoke a major war, right at this peak of military power.

In 1904 Germany started seeing itself as the preponderant military power in the system (Copeland, 2001, 57). However it acknowledges that its relative military power will soon come to a peak, as Russia's growth is gigantic and the Russians possess a far superior potential power. The Germans developed a fear that when Russia would complete its industrialization and finish the expansion of its railway system, one day Russia would overwhelm German military power. That would make Germany lose its military superiority needed to win a total war. And so it came to the stand of view that war would have to be fought rather sooner than later. An important condition for this war was that Germany wouldn't be the first power performing aggressive behaviour. Berlin knew that Russia would react to any attack by Austria-Hungary on Serbia. If the Austrians would attack, Germany could come to aid to Austria when the Russians would attack it. But Germany wasn't ready yet. During the Agadir crisis in 1911 Germany provoked the French by moving a German warship into a Moroccan port. Britain firmly supported France, showing that Britain would not remain neutral in any continental war. Tirpitz again withheld the German leadership from escalation into war, as the German navy still was not ready yet. And thus the Germans waited, and meanwhile withheld Vienna from a hard-line policy towards Serbia until German military power was at its peak.

Although it wouldn't be the first time that the German leadership had thought about major war. In Bismarck's time (1875) thoughts about major war existed, however Bismarck realized that Germany did not yet have the military superiority to take on the system, nor did Germany feel the necessity to do so as it was still growing economically (Copeland, 2001, 61). But in 1887 the future chancellor Bernhard von Bülow said that 'If we fight the Russians we must not make peace until we have made them incapable of attacking us for at least a generation' (Copeland, 2001, 61). Again it shows how Germany regarded Russia.

In 1905 the Schlieffen plan was developed, contending to first destroy France, so that after that Germany could fully focus at dealing with Russia. Admiral von Tirpitz withheld military command from carrying out the Schlieffen plan however, because he knew that the German navy wouldn't be ready for war against Britain. The Brits would definitely react when Germany behaved aggressively against France. Domestic public opinion wasn't ready for war neither in 1905.

In 1912 civilian leadership starts developing a fear towards Russian growth too. Chancellor Bethmann got convinced that general war would have to be fought sooner than later (Copeland, 2001, 64) and supported the army's call for a massive increase in war preparations. On 8 December 1912 German leaders came together in the so called War Council in which was decided to actively start preparing for a preventive war to be initiated in one to two years. Admiral von Tirpitz said to need one and a half year to make the navy ready for major war against Britain, of which is was seen as a given that it would get involved in the war.

Copeland highlights three major points that emerge from this War Council in 1912. First, no one disagreed with Moltke, German chief of general staff, that a preventive war for hegemony had to be fought. The decision to do so was only postponed to have more time to prepare navy and land forces. Second, all attending understood that Britain would oppose a German attack on France.



Britain would continue to uphold its policy of keeping the balance of power intact. Even chancellor Bethmann didn't have faith in British neutrality, not demotivating him from putting whatever effort in attempting to nevertheless achieve it. Third, every key leader in the Council agreed on the necessity of motivating Germany's population for a war directed against Russia (Copeland, 2001, 66).

As seen in the section about German decision-making during the July Crises, these three points strongly reinforce Copeland's statement that German decision-makers were acting very consciously and working towards a major war. The Germans got obsessed with Russian growth and started calculating what the results would be if major war would break out. It is clear that German leadership faced a deep and inevitable decline. But what about its military superiority? Was it really the preponderant military power? At least the general conviction was so, and not only in Germany. There were widespread ideas that the German army was the most powerful in Europe. The Germans themselves believed in a short-term qualitative superiority. The German army possessed better artillery, used superior infantry rifles and was excellently trained.

The years 1913 and 1914 were used to optimize the army. During these two years, four Balkans Crises arose, after which the July Crises of 1914 came up. Copeland's top evidence in Germany seeking war, and seeking it at the most favourable moment, lies in the dramatic switch of policy maintained by Berlin during these first crises and the July Crisis. Copeland's theory can not only explain why war broke out in August 1914, but also why it didn't break out earlier. Berlin was very aware that any Austrian move against Serbia could cause escalation. It thus had to restrain Vienna from any aggression until the German army was ready for major war. For four crises Berlin did so, maintaining a moderate policy towards the Balkans, until July 1914, when the conditions were optimal for major war.

The First Balkan War started a streak of crises. An offensive alliance was formed against the part of the Ottoman empire in the Balkan. Austria worried that Russia and Serbia would exploit Turkey's declining position to increase their power and thus encouraged that Balkan states not to fight Turkey. Vienna's efforts were unsuccessful and Turkey got almost pushed out of Europe. During the First Balkan War, four periods marked high tension in which great power war was probable. In this periods of tension, German policy always was to support Austria but never to the point where Austrian actions might bring in Russia and thus provoke a general war (Copeland, 2001, 73).

As Turkey was pushed back, Austria feared that Serbia would turn against Austria. Therefore it activated troops. Russia and Austria had earlier mobilized troops around the Galician border, also contributing to tensions. Austria knew that Berlin would never agree to a unilateral move by Vienna however, and thus did not go to war.

Austria and Russia nevertheless remained in states of partial mobilization around the Galician border in the beginning of 1913. Austria prepared for attacking Serbia, but Russia didn't know this and perceived the military activity on the other side of the border as a threat. Hence both sides maintained a state of high military readiness. Germany did not mobilize however, simply because it still needed more to maximize its superiority. Instead, it strongly advised Vienna to hold off war against Serbia, so that the war could be fought later under better circumstances.

The third crisis is interesting. This crisis was about the city of Scutari, in Albania. A dispute emerged about whether it belonged to Albania or to Montenegro. Serbia supported Montenegro's claim while Austria prepared to move against the Montenegrins. Berlin supported Austrian action this time, in a contrast to the earlier holding back of Austria. The big difference in this third crisis is that Berlin knew that Russia would not react. Petersburg was not supporting the Serbian point of view according to Scutari, and thus Germany knew that they would not get provoked if Austria would march against Montenegro and thus indirectly Serbia.

Germany policy switched back to a maintenance of Austria in a fourth conflict. In June 1913 Austria felt the need to attack Serbia in support of Bulgaria during the Second Balkan War. This time, Russia would definitely react as Serbia would be directly attacked by Austria. Berlin rapidly reacted,

demotivating Austria to give up the waiting attitude. The Germans convinced the Austrians that attacking Serbia would cause a European war.

Copeland draws a conclusion of these four moments of tensions. He states that 'when there was little possibility of Russian intervention, Berlin allowed Austria to act forcefully; but whenever it seemed that Russia might be obliged, for the sake of its reputation, to oppose Austrian actions, Berlin withheld support and advised Vienna to maintain its "waiting attitude". By July 1914, this policy would be reversed.' (Copeland, 2001, 75).

#### German decision-making during the July Crisis

Copeland starts this chapter about the July Crisis by stating that Germany preferred world war to a negotiated peace, even to one that gave Austria most of what it wanted (Copeland, 2001, 79). Furthermore he writes that German decision-makers were aware that Britain would not remain neutral if Germany would persist a hard-line strategy. Copeland argues that Berlin deliberately brought on a world war by declaring war to avert a last-minute capitulation by Russia to the demands that Austria had set in its ultimatum to Serbia.

Dynamic Differentials Theory comes in at the part that Copeland states that decision-making of the German leaders was driven by negative power trends. Russia was the rising state and German leaders believed that a war had to be fought in 1914. Postponing it would mean that Russia would complete its military reforms and strategic railways. Germany by then wouldn't be able to take on the system (Copeland, 2001, 80). The opportunity to beat Russia would be lost and further decay would follow as the Russian growth would overwhelm Germany. According to Dynamic Differentials Theory, Germany thus didn't have any alternative to seeking major war. Copeland mainly focusses at how Bethmann set this war up under the best conditions for Germany.

Three conditions were important to Bethmann. First, and most important, the German people had to be in favour of the war. German leaders feared that Socialists would be against any form of aggressive military behaviour. Second, Germany needed to ensure itself of Austrian help. Third, although not very necessary, Britain had to be delayed as long as possible from entering the war, so that the Germans first could deal with the French. The overall strategy however was that Russia had to be blamed for the war, and that strategy could easily be matched to the three conditions. If Bethmann could find a way to provoke the Russians into mobilization, it would appear as if Germany was only reacting in self-defence, and that would create a great domestic support. Furthermore it would draw Austria into the war for fear of a Russian attack, and with Russia as the aggressor, the British might be more tentative to support Russia and – later on – France.

Copeland questions himself why Germany pressed Austria into taking a hard-line stance against Serbia after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne. He distinguishes three main explanations. The first being that Germany falsely assumed that Russia would not intervene, second that Germany expected and hoped that the conflict would remain localized and third that Germany expected and hoped that Russia would bite and intervene. Copeland states that Germany's motive is the third. Seeking a preventive war, they had to drag Russia in so that it could be blamed for the war (Copeland, 2001, 82). The evidence for this statement is based on the diaries of Kurt Riezler, Bethmann's personal secretary and confidant. Out of this diary, it becomes clear that Bethmann was faced with the choice between German decline or fighting will Germany still had a chance. Reluctantly Bethman chose war.

To harden his argument, Copeland brings up all kinds of evidence. For example, he brings up that Bethmann was very concerned about domestic support for the war. Although some said that war might improve internal conditions, Bethmann thought that a world war would greatly increase the power of Social Democrats in Germany. The Social Democrats preached peace, and with the horrors of the war, many would alter their opinion about first willing to have a war. Nevertheless, this didn't stop Bethmann from opting for war. It can be concluded that domestic opinion was not what drove

Bethmann to want war. In another passage of Riezler's diary, it becomes clear that Germany preferred a major war to a localized war. In the passage is written that even if war would not come 'we still have the prospect of manoeuvring the Entente apart over this matter' (Copeland, 2001, 85). The word 'still' indicates – according to Copeland - that not having war would be a secondary-preferred scenario. Another argument that Germany was seeking war is that it didn't reject nor edit the ultimatum that Austria was about to send to Austria. It had the full text in hands before being sent and there would have been plenty of time to reject it, but the Germans did not (Copeland 2001, 86).

The universally accepted paradigm is that German leaders were driven by absolute panic in the week of 26 July to 1 August. The German leaders got cold feet on the night of 29-30 July and would have tried but fail to keep Austria from pulling the system into war. Copeland rejects this. The telegrams that were sent in the week before the ultimatum are perceived a last-second drawback of the Germans, but it is the exact opposite. By doing so, Germany moderated the attitude that Austria held against Serbia, and so the world wouldn't perceive Austria as the aggressor, but as a legitimate claimer. All steps were part of the strategy to blame Russia for the war. Bethmann had to go through a seven-step plan to make the world believe that Russia was to blame for the war.

First, Russia had to be provoked into at least partial mobilization against Austria. Germany achieved this by having Austria declare war on Serbia and immediately attack, but also by sending a false promise to Petersburg that partial mobilization would not lead to a generally war. Second, Germany had to position itself as the honest broker, appearing to be operating apart from Austria and not knowing about their tough stand. The world would have to think that Germany wanted to contain the conflict to a localized war. Third, Germany would have to scare Russia of from generally mobilization that would direct Russian forces against Germany. Fourth, once Russian general mobilization was given, Berlin had to ensure that the Russians would not get cold feet. Germany would have to adapt a softer attitude towards the Russians to achieve that they would believe that mobilization on both sides would be possible without automatically bringing war. Fifth, the world had to believe that German and Austrian leaders tried all they could do to pursue a negotiated solution at the end, but that Russian general mobilization had eliminated this diplomatic solution. Sixth, Austria should be prevented from negotiating with Russia to come to a last-minute agreement with Russia. These two steps, five and six, are heavily complicated as they work against each other. The more Austria negotiated with Russia, the higher the chance that an agreement would follow. Germany would thus have to pressure Austria just enough to have them maintain a stance harsh enough to not be acceptable by the Russians. Step seven included that Germany would send an ultimatum to Petersburg, stating that Germany would have to go to full mobilization, but not indicating that that mobilization would mean war (Copeland, 2001, 89-90).

This seven-step plan is the strategy that Bethmann adapted in the last week of July 1914 according to Copeland. More often the German leaders are seen as incompetent statesmen, forming decision through chaotic mechanism without really knowing what they were doing. Copeland states that this is exactly how the German officials would have wanted to be seen. They convinced the world that they were not in control of events, so that they couldn't be blamed for them. Copeland even states that they were so successful in doing so, that even nowadays the general agreement is that the First World War is a war that no state ever wanted.

#### H4: Reflecting Copeland's Theory and Hypotheses

##### Germany's attitude in 1912-13 seen from a different angle

In contrast to Copeland, who clearly blames Germany for provoking a major war, Christopher Clark sticks to a much more neutral view. In his book *Sleepwalkers, how Europe went to war in 1914* he states that the German leaders motivated the Austrians to a moderate policy towards Serbia, so that Russia would not get provoked. Meanwhile, the Russians did the exact opposite, motivating their satellite-states in the Balkan to adopt hard lines against Austria (Clark, 2017, 377). Clark describes in his work that the major powers of Europe found themselves in a very complex multipolar system. All states noticed the tension and increased likelihood for war and attempted to stay close in contact with each other. By diplomacy they hoped that a détente would be possible, but confusion and misperception made it almost an impossible job.

An interesting statement that Clark comes forward with is that the 'War Council', as described above, wouldn't be as ground-breaking as Copeland assumes. Chancellor Bethmann would not have been invited at all (Clark, 2017, 390). Emperor Wilhelm would be the thrusting power in the meeting, steering to strong military measures. Bethmann would be the one to agitate against the decisions made in the Council, attempting to make them un-done.

In December 1912 there was a much more important meeting in the Neues Palais, in which a great army bill was adopted. Clark states that this bill was adopted by the German leadership because the concerns about the worsening security of Germany had strongly increased. France and Russia were mainly responsible for Germany feeling threatened. Russia because of its gigantic economic growth which was rapidly being translated into military power. France's responsibility was more indirect. The enormous loan provided by France to Russia was perceived in Berlin as a big strategic blow against Germany. With this loan the railway improvements could be afforded, gearing up Russian military power at an even faster rate. Germany did thus not expand its military capabilities because it wanted to peak its military power, but because it felt threatened by Russia to its eastern and France to its western border. Clark thus doesn't blame Germany for being aggressive, he explains it in a way that Germany felt threatened, and thus arming itself would be the reasonable thing to do. So, Clark keeps to a much milder tone and doesn't condemn Germany.

##### German behaviour in July re-analysed

Halfway July, Germany held on to its policy to contain the conflict to a local size. It expected that the tension between Austria and Serbia would hold on for a week, or maybe a couple of weeks. It didn't express any tendency to be willing to use the Austro-Serbian conflict to provoke major war. German policy-makers were very conscious that Germany itself should not undertake any action that could provoke or escalate the situation. Therefore the leadership and commanders were not obstructed to go on their planned vacations. Emperor Wilhelm sailed the Eastern Sea and the commanders of the army went on leave, even though the crisis persisted. If the German leaders would have decided to cancel their holiday plans, that might have generated suspicious thoughts (Clark, 2017, 597). It can be said however that just for going on their leaves and holidays, Germany wanted to arise an ambience of nonchalance, diverting the attention from preparations being made for major war. Clark doesn't want to attach too much value to this particular event. He does not want to condemn the vacations as a disguise, in contrast with Copeland, who claimed that the German leaders tried to make the situation appear as if nothing was going on, while in the meantime the German war machine was running at full speed.

Another statement made by Copeland is that Germany fiercely pressured Austria to act against Serbia. Copeland states that Germany wanted Austria to do so, so that there wouldn't be a way back anymore. Directly after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand was the legit moment for Austria to strike, and if Germany could push them to do so as quick as possible, Russia would have to react and Germany would have its war. Clark interprets this pressure upon Austria to act rapidly in a different way. He says that Germany pushed Austria to be quick with their action so that the conflict could not

expand to a large, European conflict. The Austrians were too slow however, because of their sluggish decision-making and because of the lack of logistics in its army to mobilize rapidly.

With Austria reacting too slow on the crisis, one of the main preconditions to contain the conflict to a local one fell away. Germany nevertheless held on to its policy. They did so because they received information about the French army, bringing the message that the French army would perform very poor in an armed conflict. This generated the assumption amongst German decision-makers that the French would not be willing to go to war because of Serbia, which would discourage the Russians too (Clark, 2017, 600).

But still, with Germany holding on to its containment-policy of the conflict, the Germans excluded any kind of alternative solution, like diplomacy between Austria and Serbia. Germany knew that it was risky, because Russia might react, and that would let the conflict develop in a war between the great European powers. Germany thus contributed to the crisis and outbreak of the World War too, but Clark states that reactions to all the events in the summer of 1914 gave all but the impression that the German leadership embraced the crisis as a welcome event, giving them the possibility to finally execute a plan that was long cherished and to start their preventive war. On the contrary; it took quite some time until the German leadership started noticing that the crisis was leading Europe straight into a tremendous disaster. Even on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July the top-leaders of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not expect that France nor Britain would interfere with the Balkans conflict. The German leaders couldn't cope with the situation, they didn't master it. All the developments followed each other so rapidly that the German leadership couldn't keep up with the pace of the crisis (Clark, 2017, 601). In this perception of Clark lies the biggest contrast between his interpretations and those of Copeland. Copeland says that this is exactly the way the Germany leadership to be seen; chaotic, not in control of events, panicking even. All so that Germany would not be to blame for forging a plan that would drag the entire European continent into a war. Clark believes in the ignorance of the German leadership, Copeland condemns it as a disguise for their plans. I advocate Copeland's point of view, as in the section above I have shown that there are too many examples of German policy choices that resulted in escalation of the situation, resulting into war.

#### Russian policy and motivation

But that's still not enough to prove that Dynamic Differentials Theory is plausible enough to prove that German decision-makers actively sought war in July 1914. When we take two other great powers into account, things get more clear.

During governmental meetings in July 1913 amongst Russian decision-makers, Sazonov, Russian minister of Foreign Affairs, finger pointed towards Germany as the source of tension and unrest in Europe. The crises during 1912 and 1913 were started by Austria however, but that didn't matter. Germany had evil intentions is what Sazonov thought. No longer was Austria seen as the main opponent during the crises. Germany took its place as the main enemy (Clark, 20017, 552). The leaders of Russia were convinced that war would come, no matter what. In this matter they shared the feelings Germany had, although Clark notices a vital difference: Bethmann accepted the fact that war would be inevitable as Russia would grow and would start a war. He didn't reason in a way that would lead to preventive military measures until Russia fully mobilized. Petersburg however adopted proactive military measures, while not being under any threat. That strongly contributed to the increase of the risk of major war.

In July 1914 Russia adopted military measures with a quite bizarre result to the rise of tensions. Partial mobilization was accepted by the government, being a completely unpractical and potentially dangerous procedure, according to Clark. Partial mobilization could not other than to be perceived as a direct threat against Austria, provoking them into partial mobilization as well. Germany would definitely react, as Russia would react too in the case that Germany would conduct partial mobilization against France. Before the order was sent out, Russia realized this and attempted to change the partial mobilization into a pre-mobilization. This was however misperceived by many European states, who still assumed that Russia was partially mobilizing, generating great

consequences (Clark, 2017, 556). The pre-mobilization, or partial mobilization, put Germany under a dramatically increased pressure. Germany still desired a local solution for the conflict between Austria and Serbia, contain a potential war and preventing it to spread out into Europe. Why then did Russia act as it did? The answer lies in Sazonov's conviction that if Austria would undertake military actions against Serbia, a Russian militarily counter-reaction must follow. When the ultimatum was delivered after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, Sazonov proclaimed 'C'est la guerre européenne' (Clark, 2017, 558). Sazonov never wanted to acknowledge that Austria had the right to adopt countermeasures against Serbia after its heir was assassinated in Sarajevo. Many times and in many different contexts had Sazonov claimed that Russian military action would follow if Serbia would be attacked. He did know about the risks of partial mobilization, as became clear out of his objection to proceed into it during on of the crises in November 1912. In 1914 however the situation was different. Russia had ensured itself from French support against Germany, and thus felt confident enough to act more provocative (Clark, 2017, 592). The critical condition that caused Russia to opt for mobilization was the complete willingness of the French to fulfill its obligations as an ally in case of an emergency. At the 28<sup>th</sup> of July this was made clear through a message from Paléologue, French ambassador in Petersburg (Clark, 2017, 592). Another motivation for the hard-line policy conducted by the Russians lie in the frustrations amongst Russian politicians that were built up because of the situation around the Bosphorus. Russian naval commanders strongly desired to possess the access to the Turkish throughway to the Black Sea (Clark, 2017, 562). Turkey had ordered two Dreadnoughts in Britain, and the prospect that there would be Turkish Dreadnoughts in the Black Sea caused the naval command nightmares. Serbia could not fall, as this would decrease the chance of Russia ever getting to possess the Bosphorus-channels, or at least controlling undesired disturbances around it. Clark concludes his view upon the Russian motivation for its conducted policies by stating that it doesn't matter what the exact order of preferences for Russia was. Sazonov had opted war from the beginning of the streak of crises on. The intensive contact and exchange of telegrams between governments of Russia and Germany were no more than the theatre of a historical drama (Clark, 2017, 564). This section thus shows that there may be another factor that can be the cause of World War One. Clark opens the option that Germany was not the main responsible actor.

### Zooming in on Austria

Max Hastings wrote a historical analysis of how Europe went to war in 1914. In his book '*Catastrophe, Europe goes to war 1914*' his main point is that the leaders of the European great powers were not really knowing what they were doing. He states that participants in all conflicts with more than two states going to war have different motivations for deciding to fight, and this was definitely true in 1914 (Hastings, 2013, 42). He continues that the decision-making of seven governments was influenced by a wide range of ambitions and fears. Although there were a lot of common allegiances in Europe, these alliances and connections were certainly not based on common logic. As an example Hastings takes Austria's reaction to the assassination of Frans Ferdinand. Austria almost directly decided to invade Serbia, not because its leadership cared for retaliation of the killed Archduke and his wife, but because the assassination represented the best justification Austria would ever get to finally deal with their mortally troublesome neighbour (Hasting, 2013, 42). For Austria, a military reaction would be the best resolve to deal with Serbia. And that was not only for dealing with Austria, but also to divert attention of the trouble with the restless peoples in the Hapsburg empire. Hastings brings up a personal message from Emperor Franz Joseph to Kaiser Wilhelm, in which the Emperor says that a peaceful solution for the conflict between Austria and Serbia is unthinkable. It shows that Austria itself maintained an aggressive attitude, one which was not only imposed and fuelled by the Germans. And so Hastings shows an alternative to Copelands theory as well. Germany may have pushed Austria, but Austria itself yet was strongly motivated to attack Serbia and probably would have invaded it without Germany pushing it to do so.

Let's come back to the two applied hypotheses of Copelands theory. Germany reaches its peak in power, after which a deep and inevitable decline follows, and Germany is the strongest military power, and thus in a position to take on the system. I agree, based on the information provided above and in Copelands, Clarks and Hastings work, that these conditions were fulfilled in 1914. As mentioned several times before, German military superiority was not only perceived by other states, but also proven by the huge Army Bill that was adopted by the German leadership in 1912. The absolute numbers of military strength remain unknown, not only of Germany but also of the other great powers of Europe. A great example of how other states looked to Germany's military is how Austrian count of Hoyos Alexander wrote in his memoirs: 'No one today can imagine just how much the belief in German power, the invincibility of the German army, determined our thinking and how certain we all were that Germany [would easily win the war against France] (deleted in original) would provide us with the greatest guarantee of our safety...' (Hastings, 2013, 45). Especially the crossed out part in this quotation says enough; everyone knew about the strength of the German army.

The deep and inevitable decline, as mentioned in the second hypothesis, is definitely present in Germany in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The legacy of Bismarck was a unified German empire with an enormous potential. Economic power was transformed in military power, enlarging its influence in continental Europe. But as the years passed, Russia developed and started mastering the new techniques that came with the industrialization. It caused a change in how the future for the Germans looked like. The German decisionmakers had a great fear for Russia, as described in the section about German Security, that pushed them to adapt great reforms in their military security.

The two conditions for the theory thus are proven to be present. But is it really that these two conditions would have driven Germany to provoke a preventive war? My answer to this question is yes. Copeland brings up a great amount of evidence that shows the results of the choices of the German leadership. An example is the perfect timing of switching its policy to Austria. From first holding back support for Austria's harsh attitude towards Serbia, Germany waits until the time is ready to push Austria straight into a conflict, of which the Germans know it will escalate into major war. The dramatic change in policy when the Balkan crises of 1912 and 1913 are compared with the one in 1914 is the strongest proof that Germany was waiting until its military plans were completed, putting itself in the position to be able to take on the system.

## Chapter 5: *Conclusion*

The central research question was introduced in the beginning of this thesis. Is the theory of Dynamic Differentials plausible enough to certify that German decision-makers were actively seeking war during the summer of 1914? The conclusion is affirmative. Copeland's theory is strong enough to prove that the German leadership acted in such a way that the only possible outcome would be a major war. Fuelled and motivated by the prospect of deep and inevitable decline, and by the feeling that they were the superior military power, the Germans felt the necessity and meanwhile the capability to take on the international system.

All aspects of German decision-making show realist convictions. The focus at relative gains for example is the main motivation for every decision being made. In the section about the Balkan crises and its policy towards Austria this is clearly visible. German leaders are precisely calculating how big the risks are they can take, carefully holding Russia in their vision. But in the bigger picture, relative gains also are the main concern. Germany wouldn't face any absolute decline at all, it's economy probably would remain growing. Only when compared to Russia it would decline relatively, and that was unacceptable to the Germans, as it would cost them their position in the international system. As human beings act out of self-interest and always take a cost-benefit analysis in account when making a decision, the theory of Copeland is a very plausible one. The objective of Germany was to maintain its leading position on the European continent. The risk was that Russia would sooner or later take over. The calculation is based upon how big this risk is. Taking on the system obviously would be a huge risk, but as it got more and more clear that the rise of Russia was so immense that it would overwhelm Germany, the tolerance to taking this risk must have gotten bigger for the Germans. Thereby comes that German leaders got ensured of their military superiority, giving them a high self-assured feeling in calculating the risk.

Especially the 'inevitable' part of the decline must have been a thrusting force in Germany decision-making. 'Inevitable' expresses the desperation that the German leadership felt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were no other means than war to prevent a decline. If military superiority thus is present, and the likelihood of another state sooner or later being an overwhelming power is big enough, I support Copeland's vision that this is enough to push a state to take on the system.



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