“Es wird ein Volkskrieg werden”

Conrad von Hőtzendorf and Moltke: decision making at the advent of the First World War

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* A phrase uttered by Helmuth von Moltke in a letter to his wife, dated January 29th 1905. In this letter Moltke predicted the expected upcoming European War not to be a short war of professional armies, like the preceding Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian Wars, but one that would require the mobilisation of a large part of the population, putting every available resource in favour of the war effort.
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Introduction

“But the real reason for the whole thing was that it was too much effort not to have a war.”

— Edmund Blackadder, Goodbye...1

In his book Een kleine geschiedenis van de Grote Oorlog 1914-1918 the late Dutch historian Koen Koch wrote two things that led me to the question I want to discuss in this thesis. While discussing the July Crisis of 1914 and the start of the First World War, Koch describes the roles of the Chiefs of General Staff of Austria-Hungary and Germany, Field Marshal Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf2 and General Helmuth von Moltke3 respectively, as being pivotal in the outbreak of the war. On the one hand he suggests that Conrad and Moltke might have contributed more than any other individual to the outbreak of the war, while on the other hand, they were very pessimistic about the chances of an Austro-Hungarian or German victory in the upcoming conflict.4 This at first led to the simple question why these men were able to commit to something of which they suspected the outcome to be largely negative to themselves.

Koch, like others before him, seeks the answer in the concept of social Darwinism. While social Darwinism might be seen as a valid explanation of their motives, it seemed hardly a plausible explanation for the decisions that were made. As a concept, social Darwinism relies heavily on the Darwinian survival of the fittest. In social Darwinism this is sometimes explained as an inevitable struggle between states for survival in which the strongest will come out on top. On the other hand, in evolutionary theory, fittest does not need to mean those that are most psychologically fit, it means those best adapted to survive – and thus those that are most successful in reproducing themselves. For nation-states one could see their social Darwinist strive for survival not just as a military struggle to beat other states; survival, and ‘reproduction,’ can be achieved through other means, one could think of diplomatic or economic gains that further a country. As such it could be suggested that the Bismarckian alliance system is a great example of social Darwinist diplomacy. This all remains to speculation; there does not seem to be a single social Darwinist interpretation of natural selection.5 More on social Darwinism and its influence on men like Conrad and Moltke later in this introduction, first it is important to make clear what this thesis will be about.

Returning to the opening lines of this introduction and the remarks made by Koch about Conrad and Moltke, it should simply be said that it is nearly impossible to hold a single person responsible for the outbreak of the First World War. The question of war guilt is a highly speculative one. As such this thesis will not be yet another study into the causes of the war. Too many books have already been written about this subject and it would add nothing new to the enormous pile that is already available. Causes that are generally named range from such a direct cause as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, to less direct causes; impe-

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1 “Goodbyeee...” Blackadder Goes Forth, BBC 1, November 2, 1989, television broadcast.
2 Conrad von Hötzendorf is his full surname, often shortened to just Conrad.
3 This concerns Helmuth Johann Ludwig von Moltke, also known as Moltke the Younger to distinguish him from his uncle Field Marshall Count Moltke (the Elder), Chief of General Staff during German Unification.
4 Koen Koch, Een kleine geschiedenis van de Grote Oorlog 1914-1918 (Amsterdam: 2010), 37.
5 Cor Hermans, De dwaaaltocht van het sociaal-darwinisme: vroege sociale interpretaties van Charles Darwin’s theorie van natuurlijke selectie, 1859-1918 (Amsterdam: 2003), 11-14.
rialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century or the alliance-system that was in place in Europe. Some authors blame the Central Powers, picking out Germany or Austria-Hungary in particular, while others blame the actions of the Entente Powers as being vital to leading to the destructive war that was the First World War. Then there are those who do not seek to blame any country or alliance in particular but just seek the cause of the war in the diplomatic mistakes made by the European powers combined. In naming some of the suggested causes for the First World War I have only got to the tip of the iceberg. Perhaps it is simply best to conclude that the cause, or causes, whichever is preferred, is a matter of opinion, different from person to person and even a hundred years later still very much open to debate. The academic search for the cause of the First World War, when looking at the many works written about it, can even be seen as a Holy Grail to historians. There was, and still is, a true quest going on in finding the ‘true’ cause of the war. Yet it might be better to say that this cause will likely never be found.

A point that should be made, however, is the seemed willingness of the individuals of Conrad and Moltke to go to war. According to the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister at the start of the war Count Berchtold, Conrad’s reaction to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand could be summarised as “Krieg, Krieg, Krieg.” While they cannot be held responsible for start-

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6 A good overview of the different opinions concerning the causes of the First World War is given by American historians Williamson Jr. and May. Their article shows an overview of different studies that have been done into the start of the First World War. Samuel R. Williamson Jr. and Ernest R. May, "An Identity of Opinion: Historians and July 1914," *The Journal of Modern History* 79, no. 2 (2007).

ing the war – not even Gavrilo Princip or Kaiser Wilhelm II should be held responsible for starting something as big as the First World War on their own. It can be said that both Conrad and Moltke were able to influence the politicians in Berlin and Vienna. As Chiefs of General Staff they were effectively part of their respective governments. Furthermore, it can be said that they did not try to stop the July Crisis from escalating. Although it is uncertain if it would have been in their power, both Conrad and Moltke made no attempts to dissuade the men in power from backing down from military action against Serbia. Conrad, as one of the hawks within the Austro-Hungarian government, had long been campaigning for a war against Serbia. Furthermore, both Chiefs of Staff were jointly planning for a war against Serbia, Russia and France. This planning did not take place behind the backs of their superiors and was, up to a point, monitored by higher politicians in Berlin and Vienna. Of course, it should be said that this planning was limited to war plans made on paper. Nothing concrete was settled between the Chiefs of Staff at this point. It was mainly Moltke seeking Conrad’s promise to aid in the defence of East Prussia and Silesia against a Russian advance, while Germany enacted the Schlieffen Plan against France.

From this early planning, which took place over three years before the famous German Imperial War Council of 1912, it can be seen that an overall European war was something that Moltke and Conrad were both taking into account. At this point it is impossible to say whether they pushed towards such a war. But it is clear that they expected it in the following years. Their commitment to war leads to the main theme of this thesis: why did the Chiefs of General Staff of Austria-Hungary and Germany fully commit to a war of which they knew it was not going to be over by Christmas and which would devastate their respective countries? In order to study this theme several aspects need to be looked at.

At first it is important to go into further detail, regarding the concept of social Darwinism. It is certainly true that social Darwinist thoughts were common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Furthermore it can, even at this early point, also be stated that both Moltke and Conrad were influenced by social Darwinism. Of Conrad it is known, he was a fervent reader of Darwin. There is, however, no single definition of social Darwinism. There are many different ways to define it. It can be used, on the one hand, to explain aggressive actions, such as war, as a type of natural selection. This is also the argumentation that is used when social Darwinism is linked with racism and eugenics. Such a way is introduced by the German historian H.W. Koch; quoting an early twentieth century magazine article he states that an aspect of social Darwinism is a sacrificial impulse as “the future of the next generation is determined by the self-sacrifice of that which precedes it.” On the other hand, social Darwinist natu-

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8 A German war plan against both Russia and France was drafted by the famous Schlieffen Plan in the early twentieth century. Planning for a war that incorporated both Austria-Hungary, as Germany’s ally, and Serbia, as Austria-Hungary’s primary foe, between Conrad and Moltke started in 1909. An overview of this war plan is given by: Norman Stone, “Moltke-Conrad: Relations between the Austro-Hungarian and German General Staffs, 1909-1914,” The Historical Journal 9, no. 2 (1966), 201-228.

9 The War Council of 1912 is seen by historians such as Fritz Fischer as the pivotal step by Germany towards war.


11 Hermans, De dwaaltocht, 27-34.


ral selection can be achieved through various peaceful ways.\textsuperscript{14} It is the first definition of social Darwinism given here that has often led historians to claim social Darwinist thoughts as a motivation for the decisions made at the advent of the First World War. Koen Koch, and other historians with him, linked a quote from a letter written by Conrad to his romantic interest, and later his wife, Gina von Reininghaus at the day of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand to the sacrificial nature of social Darwinism. In this letter Conrad stated that he believed that an upcoming European war would mean the end of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy: "It will be a hopeless fight; nevertheless it must be waged, since an old monarchy and a glorious army must not perish without glory."\textsuperscript{15} From this statement speaks Conrad's willingness to commit to war, as well as his willingness for self-sacrifice. On the other hand there does not appear to be anything to gain, not even for a next generation. All that is being achieved, is that a former great power will perish in glory. As such this thesis will need to look at the different roles of social Darwinism in the early twentieth century and how it influenced the decision making by Conrad and Moltke.

As this thesis will look directly at decision making at the advent of the First World War, it is important to explore theories concerning this decision making. At a first glance a decision to go to war might seem to be a rational one. Considering the consequences of losing a war – such consequences range from a mere loss of prestige to the loss of land or even the entire country – it seems almost obvious that any faction that would be willing to start a war would inquire whether or not the pros will outweigh the cons. That said, events within a war, often battles, can still be rational while the cons outweigh the pros. Take for example a famous rear-guard action as Roland's defence of Roncevaux Pass, who's troops sacrifice allowed the main body of the army to disengage. Or the last stand of the 51st Highland Division at Saint-Valery-en-Caux during the Battle of France in 1940, which had remained in France after the Dunkirk Evacuation and could have been evacuated from other French ports, but instead was ordered to remain in France in the hopes of keeping French morale high. Next there are those battles that seem rational to commit to by those who are in command. Such an example was the German defence of the Falaise Pocket during the Battle of Normandy, which – driven by Hitler's over-confidence – resulted in huge losses of men and material. These, however, are all mere battles, only a smaller part of the larger conflict, which are fought while the cons seemingly outweigh the pros. Still the long term pros of these engagements tend to outweigh the cons of the battle itself, Roland's sacrifice allowed the main army to retreat. And, would it have succeeded, Kluge's defence of the Falaise Pocket could have tipped the Battle of Normandy in favour of the Germans. It does however seem very unlikely that one would start a war while assenting to a loss in the first place. A premeditated loss in one war does not lead to a gain in the next one. After all, as Clausewitz has stated: war is "an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will."\textsuperscript{16}

It could be suggested that not all wars need to develop from rational choices. Even an event as big as a war can be started by an impulse. It cannot be said that the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand was such an impulse. If it would have been, war would have started the next day, or at least the following week, not a month after the event took place. While rationality implies a good weighing of pros versus cons, it can also be stated that only 55% of all

\textsuperscript{14} Paul Crook, Darwinism, war and history: The debate over the biology of war from the 'Origin of Species' to the First World War (Cambridge: 1994), 153-166.


79 large interstate wars fought between 1815 and 1991 have been won by the aggressor. It seems that the pros and cons were not weighed out correctly every time a war was started, thus wars were started over a misconception. Or even, not weighing out the pros and cons at all, starting the war on an impulse.

Decision-theoretically speaking, the prevailing view of the start of the First World War seems to be that of statesmen stumbling into a war they did not want. These theories, however, often discuss the events after the actual start of the declarations of war. They concern the fact that the war was not what the decision makers expected it to be. In order to try to explain the actions taken by Conrad and Moltke at the advent of the First World War, this thesis will look at different decision-theoretical and game-theoretical studies that have been done regarding the causes of wars. These could help in trying to explain the steps taken by both men from a rational standpoint. On the other hand, however, there is a way of looking at the actions during the July Crisis from an irrational standpoint. In his 2010 article in the journal History & Theory the Dutch historian Eelco Runia introduces the concepts of vertigo and fleeing forward in relation to actions being undertaken by historical agents. Unlike game theory, which tends to search for the rational choice, Runia explains actions made by agents through the short phrase “why not?” Making history is, according to Runia, not the matter of pursuing a predefined interest, but of fleeing forward into the unknown. This is something which Runia encapsulated in the term vertigo. As Runia states: “Vertigo may feel like ‘fear of falling,’ but in reality it is – according to psychoanalysis – a wish to jump, covered by a fear of falling.” Furthermore he states that vertigo predisposes to, so-called, counter-phobic behaviour. “Giving in to vertigo is a strategy for escaping an unbearable tension by doing something (…). Vertigo thus is the condition in which we may jump into the unknown.” But, while we might be able to explain the decisions to advocate war, made among others by Moltke and Conrad, as them jumping into the unknown, or rather stumbling into war – trying to break the tension that was certainly there at the start of the 20th century – it is not certain why they made the decision they made. This is where game and decision theories, as already introduced above, can help to make clear the different decisions available to the agents. They can help understand why certain decisions were preferred over others. While the notion “why not?” might seem irrational at first, this does not need to be the case. In the example of Kluge’s defence of the Falaise Pocket that was brought up above I state that such a defence might have seemed to be a rational choice for Hitler, in his eyes not
retreating seemed the best option to take; just as the Ardennes Offensive seemed a good option to him, while Von Rundstedt, commander of OB West, disliked it deeply.

This thesis will concentrate on the concepts of vertigo and fleeing forward in relation to the main theme that was introduced above. As such it will ask a main question: did the Chiefs of General Staff of Austria-Hungary, Conrad von Hötzendorf, and Germany, Moltke, give in to vertigo during the July Crisis? If it can be said that they did, I will try to explain why they gave in. Was it caused by their social Darwinist background and the pessimism persistent at the time or was it caused by misconceptions about the upcoming war? Decisional- and game-theoretical models, that are available, can help explain whether or not Conrad and Moltke were forced to make the decisions they made. It can help review whether war was the only option that was available to them or were there other ways out of the crisis. In the same way they can shed light upon the inevitability of a war between Germany and Russia. Seeing the modernisation process the Russian army and infrastructure were going through following their defeat against Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, Moltke, and several other German officials with him, is said to have wanted a war with Russia rather sooner than later;25 fearing that a fully modernised Russian army would be unstoppable to combined German and Austro-Hungarian efforts.26 It should be noted that neither Conrad nor Moltke directly made their countries decisions. Yet it can be said that they had an influence on these decisions.27 Their own decisions to push towards war, as many authors have said they did, helped create the First World War.

In order to answer the main question I will give a short overview of the July Crisis, starting at the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and ending with the mobilisations and declarations of war in late July and early August 1914. This will be done to create a chronological framework for this thesis. For a more detailed overview of the events of the July Crisis one is referred to the many works written about this crisis. Subsequently the theoretical framework of this thesis shall be introduced. First that chapter shall introduce the concept of vertigo and fleeing forward as they were made clear by Runia. Next it shall explain the game theories that can help make clear the available decisions during the July Crisis. A good example of such a theory is the so-called Chicken Game, which will be elaborated further upon in this chapter. The basis for this, and similar games which will be introduced, is that two players prefer not to yield to each other, yet the worst possible outcome will occur if neither player yields. This type of game will form the basis upon which to discuss the commitment to war of men like Conrad and Moltke. The ensuing chapter shall discuss social Darwinism, a concept that is often ‘blamed’ for the ideas of men like Conrad and for its relation to the start of the First World War. The next two chapters shall discuss Conrad and Moltke each in greater detail. They shall give short biographies of both men before discussing their role during the July Crisis and finally give an analysis of why both men decided to push for war, while knowing little good could come of it. Finally the conclusion will return to the main question of the thesis and discuss the role of vertigo during the July Crisis and the use of the concept of vertigo and fleeing forward when describing historical events.

27 As Chiefs of General Staff both Conrad and Moltke had a strong influence. Conrad was part of the Austro-Hungarian cabinet, Moltke was often asked for advice on matters political by the Kaiser.
The July Crisis and the start of the Great War

"Wir sind zwar bereit, unsere Bündnispflicht zu erfüllen, müssen es aber ablehnen, uns von Wien leichtfertig und ohne Beachtung unserer Ratschläge in einen Weltbrand hineinziehen zu lassen."
— Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, chancellor of Germany

On the 28th of June 1914, approximately an hour before noon, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was shot dead by Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb, in the city of Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, one of the provinces of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand counts among the most famous events in history. In itself it is nothing more than an incident that happened in one of the provincial capitals of the vast Austro-Hungarian empire. Yet, it led to one of the most destructive wars ever fought. It cannot be said that assassinations were common place during the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. However, this era had seen several assassinations and assassination attempts on members of royal dynasties and politicians. Franz Ferdinand's aunt Empress Elizabeth, better known as Sisi, was assassinated in 1898 by an anarchist in the Swiss city of Geneva. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century many more public figures fell to the anarchist propaganda of the deed. Among the people killed by anarchists were the Italian king Umberto I, Tsar Alexander II of Russia, American president William McKinley, Carlos I of Portugal and his son Crown Prince Luis Felipe and King George I of Greece. Next to these there were many more assassination and attempts at assassinations in the approximately thirty years before the start of the First World War. Committing assassinations was not limited to people with anarchist beliefs. Never, however, had any assassination led to a war between nations. This chapter shall describe the events from the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand to the declarations of war approximately one month later, in order to create a chronological framework for this thesis.

Before discussing the chronology of events leading up to the declarations of war in late July and early August 1914, it should be made clear that the origin of the First World War cannot be sought in the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. It was the catalyst that set into action a series of events that ultimately led to the First World War. The origins of the First World War have been well studied and often discussed by historians in the past. Leading up to the centenary of the war discussions are heating up again. There are those who blame Germany or Austro-Hungary, those who blame Serbia and those who blame Great Britain, France or Russia. While some search the origins of the war in the politics of nations during the years leading up to the war. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, I shall not discuss the different origins of the war or present another possible cause for the war. Nor will I list all the different causes that have been named in articles and books in the past. Doing so would, in size, require a thesis of itself and it has been done numerous times in the past already.

28 "We are prepared to fulfil our duty as allies, but must refuse to allow Vienna to draw us into a world conflagration frivolously and without regard to our advice." Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, Der Reichskanzler an den Botschafter in Wien, July 30, 1914. Reprinted in: Karl Kautsky, Die deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch: II, Vom Eintreffen der serbischen Antwortnote in Berlin bis zum Bekanntwerden der russischen allgemeinen Mobilmachung (Charlottenburg: 1919).

29 For an overview of the historiography of the July Crisis see: Williamson Jr. and May, Identity.
After the assassination of Franz Ferdinand events quickly gained momentum. Princip was apprehended at the scene of his deed and he was quickly linked to the Serbian secret society Udjendjene ili Smrt, Unification or Death, better known as the Black Hand. Conrad von Hötzendorf, and others with similar opinions, began advocating for immediate action against Serbia, as they believed the perpetrators to be coming from and aided by the Serbian government. Others, like the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Count Berchtold, at first, saw no reason for any radical action and preferred to seek a diplomatic solution. It should be said that Berchtold was in favour of action against Serbia, however, he wanted it to be a diplomatically supported one, rather than a preventive strike into Serbia. Opposite Conrad’s hawkish views were the doves within the Austro-Hungarian government, represented most of all by Count Tisza, the Hungarian prime minister. He called for a delay, to allow Serbia to take a stand on whether or not it was involved in the assassination, as he believed any preventive action undertaken by Austria-Hungary on the Balkans might antagonise countries as Bulgaria and Romania. Next to this, Tisza had a more personal reason to avoid any war on the Balkans after which Austria-Hungary would incorporate further Slavic territory into its empire; it would increase the Slavic component of the dual-monarchy, thus decreasing Hungarian influence. Nevertheless Austria-Hungary did begin communicating with Germany regarding support for a possible war against Serbia – and its ally Russia. On July 2nd it send Count Hoyos, a noted hawk, to Berlin carrying a letter from Emperor Franz Joseph to Kaiser Wilhelm. Following a successful mission, Hoyos brought back the famous Blank Cheque several days later. In this Germany promised to stand by Austria-Hungary no matter what action it would take against Serbia. In Vienna preparations for an action towards Serbia were slowly being made. All members of the Ministerial Council, except for Tisza, agreed that a sole diplomatic victory over Serbia “would be worthless.” They agreed that Austria-Hungary needed a legitimate reason to start a war against Serbia. Thus, demands needed to be formulated in such a way that Serbia would surely reject them. Tisza was fully convinced of the need for action on July 14th, with the concession that Austria-Hungary would not seek the full annexation of Serbia. The demands that would be formulated by Austria-Hungary would become known as the famous Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia.

The ultimatum was approved on July 19th, three weeks after the assassination in Sarajevo. It was not send to Serbia until July 23rd, as the French president Poincaré happened to be visiting Russia at that exact time. Austria-Hungary feared that both allies would start discussing any action they would take immediately and waited until Poincaré departed on the 23rd to send the ultimatum to Belgrade. The Serbian government was given 48 hours to respond to the terms set. These terms, ten in total, included the arrest and handing over of Major Tankosic and civil servant Ciganovic, who were named as accomplices in the murder plot, the cessation of arms traffic from Serbia into Austria-Hungary and the elimination of any propaganda towards Austria-Hungary from Serbian schoolbooks. The most important demand made by Austria-Hungary was that Serbia threatened the Habsburg monarchy. For a rather more detailed description of Conrad’s view of Serbia and the Balkans see chapter Conrad, the Hawk.

Imanuel Geiss, Julikrise und Kriegsausbruch 1914: Band I (Bonn: 1976), 55.
Koch, Kleine geschiedenis, 59.
Koch, Kleine geschiedenis, 69.
ibid., 69-70.
Hungary was that their agents would be given a free pass into Serbia to track down and arrest any accomplices to the assassination. This demand violated Serbia’s sovereignty and would be rejected almost certainly by the Serbian government. It was this rejection the Austro-Hungarians were aiming at, as it would give them a diplomatically valid reason to declare war on Serbia. On July 25th Serbia send its reply to the ultimatum to Austria-Hungary, minutes before the deadline expired at 18:00 hours. It would agree to all terms, except the most important one. Minutes before, Austria-Hungary had already started mobilising against Serbia.38

At this point, however, a European war did not seem inevitable. In the morning of July 28th, less than three days after Austria-Hungary’s mobilisation, Kaiser Wilhelm did not see the necessity of war, commenting on the Serbian reply to the ultimatum: “Das ist mehr als man erwarten konnte! Ein großer moralischer Erfolg für Wien; aber damit fällt jeder Kriegsgrund fort, und Giesl hätte ruhig in Belgrad bleiben sollen! Daraufhin hätte ich niemals Mobilmachung befohlen!”39 In the meantime several attempts at mediation from Great Britain attempted to lessen the crisis and still seek a peaceful solution. Yet, as the British cabinet did only start serious discussion of the Austro-Serbian crisis on July 24th, these came much too late.40 In the morning of July 28th Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, in an attempt to frustrate any further attempts at mediation.41 While this did stop any Austro-Russians negotiations which were going on, attempts at mediation by Great Britain increased.42 In the meantime Bethmann-Hollweg tried his best to localise the conflict. A famous telegram exchange between Kaiser Wilhelm and his cousin Tsar Nicholas developed. This amicable exchange resulted in the postponement of Russian general mobilisation, which was due to start on July 29th, until July 31st. It should be said that decision makers in Russia had decided steps towards war from July 25th onwards.43 The telegram exchange only postponed what seemed inevitable. Following this mobilisation Germany send an ultimatum to both Russia, to reverse the mobilisation orders, and France, to declare its neutrality in the conflict. Following rejection by both countries German military planners saw themselves forced to commit to their war plans and declared war on Russia on August 1st, followed by general mobilisation the same day. Declarations of war started to follow each other in rapid succession. Germany declared war on France on August 3rd and following its refusal to respect Belgian neutrality Britain was brought into the war on August 4th as the Schlieffen Plan was being implemented. Incidentally Austria-Hungary, prime mover in the crisis, did not declare war on Russia until August 6th. By then the First World War had started. The guns would not be silent again until November 11th 1918. Four years of war would bring a devastation to Europe that would change the world forever.

38 ibid., 72.
39 “This is more than we could have expected! A great moral victory for Vienna; but this does away with any need for war, and Giesl [the Austrian ambassador in Serbia who left for Vienna on July 25th] could have stayed calmly in Belgrade! I would have never ordered mobilisation on this basis!” Handwritten comments by Kaiser Wilhelm on the Serbian reply to the Ultimatum, made at 10:00 hours on July 28th, 1914. Reprinted in: Karl Kautsky, Die deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch: I, Vom Attentat in Sarajevo bis zum Eintreffen der serbischen Antwortnote, nebst einigen Dokumenten aus den vorhergehenden Wochen (Charlottenburg: 1919), 264.
43 ibid., 476-477.
Vertigo, fleeing forward and game theory

"It was vertigo. A heady, insuperable longing to fall. We might also call vertigo the intoxication of the weak. Aware of his weakness, a man decides to give in rather than stand up to it. He is drunk with weakness, wishes to grow even weaker, wishes to fall down in the middle of the main square in front of everybody, wishes to be down, lower than down."

— Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Historians tend to search for the discontinuities within history, in an effort to make them disappear by explaining their continuity with other past events. This is nothing uncommon, as discontinuities break our linear perception of time and progress. Therefore they are strange abominations that cloud our view of the past. In this manner large events in history, such as the French Revolution, are explained as having stemmed from earlier events. This enables the historian to put all events that he describes into a linear story, where one event leads to another. On the other hand it could be possible to see discontinuities as evolutionary mutations of this linear time. Dutch historian Eelco Runia seeks to explain cultural renewal, the evolution in history, as following from discontinuities. To him these discontinuities are not the mutations, rather they are catastrophes that lead to mutations. This does not necessarily match with the original biological concept of evolution. In biology it is the mutation that leads to variation. In history, in time in general, it is only possible to have one single timeline; there are no variations, no alternate dimensions that occur whenever a mutation of history takes place. Vertigo, as was already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, can be used to explain the discontinuities. This chapter shall introduce the concepts of vertigo and fleeing forward, as they were introduced by Runia, and explain how they can be used within the advent of the First World War and the roles of Conrad and Moltke in particular. Subsequently it shall discuss the role of rationality in military strategy and the ability of game theoretical models to describe the start of the First World War.

Central to Runia’s thesis of vertigo and fleeing forward is a line from Goethe's play Faust: "Im Anfang war die Tat," which can be translated as "in the beginning was the deed." With this sentence Runia wants to make clear that in some cases ‘deeds’ come before ‘words’; some actions can be undertaken without proper premeditation. History is thus not consciously being made, rather some events just happened, surprising even those who started them. These events cannot be “brought into harmony with the things that went before,” as historians of the nineteenth century as Leopold von Ranke aimed to do. These sudden events break the continuous line of history, creating discontinuities that are hard to explain. At this point it should be stated that ‘deeds-before-words’ does not necessarily imply that people acted on totally random impulses. Impulses, even though they might appear to come from nowhere, can be – and maybe even are – predetermined. Among others, factors like culture, upbringing and life experiences

46 Eelco Runia, Moved by the Past: Discontinuity and Historical Mutation (New York: 2014), 188.
47 Runia, "Into cleanness," 5.
48 ibid., 6.
influence a person’s impulses. ‘Deeds’ that are committed before ‘words’ can be seen as people trying to flee forward into the unknown, using the knowledge they possess. They act without having thought up their actions. This is how vertigo manifests itself in human actions in history.

As already mentioned in the introduction Runia does not see vertigo as a fear of heights or a fear of falling, but rather as a desire to jump. Translated to the field of the historical agent this desire to jump can be seen as a desire to jump into the unknown, or rather: to commit a deed. As a therapeutic phenomenon vertigo does not necessarily need to be associated with heights of any form. It can be seen as a dizziness; “an urge to commit irreparable things.” Or, as it was put by Kundera in the quote at the start of this chapter, a weakness that intoxicates a person; forcing him into making actions he would otherwise refrain from taking. As Runia says: “giving in to vertigo is a strategy for escaping from an unbearable tension by doing something.” Vertigo can thus be seen as a state of mind, like aggression, panic or fear. It can cause people to make decisions they would otherwise refrain from. By fleeing forward into the unknown people leave the known paths and discover new ones. Fleeing forward and the concept of vertigo allow us to explain discontinuities in as a result of acting rather than thinking.

While Runia’s thesis is relatively new to history, similar concepts have been used in the discussion and analysis of military strategy. As political scientist Marc Trachtenberg notes, the idea that wars can be more than just the product of deliberate decision. That they can be caused by statesmen losing control over events, is a basic and common notion in strategic thought. Trachtenberg states that “a crisis might unleash forces of an essential military nature that overwhelm the political process and bringing on a war nobody wants.” At some point during the crisis leading to a war becomes inevitable, even though war might not be the outcome that was initially desired by the agents. The notion that wars are started because statesmen lose control of events happening around them cannot be seen to be the same as vertigo. Yet, vertigo can be a reason through which control is lost. Wars are generally said to be started for one of two reasons: either they are started as a rational choice, as explained in the introduction to this thesis, or the war is based on miscalculations and misperceptions, in which case the initial choice to go to war still appears fully rational. The theory that wars can be inadvertent still largely fits into the latter. For example, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour during the Second World War is believed to originate from the Japanese believe that war with the USA was inevitable. This miscalculation does, however, not explain the reason for the loss of control of the events. Vertigo might be able to offer a possible explanation for this. Control can be lost by making a decision of which the outcome was not well or fully calculated by the agent, by making a rash decision: by committing to vertigo.

Runia defines making history not as working towards a predefined goal, but rather as fleeing forward into the unknown. The First World War is often seen as a predefined goal by historians. The famous Fischer thesis, for example, states that Germany willingly committed to the July Crisis, having finally found the excuse the start a major war they wanted for a long time. Such a view of the start of the First World War, while often criticised, is still mirrored by

49 ibid., 16.
50 ibid., 17.
51 Marc Trachtenberg, History and Strategy (Princeton: 1991), 47.
52 Lindley and Schildkraut, "Is War Rational?", 3-6.
53 Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, 96.
Es wird ein Volkskrieg werden

many present day historians.\textsuperscript{55} In the same way Conrad and Moltke have been named as having vital roles in starting the war, both having longed for a war against Serbia and Russia respectively. This might very well be true, but naming both men as main culprits, as is done by several historians,\textsuperscript{56} ignores the fact that both named the expected continental war as one that would devastate their respective countries. Vertigo can offer an explanation to the actions of both men. It can explain how, during the July Crisis, they fled forward into the unknown, feeling the desire to act rather than watching from the side-lines.

Runia’s thesis of vertigo and fleeing forward can be seen as contradicting rational choice theories. Where rational choice theory implies that the most well-weight decision would be taken, Runia’s theory implies that this is not necessary. Agents can take near-impulsive decisions that might be explained as rational afterwards, when taking enough factors into account, while they really were taken out of impulse. An analogy for this can be made to modern everyday life. One should imagine making an impulsive buy of any object, preferably one that is regretted afterwards. While you can, and often will, try to explain the purchase to yourself – “I thought it looked good on the wall” or “I felt I needed it” – you can only agree much afterwards that the purchase was a mistake and it was made on impulse at a moment you were not thinking clearly and got carried away by whichever factor played a role at the moment. Rational choices often can be explained, or at the very least made clear, using game theoretical models. These same models can also be used in helping to explain the available decisions made under the influence of vertigo. The structure of game theory is based on the assumption that agents are rational, or rather ‘utility maximisers’.\textsuperscript{57} Rationality in this sense implies that agents will choose that option that gives them the most preferred of the possible outcomes; the option that will yield them the most preferable outcome, while noting that there are multiple agents playing the same game. Game theory cannot help to explain vertiginous decisions, but it can, as stated above, help make clear the options that were available to the agents. Why the decision was taken can, however, not be explained. It can only be hinted towards using available information or writing by and about the agents in question.

Game theories can be, and in the past have been, applied to the events of the July Crisis. One game that directly springs to mind when viewing the events is the so-called Chicken Game.\textsuperscript{58} In this game one can imagine two cars speeding towards each other on a collision course. One of the cars must swerve, else both drivers will die in the ensuing crash. However,
the driver who swerves is deemed the ‘chicken’ and is said to have lost the game. While neither drivers wants to end with the outcome of the collision, nor do they want to give way as it would result in a loss of face. At first sight this seems very applicable to the events of July 1914. Two drivers, the Central powers on one side, the Allies on the other, are on a collision course. Neither wants to swerve and suffer a loss of prestige, however one can also suggest that neither really wanted the outcome of a collision, a continental war.

Another, more complicated, way of describing the Chicken Game is the so-called "Hawk-Dove game". In this game two animals can be seen contesting a resource of a certain value for their survival. Gaining this resource will increase their Darwinian fitness – hence the use of the Hawk-Dove game in explaining various evolutionary models. In contesting this resource the animals have two options to choose from: they can 'escalate', continue fighting for it until they either get injured or gain it, or they can 'display', retreating if the opponent chooses to escalate. If both choose a Hawkish approach and escalate they will fight until one gets injured and the other gains the entire resource, who's fitness will be limited, as he does gain an injury as a result of the fight. If both choose the Dovish approach both will share the resource equally. If one chooses to escalate while the other only displays the Hawk will gain all of the resource. Like in the Chicken Game having prior knowledge of the actions of the opponents will greatly influence the decisions of the agent. There is no clear Nash equilibrium as there is in other games such as the Prisoner’s Dilemma. While the cost of choosing the option to back down, by swerving or displaying, may seem little compared to the ultimate cost of dying in an accident or getting so seriously injured in the fight with the other animal it may still be deemed undesirable: both still result in a loss for the agent, while the opponent gains a victory.

Both the Chicken Game and the Hawk-Dove Game are simple games which can describe the events of July 1914 in its basics. They can help make clear the decisional options that were available to the different agents during the crisis that led up to the First World War. Game theoretical research designed particularly for the July Crisis was published by the American political scientist Frank Zagare. In his study Zagare explains multiple questions regarding the causes of the First World War using game theory. Two of his questions, asking why Germany issued a blank cheque to Austria, thus – according to Zagare – relinquishing its foreign policy to another nation, and why a local conflict could escalate into a continental war, are of particular interest to the thesis presented here. In his explanation of the July Crisis Zagare makes use of the so-called Tripartite Crisis Game. First designed by Zagare for the Austro-German negotiations in 1879 he has adapted it to be used for the negotiations and actions undertaken by the two Central Powers during the July Crisis. The game features a challenger, Serbia, a protégé, Austria-Hungary, and a defender, Germany. It should be noted that the challenger in this game is heavily supported by a second power, in the game this is Russia. The mechanics of the game are made clear in figure 2. At the first node the challenger poses a challenge: Serbia challenging Austro-Hungarian hegemony which is culminated by the act of assassinating Franz Ferdinand. Zagare suggest that Serbia thus poses a demand for a larger influence on the Balkan. In the second node

60 The options of the Hawk-Dove Game seem well applicable to the latter part of the July Crisis. Clark quotes the Tsar as saying Russia would “safeguard peace by a demonstration of force” (Sleepwalkers, 486). Russia would thus ‘display’ by mobilising its army, only a few days later into the crisis it would become clear that it was not a mere ‘display’, but that it had chosen to ‘escalate’.
61 Zagare, *Games of July*.
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Austria-Hungary can respond in two ways, it can concede to the challenge or it can hold firm, by taking steps to eliminate the Serbian threat. Subsequently Germany gets into the game, having the choice to support Austria-Hungary or not. Supporting would give the chance of war against Russia, while not supporting might lead to the breaking of the alliance with Austria-Hungary. Not supporting will pose a question to the protégé, whether or not to realign away from their defenders. Supporting will pose a question to the challenger, whether or not to back down from their demands. Based on the outcomes of these decisions Zagare has formulated the different preferences of the players in this game, these are presented in the table on page 17. As is clear from the table, there is no point in the table were the preferences of all three players overlap; as such there is no clear equilibrium to be found. Seeing the fact that Serbia seemed determined in its challenge Zagare has scaled the game down to a so-called Protégé-Defender Subgame in which Austria-Hungary and Germany are the main players, but the options remain the same.

What is striking about the game Zagare presents is that he suggests that Germany would dislike conflict as the outcome of the crisis. While it did choose to support Austria-Hungary in its effort to deal with Serbia, bringing about conflict. Why Germany gave away its diplomatic power

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63 Zagare, Games of July, 97.
to Austria-Hungary, is perhaps one of the most intriguing questions that can be asked about the July Crisis. Zagare seeks the explanation in the options available to Germany. Austria-Hungary could choose to take a loss from the crisis, which it was not expected to. The other options protégé realigns and conflict can both be seen as devastating to Germany, the former would isolate Germany diplomatically, the latter might at the very least result in a war that could be won.64

Unfortunately the Asymmetrical Escalation Game65, which Zagare designed for explaining why the conflict escalated into a continental war, is based on several assumptions that might not prove to be true. As Zagare states he assumes that Austria-Hungary and Germany and France and Russia are single decision making units, which is not in line with historical facts.66 Therefore, no matter how well designed the game is, it is best to disregard the game and use the less complicated Hawk-Dove Game, based on similar principles, to help explain this escalation.

Zagare’s Protégé-Defender Subgame seems to relate somewhat to the Chicken and Hawk-Dove Game presented above. All three feature players pitted against each other, none of whom want to back down and lose face over the crisis, while at the same time none want the ultimate outcome of a large-scale conflict. The Protégé-Defender Subgame is most detailed of all by giving the options as an extensive-form game; there is a sequencing of moves. What all games have in common is that there are two players who do not wish to yield towards the other, while the worst possible outcome occurs if neither player yields. On a side note all games can be influenced by brinkmanship: the practise of pushing events to the brink of disaster to try and achieve the most favourable outcome. For example the Chicken Game can be influenced by having the other player believe one is favouring a certain option over another.67 The games introduced above will be used as a basis to discuss the commitment, or possibly non-commitment, to vertigo of Conrad and Moltke. Of course it should be stated that neither Conrad or Moltke can take full responsibility for causing the First World War. However, as stated several times so far, both advocated heavily in favour of the war; they did not try to avoid war. These game theories which apply to states being on a collision course, something Conrad and Moltke both likely knew,68 will be used to investigate the individual fleeing forward of both men.

64 Zagare, Games of July, 103.
65 ibid., 113-119.
66 ibid., 113.
68 In their writings both Conrad and Moltke referred to the probability of a continental war occurring as a result of the July Crisis. Neither man tried to avoid this war, as will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.
Social Darwinism at the advent of the war

"At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races."
— Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man

There does not seem to be a single definition for the concept of social Darwinism. It is based on the theory of natural selection, which states that those organisms that are best able to adapt have the best chance of survival. The organisms that are best able to adapt are seen as the 'fittest'; a term that does not necessarily mean those most physically fit, but rather those best able to produce offspring. This led to the famous phrase survival of the fittest, first coined by British polymath Herbert Spencer in his Principles of Biology in 1864. In truth, social Darwinism is more related to this phrase by Spencer than to Darwin’s idea of natural selection. Spencer’s term is applied to a range of sciences broader than just evolutionary science. He himself talked about selection within population in his 1852 work A Theory of Population. This was in turn picked up on by Darwin who allowed this work to influence his own theory of natural selection. While Spencer’s term survival of the fittest may be influenced by Darwin’s theory, the scope of this term is more related to the pre-Darwinian ideas of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck than to Darwin’s theory of mutation and selection. Lamarck’s own ideas of evolution are only slightly related to the theory later developed by Darwin. A most famous example is the neck of giraffes. Lamarck argued that the need for giraffes to stretch their necks to reach high treetops caused it to become more muscular, lengthen and strengthen. Subsequent offspring would inherit these traits and have longer necks, up to the point where they developed in the giraffes known today. These giraffes, as a species, would not evolve from one into another, but rather develop gradually. Change in a species is brought about by needs that existed before any change took place. There is a need to reach high treetops, thus necks lengthen. It differs significantly from Darwin’s theory of evolution. According to the Darwinian theory a mutation would take place, a proto-giraffe would be born with a longer neck. This specimen is able to reach the high treetops and is more successful. Consequently it has a larger chance of reproducing. It is the Lamarckian need for adaptation that is again visible in Spencer’s survival of the fittest when it is adapted for other fields such as sociology. One could say that those most ‘fit’ – or even those most willing to survive – are those that see the need to adapt and subsequently do adapt themselves to changing situations.

This chapter will review the terminology related to social Darwinism and the use of the idea in politics and diplomacy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Finally it shall give a short treatise on how social Darwinism can be used in relation to both men who are the main subject of this thesis, while elaborating on their thoughts on social Darwinism, as that will be reserved for the upcoming chapters which will discuss both these men in greater detail. In doing so it shall also briefly discuss the role of fin de siècle pessimism that was present at the

70 Hermans, Dwaaltocht, 262.
71 ibid., 265-266.
years leading up to the First World War and its relation to social Darwinism.

Australian historian and specialist on the field of social Darwinism Paul Crook makes a distinction between two traditions of social Darwinism within the historical discourse: generalist and restrictionist. Both traditions do what their name implies. Generalists are flexible in the usage of the term social Darwinism, applying it loosely in the field of historical research and explaining the many implications that were drawn from Darwin’s theory of evolution. They are the group of historians who also view Lamarckism – on a social level – as a part of social Darwinism. Opposite to these generalists are the restrictionists. They state that the term social Darwinism should only be used when discussing social theory that uses concepts that are central to Darwinism; mainly natural selection. References to Lamarckism or Malthusianism should be left out of the concept of social Darwinism. Crook himself argues that Darwin could hardly be seen as a social Darwinist himself, possibly being on the nurture side in the nature versus nurture debate. As Darwin hardly fits in the restrictionist view of social Darwinism and he himself called Spencer’s Lamarckian survival of the fittest an “excellent expression” of his theory of natural selection, only objecting to the fact that it could not be used as a verb, this thesis shall adopt a more generalist view of the concept of social Darwinism; using the term more loosely and adapting the important, yet Lamarckian, need for adaptation to social Darwinism.

A concept that is most central to social Darwinism seems to be the willingness to put oneself on the line. This willingness is best seen in the Lamarckian need for adaptation, where the agent needs to actively try and turn situations in his favour by adapting faster than others. In a way this links social Darwinism with the concept of vertigo. Although social Darwinism proposes consciously putting oneself on the line, vertigo reaches this point through unconscious acting for the sake of acting. It will be important to note the difference between the conscious Darwinist act of adapting for the sake of survival and the unconscious act of fleeing forwards when describing historical events. Social Darwinism might be what drove the act of fleeing forward, but in this case it is not the same as actively putting oneself on the line and seeking out the adaptation.

Social Darwinism can be adapted at multiple levels and fields. It can, among others, be used in fields of sociology and politics and it can be adapted at levels ranging from the individual to entire nation states. In the light of the main subject of this thesis, it is this last and largest level, that of competing nation states, that seems to be most interesting. Yet, on the other hand, it is not unlikely that social Darwinist thinking influenced men like Moltke and Conrad on an individual level. One could imagine that they had something to gain personally by the decisions they made; fame seems to be the most obvious, but others might be found. Making decisions that influence entire nations can have two clear results: if whatever is decided is successful the

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74 One would expect a true Darwinist to be on the nature side of the nature versus nurture debate, as survival through natural selection is being decided through naturally acquired traits. Yet, as Crook points out, Darwin’s theory of cultural evolution “stressed the human capacity to control nature and transcend natural selection.” Thus it is hard to place Darwin’s own ideas within the restrictionist view of social Darwinism.
76 In this sense social Darwinism seems closely related to rational choice theory. After all, the agent will likely choose the option which will yield him the highest personal gain – or in other cases the highest gain for his interest. Jocelyne Couture, “Decision Theory, Individualistic Explanations and Social Darwinism,” in Québec Studies in the Philosophy of Science: Part II: Biology, Psychology, Cognitive Science and Economics Essays in Honor of Hagues Leblanc, ed. Mathieu Marion and Robert S. Cohen (Dordrecht: 1996), 229.
agent can be seen as a national hero of some sorts. If, on the other hand, the decision would be wrong the agent can be made into a scapegoat, or even worse. On the other hand decisions can be made on an even more personal level: one can make a decision which he or she hopes to be successful in order to get into a better light with a single person, who can be a superior – for example the Kaiser – or just another person of lesser apparent significance – for example a romantic interest.

The level of competing nation states is one that seems best suited for the adaptation of social Darwinist thinking. It often is used to describe the interstate diplomacy during the latter part of the nineteenth century and up to the First World War. Especially Germany’s competitive Weltpolitik is sometimes seen as a prime example of social Darwinist diplomacy. Yet, Weltpolitik has as much in common with social Darwinism as it had with other traditions persistent at the time in Imperial Germany. The same can be said about many individuals, who are seen as social Darwinists often for the simple reason that their careers started after the publication of Darwin’s Origin of Species. As such policies and individuals are easily named as social Darwinist, while surpassing even the stage of a generalist social Darwinism.

While the concept of social Darwinism at first had been devised for the social interactions of individuals or groups, it can be applied for use at the political and diplomatic level of states. In this case social Darwinism is linked to other ideas of thought such as eugenics and racism. National-socialist politics in favour of Lebensraum are some of the first that can spring to mind when discussing the use of social Darwinism in politics. As a concept Lebensraum not only advocated the settling of territories by German populations, it also favoured the deportation of the here existent population. As such the survival of the fittest is easily applied to such kinds of politics, unfit population need to make room for fit populations; even though in this case the process is not one of nature. Next to survival of the fittest is the Darwinist notion of struggle for existence – or survival – which, as a term, seems very applicable to the level of politics and diplomacy of states. Like nature, states can also be seen as being in a continuous struggle for survival. They need to conduct politics and diplomacy in order to come out as ‘fit’ and survive: they need to adapt in order to survive. As such it is possible to view the interstate level of politics as a Darwinian – or rather: Lamarckian – garden in which only the fittest survive.

As a theory regarding nation states social Darwinism developed through several paths. American scholars Benjamin Kidd and William Sumner both noted that war was part of a natural state in which nations existed. Kidd simply stated that “states (…) grow up by a kind of natural selection,” whereas Sumner stated that war is “the iron spur of the nature process.”

77 One can recall the demoting of Churchill after the Gallipoli Campaign during the First World War. Would this offensive have succeeded Churchill would have no doubt been made a hero. Instead he was demoted from First Lord of the Admiralty to Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

78 Crook, “Social Darwinism: the concept,” 263.

79 A claim made by: Alfred Kelly, The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860-1914 (Chapel Hill: 1981), 102. Kelly names figures as Treitschke and Moltke the Elder as people who are sometimes named as social Darwinists while their ideas do not hold much in common with Darwinism.

80 It is true that Lebensraum is not a National Socialist invention. It was first mentioned in the early twentieth century by anthropologist Friedrich Ratzel and used by Friedrich von Bernhardi in his famous 1912 book entitled Deutschland und der Nächste Krieg. Yet, after the Second World War it has often been connected to National Socialism.

81 This of course only applies when using the generalist view of social Darwinism that includes Lamarckism, as is done in this thesis.

82 Quoted in: Torbjørn L. Knutsen, A history of International Relations theory (Manchester: 1997), 195.
as part of the social Darwinist *struggle for existence* was also advocated by Friedrich von Bernhardi in his book *Germany and the Next War*. In Germany the possibilities of social Darwinism were explored by biologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel who saw Darwinism, the *struggle for survival*, as a law of nature; it is unavoidable and universal. As the unfit would perish in the struggle, society would become more perfect; or rather, it would evolve into a more fit society. In his turn Haeckel adapted his views of Darwinism on a political level, simply stating that only the fittest states would survive the unavoidable *struggle for survival*. While these theories developed by Kidd, Sumner and Haeckel seem 'harmless', they did in a way advocate war and actively seeking becoming more fit than others. After all, would states want to survive in the *struggle for existence* their best chance would be to try and bend this struggle in their favour. Since war, as Kidd and Sumner put it, was a vital part of this struggle, making sure future wars would end in their favour would be an important part of their politics.

At this point it should be stated that making sure wars would end in favour of yourself can be achieved through several paths: wars can be won on the battlefield by having the most successful army or by making sure, as a state, one would ally himself to other powerful states. On a similar note one could make sure that the war would be fought on one owns terms. Another path to choose could be to avoid wars all together, if one is not strong enough to succeed in the future war. Thus social Darwinism does not need to be interpreted as a theory of aggressive policies. Look at every aggressive foreign policy in the late nineteenth century as a manifestation of social Darwinism can be seen as a hasty generalisation.

Nevertheless social Darwinism did become connected to the developing nationalism of the nineteenth century. Not only did it spread faster, it also became rooted in other ideas than itself. As stated above the *struggle for survival* took a detour from the path of a law of nature: it became an active struggle that could be sought out. This is the point where ideas of eugenics and racism come into play. There is no doubt that the Holocaust and the seeking of *Lebensraum* can be linked to social Darwinism. This short detour into the Second World War brings this thesis back to the First World War and the opening remarks in the introduction of this thesis. Conrad believed that Serbia and its struggle for a nation for all Slavs endangered Austria-Hungary. Stopping Serbia and making sure Austria-Hungary would come out on top in a conflict between the two states would secure the interests of Austria-Hungary. In seeing social Darwinism as a part of the developing nationalism in the late nineteenth century it has become connected to the way of thinking in the *fin de siècle*. As such one can be able to conclude that social Darwinist thinking, when related to societies, became a prevalent way of thinking in the years leading up to the First World War.

83 ibid., 196.
85 ibid., 197.
86 Such a non-aggressive form of social Darwinism is advocated by Paul Crook, who states – in his book *Darwinism, War and History*, that Darwinian natural selection of states can be achieved through non-violent ways.
87 Kelly, *Descent*, 100.
This way of thinking, not necessarily evolutionary, is seen as prevalent for much of the nineteenth century. Before Lamarck, Spencer and Darwin described evolutionary models biological theory was mainly dictated by the works of Thomas Malthus and his theory of population, principally his *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Malthus provided an influence for most biologists in the nineteenth century. Central to Malthus’ thesis is the principle that increasing population growth will grow out of check with agricultural yield and a catastrophe will take place significantly decreasing population. In social theory Malthus thesis was adapted and used to explain the need for the competition of available resources. A similarity to the *struggle for existence* and survival of the fittest is easy to be seen; after all, the fittest will likely be most successful in competing for the limited resources. Darwin himself acknowledged the fact that he owed inspiration to Malthus. In a way that Malthusianism influenced thought in the early nineteenth century Darwinism came to influence thought in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. As the British historian Gregory Claeys states: “by 1900, indeed, social Darwinist ideas of ‘struggle,’ ‘fitness,’ and ‘survival,’ of the eternal Hobbesian war of all against all, individual, national, and species-centered, had become virtually omnipresent and definitive of one of the most important modern trends in European and American thought.”

Social Darwinism often is linked to a certain pessimism; itself having largely negative connotations, but the ideas associated with the theories tend to be viewed as pessimistic as well. Societies and individuals need to compete against each other, trying to come out on top in a *struggle for existence*, in which war can be viewed as an important medium. This same pessimism is often seen in de *fin de siècle*. The mood of the *fin de siècle* has been likened the a prevailing boredom, which saw in turn rise the many new ideas, some more pessimistic than the other. It cannot be said that social Darwinism and *fin de siècle* thinking go hand in hand; yet, the pessimistic Darwinist ideas fit in well with the mood in society leading up to the First World War.

Both Conrad and Moltke are seen as pessimistic social Darwinists. Koen Koch writes that Moltke “combined, like Conrad, social Darwinism with pessimism and fatalism” hereby referring to the writings of both men were they predicted the upcoming war that they both expected. I will not go into detail of the role social Darwinism played in the lives of both men here. This will be brought up in the next two chapters that will discuss their lives and actions during the July Crisis in greater detail.

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91 Crook, *Darwinism*, 17.
94 Koch, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 68.
Conrad, the Hawk

"Die Frage ging nicht mehr um Größe und Glanz, die Frage ging um Sein oder Nichtsein. Vielhundertjähriges sollte erweisen, ob es stehen, ob es stürzen wollte."
— Karl Friedrich Nowak, Der Weg zur Katastrophe

The upcoming chapter will, like the subsequent one, discuss one of the main characters of this thesis. It will concentrate on the role and actions of Austrian Chief of Staff General Count Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf. Conrad is often named as one of the main supporters of the war, as already mentioned earlier in this thesis. One of his biographers, the American historian Lawrence Sondhaus, named him "the architect of the apocalypse," a view that can be found in numerous other works and writings about the start of the First World War. This chapter will discuss the role of Conrad during the advent of the First World War. I will first present a short biography of Conrad before going into further details of his role leading up to and during the July Crisis. Finally I shall discuss proposed reasoning for his actions and try to connect this reasoning to the concept of vertigo which was introduced in the third chapter of this thesis.

Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf was born on November 11th 1852 in the Penzing district of Vienna. His father was Franz Xaver Conrad von Hötzendorf, a retired colonel of the 4th (Hungarian) Hussar Regiment. Conrad's mother was Barbara Kübler, a painter's daughter who was 32 years younger than her husband. His mother can be seen as the dominant figure in Conrad's life. Conrad's parents moved from Penzing to a more central area of Vienna shortly after his birth, where his sister Barbara "Betti" was born in 1854. Franz Xaver's military career ended when sustaining accidental injuries in the repression of the March 1848 revolution in Vienna.

95 "The question is no longer of size and splendour, the question is to be or not to be. Time will tell whether it will stand or fall." A line of reasoning attributed to Conrad by Austrian journalist Karl Nowak. Emperor Franz Joseph is claimed to have answered: "Good, if it has to be. In that case we will at least go down with dignity." It is likely that the whole conversation is fiction, Nowak supplies no sources for this, or any other claim in his work. Yet, based on writings by Conrad, among others, the conversation does seem to be based on real proceedings. Karl F. Nowak, Der Weg zur Katastrophe, 47.

96 I will not go into a full description of all different books, articles and other writings which name Conrad as one of the main supporters of the war. Yet, apart from the name given to him by Sondhaus, similar views of Conrad appear in several works published over a large time span. An article in the Times of December 14th 1942 names him the "arch-warmonger" (Charles Horder, "Count Berchtold," Times, December 14, 1942, 5). In an 1958 article in the Manchester Guardian the relationship between China and the Soviet Union was likened to the relation between Germany and Austria-Hungary at the start of the First World War; this article was concluded with a simple sentence: "let us hope there is in Peking no Conrad von Hötzendorf" ("In whose cage?" editorial, Manchester Guardian August 7, 1958, 4). Winston Churchill wrote the following about Conrad in his account of the First World War: "this dark, small, frail, thin officer (...) dwelt year after year at the very centre of Europe's powder magazine in special charge of the detonators" (Winston Churchill, The World Crisis: vol. 6 The Eastern Front (London: 1931), 30).

97 A total of three biographies have been written about Conrad. First in 1938 by Urbanski von Ostrymiec: August Urbanski von Ostrymiec, Conrad von Hötzendorf: Soldat und Mensch (Graz: 1938). A second biography was published in 1955 by Oskar Regele: Oskar Regele, Feldmarschall Conrad: Auftrag und Erfüllung 1906-1918 (Wien: 1955). The most recent biography was published in 2000 by Lawrence Sondhaus: Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse. Sondhaus' biography is the only one which details Conrad's entire life, the other two concentrate on his work as Chief of General Staff.

98 For reasons of clarity I will refer to Conrad's father by just his given name.

99 For a more complete account of Conrad's father see: Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 2-3.
Franz Xaver harboured a grudge against the liberal revolution and Hungarian autonomy, fed by the desertion of his former regiment to the Hungarian cause during the Hungarian Revolution later in 1848. It is felt that Conrad took over this strong views opposing further liberalisation and autonomy of ethnic groups within the Habsburg Empire partly from his father.\textsuperscript{100}

As a schoolboy Conrad developed an interest in reading and the arts, receiving painting lessons from his maternal grandfather. Furthermore he gained an increased interest in the natural science in this period of his life, something which would later feed his social Darwinism.\textsuperscript{101} Through his education he developed a belief of the need for a united Habsburg Empire, with little autonomy for ethnic minorities.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{100} Sondhaus, \textit{Architect of the Apocalypse}, 3.
\textsuperscript{101} ibid., 5.
Following formative years at Realschule Conrad entered the cadet institute in Hainburg. After graduation he joined the Theresian Military Academy, the Austrian equivalent of Sandhurst, at Wiener Neustadt. Like in Hainburg Conrad managed to distinguish himself both academically and socially at the military academy. In 1871 Conrad was commissioned into the army as a lieutenant in the 11th Field Jäger Battalion. In the autumn of 1874 Conrad in turn left his unit as he secured admission to the War School to be trained as a staff officer. By late 1976 Conrad graduated from the War School first in his class and was posted to the staff of the 6th Cavalry Brigade stationed in the Carpathian Mountains. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, when Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia, Conrad applied for a transfer to a his old unit the 11th Field Jäger Battalion to be able to participate in the occupation. Instead he was transferred to the freshly mobilised 4th Division. Conrad received a promotion to captain during the occupation of Bosnia in 1879 and was transferred to the Mapping Bureau of the General Staff. During his posting at the Mapping Bureau Conrad, for a short duration, served with an active unit, the headquarters of the 47th Infantry Division, during operations to suppress rebellion in Bosnia. Conrad was finally transferred from the Mapping Bureau to become Chief of Staff of the 11th Infantry Division stationed in Lemberg. During his commission with this unit his sister Betti died aged 29.

In Lemberg Conrad met Vilma Le Beau, daughter of Colonel August Le Beau. After a brief engagement the couple married on April 10th 1886. Their first son, Konrad, was born nine months later on January 10th 1887. Later that same year Conrad was promoted to the rank of major and he returned to the General Staff, this time being commissioned in the Operations Bureau. A second son, Erwin, was born January 23rd 1888. In the same year Conrad was posted to teach tactics at the War School, a post he held for 4 years. During this posting at the War School Conrad was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and a third son, Herbert, was born on August 10th 1891. In 1892 Conrad asked for reassignment to an active army unit and was assigned to command a battalion of the 93rd Infantry Regiment in Olmütz. Subsequently he was made a full colonel in 1893. After a short posting evaluating staff officer candidates Conrad was posted to command the 1st Infantry Regiment "Kaiser", the most prestigious of the Austro-Hungarian army. A fourth son, Egon, was born during this posting on March 20th 1896. In quick succession Conrad was promoted from the 1st Infantry Regiment to command the 55th Infantry Brigade in Trieste, in 1899, and the 8th Infantry Division in Innsbruck, in 1903, gaining

103 Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 6.
104 Regele, Feldmarschall Conrad, 15.
105 Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 15.
107 Regele, Feldmarschall Conrad, 15; Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 23.
109 ibid., 32.
110 Konrad Conrad von Hützendorf was nicknamed Kurt, to spare him from being known as Konrad Conrad.
111 ibid., 35.
112 Regele, Feldmarschall Conrad, 15.
113 ibid.
114 Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 48.
115 Regele, Feldmarschall Conrad, 15.
116 Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 49.
the rank of major-general.\textsuperscript{117} While posted in Innsbruck Vilma died of stomach cancer on April 29\textsuperscript{th} 1905, while it was in Trieste that Conrad would meet his future second wife, Gina von Reininghaus in 1900.\textsuperscript{118} After a second, coincidental, meeting with Gina in 1907 Conrad is said to have proclaimed “this woman will be my wife.”\textsuperscript{119} Conrad started visiting Gina, who was then still married, and writing her on a frequent basis. He asked for her to marry him, but she refused, wishing to remain with her children. The affair, which was widely known, caused somewhat of an outrage in Vienna. Conrad believed he needed a success, the status of a hero, to be able to win Gina over and make her his wife, writing:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

Following a period of mourning following the death of his first wife Conrad resumed his command of the 8\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division. In late 1906, however, Conrad was once again promoted, this time to Chief of General Staff, by his admirer, the Archduke, and heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand.\textsuperscript{121} In this role his influence over military decision making became considerable, being subordinate only to the Command-in-Chief, emperor Franz Joseph, and the deputy Commander-in-Chief, Franz Ferdinand.

Many different authors name Conrad as one of the principal hawks within the Austro-Hungarian government, which he was part of in the role of Chief of General Staff. Conrad was an advocate of war, not only calling for action against Serbia in the summer of 1914, as will be discussed in this chapter. He advocated war against Italy after increasing tensions in 1904.\textsuperscript{122} As a part of this he drafted a war plan, codenamed Plan I,\textsuperscript{123} which only increased tensions between Italy and Austria-Hungary. Conrad’s forced resignation in 1911 as Chief of General Staff was

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{117} Regele, Feldmarschall, Conrad, 15.
\textsuperscript{118} Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 73; Gina Conrad, Mein Leben, 9.
\textsuperscript{119} Gina Conrad, Mein Leben, 11.
\textsuperscript{120} “The times are serious, and the coming year will in all probability bring war. If I physically perish in this war, you will be relieved of me. If I return with failure, then I will disappear as nothing into loneliness, if I am even to survive this battle. But if I come, as I can only self-consciously hope, crowned with success, then Gina, I will break all restraints in order to achieve the greatest success of my life, having you as my dear wife.” Franz Conrad von Hötzendörf, Letter to Gina von Reininghaus, December 26, 1908. Re-printed in: Gina Conrad, Mein Leben, 30-31. The letter is reprinted in English translation in Williamson Jr. and Van Wyk, Soldiers, Statesmen, 49, but it should be noted that this translation contains a vital mistranslation of the second sentence. Williamson and Van Wyk translate the sentence as “I go physically well, since you have saved me.” This mistranslation, however, allows to miss the vital social Darwinist message of the letter. Conrad leaves himself with two options, either he wins it all and comes out on top in the struggle, or he loses it all and will deem himself unfit to marry Gina and leave her alone forever.
\textsuperscript{121} ibid., 76-80.
\textsuperscript{123} Conrad’s war plans are all lettered for their respective targets. Plan I refers to movements against Italy, his First World War war plans against Russia and Serbia are named Plan R (Russia) and Plan B (Balkans) respectively.
\end{footnotes}
caused by Foreign Minister Aehrenthal’s unwillingness to commit to a war against Italy while it was at war with the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, Conrad was ever sceptical about the Austrian alliance with Italy and never fully expected Italian aid in the case of a war on the Balkans.\textsuperscript{125} It was not unusual for Conrad to draft war plans against allies; he even considered Germany as a possible war target.\textsuperscript{126} This ‘lust’ for war can be seen as part of Conrad’s philosophy regarding war. Conrad strongly believed in the offensive as being the best defence.\textsuperscript{127} Offensives were needed to allow the monarchy to survive according to Conrad, which fits in perfectly with his social Darwinists belief; actively trying to come out on top in the struggle for existence.

In the same way that Conrad advocated a preventive war against Italy he also actively sought a preventive war against Serbia in the years leading up to the war. Conrad believed that Serbia’s desire for expansion actively threatened the Habsburg Monarchy and thus he called for action against Serbia at several times before the July Crisis. In one of these instances he wrote to Emperor Franz Joseph calling the relations between Serbia and Austria-Hungary a trial of strength:

“Die Situation ist zu einer Kraftprobe zwischen der Monarchie und Serbien geworden. Die Kraftprobe muß ausgetragen werden. Alles andere, wie Albanien, Hafenfrage, Konsulfrage, Handelsverträge etc. sind Nebensachen. Fällt diese Kraftprobe zu Gunsten der Monarchie aus, dann werden sich die Slawen der letzteren sofort dem Stärkeren fügen und anschließen, der Besitz der südslawischen Gebiete der Monarchie wird gesichert, Serbien als Attraktionspunkt für irredentistische Bestrebungen und als dauernder Herd einer gefährlichen Agitation sowie als militärischer Gegner wird beseitigt; die ohnehin immer mehr und mehr angezweifelte Lebensfähigkeit der Monarchie wird dokumentiert, dadurch das Ansehen und die politische Geltung der Monarchie erhöht, so daß sie von ihren Feinden gefürchtet, von ihren Freunden gesucht werden wird; alle feindlichen Aspirationen, wie die italienischen, rumänischen, großrussischen, werden ebenso wie die großserbischen verstummen; alle inneren Kräfte der Monarchie werden erstarken und zusammengefaßt werden können; Macht und Ansehen der Dynastie werden nach innen und außen Gehoben; in die Armee wird wieder der Geist der Zuversicht und des Selbstvertrauens einkehren; die wirtschaftliche Lage wird sich sofort bessern und unter günstige Ausspizen gelangen.”\textsuperscript{128}

According to Conrad the trial of strength with Serbia should be the main vocal point of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, all other matters, like the Albanian-problem and Serbia’s desire for a port on the Adriatic coast, are irrelevant. Conrad believed that the South Slav problem would be

\textsuperscript{124} Fritz Fellner, “Some Reflections on Conrad von Hützendorf and His Memoirs based on Old and New Sources,” \textit{Austrian History Yearbook} 1 (1965), 77.
\textsuperscript{125} Conrad expected Italy to aim for annexing the Italian territories of the Habsburg Empire. See: Conrad von Hützendorf, \textit{Aus Meiner Dienstzeit I}, 27.
\textsuperscript{127} See for example: Sondhaus, \textit{Architect of the Apocalypse}, 44. Conrad’s belief in the offensive was not an uncommon way of thinking for military planners. See works on the so-called ‘cult of the offensive’ by Van Evera among others.
solved by defeating Serbia, as the Slavs would choose the side of the victor in this struggle. Furthermore winning the trail of strength with Serbia would also lessen other enemy aspirations, which would have been harboured by Italy, Rumania and Russia, among others, strengthen the inner force of the Habsburg Monarchy, increase status and increase optimism and confidence within the army.

Conrad repeated his fear of increasing Serbian influence on the Balkan several times in his role as Chief of General Staff and created a war plan, Plan B, to be able to quickly strike at Serbia with an offensive from Bosnia-Herzegovina, leaving his flank towards Russia vulnerable to an intervention. To check this possible intervention Conrad drafted an offensive war plan, Plan R, that should defend Galicia while Serbia was being dealt the decisive blow. Conrad would be unable to enact both plans at the same time, thus he relied on a reserve consisting of twelve divisions that could turn either plan into action.\footnote{Williamson Jr., \textit{Austria-Hungary}, 182.} Conrad himself preferred action against Serbia, following victory in Serbia Austria-Hungary would turn its armies and face Russia. For his defensive plan Conrad relied on Germany to restrain Russia,\footnote{ibid., 107-108.} while Germany itself expected
Austria-Hungary to bear the burden of an initial Russian attack while it enacted the Schlieffen Plan.\textsuperscript{131} The fear of Serbia was shared by many within the Foreign Ministry.\textsuperscript{132} After 1903 the Austro-Hungarian policy towards Serbia changed slowly towards a hostile one. Before 1903 Austria-Hungary had been able to control Serbian politics, but the new king Peter I, brought to power after the assassination of his predecessor in a plot that was organised by Dragutin Dimitrijević – best known as one of the plotters against Franz Ferdinand – sought a more expansionist foreign policy and closer ties with Russia. This increased the rivalry on the Balkans, in a way, played into the hands of Conrad. Following Serbian victories in 1912 and 1913 its threat increased and Serbia appeared a force to be reckoned with, convincing more of the need to check Serbian expansion.

Conrad was not the only so-called hawk within the Habsburg government, others include Count Hoyos, chef de cabinet of the foreign minister, who led the famous mission to Berlin to secure the Blank Cheque needed as a guarantee of German support. Hoyos was just one of several diplomats, the so-called ‘Young Rebels’, who favoured a confrontational approach towards Austria-Hungary’s enemies.\textsuperscript{133} All of them had somewhat of an influence on Austro-Hungarian decision making.

When Franz Ferdinand was assassinated on June 28\textsuperscript{th} Conrad was quick to react. At the time of the assassination Conrad was travelling to Karlstadt, present day Karlovac in Croatia, to attend a General Staff Ride, after having visiting manoeuvres in Bosnia where he had bid his farewell to Franz Ferdinand and his wife in the evening of June 27\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{134} To Conrad the assassination left little doubt, it was the last link in a chain of events. This act could only be answered with war.\textsuperscript{135} Conrad contacted the government in Vienna asking whether he was to continue on his trip to Croatia or to return to Vienna. The reply from Vienna was short, Conrad was to return immediately to Vienna, which for him confirmed the serious nature of the events taking place.\textsuperscript{136} The same day he wrote a letter to Gina von Reininghaus stating his fatalistic views on the events that would be upcoming. Conrad expected Serbia to gain support from Russia, which would result in an apocalyptical war for Austria-Hungary, stating this with the words, as already quoted in the introduction to this thesis: “it will be a hopeless fight; nevertheless it must be waged, since an old monarchy and a glorious army must not perish without glory.”\textsuperscript{137} It is this fatalistic message, often linked to Conrad’s social Darwinist beliefs, which in this thesis allows for a first connection with vertigo.

In the early days of the July Crisis Conrad was among those who most blatantly stated they favoured a war with Serbia. Berchtold summarised Conrad’s response on the assassinations in Sarajevo as “Krieg, Krieg, Krieg!”\textsuperscript{138} Next to this Berchtold recalls Conrad saying: “On 1 July we must mobilise without further negotiations with Serbia. If someone meets a poisonous

\textsuperscript{131} See footnote 8.
\textsuperscript{132} Williamson Jr., \textit{Austria-Hungary}, 103-106.
\textsuperscript{134} Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, \textit{Aus Meiner Dienstzeit 1906-1918}, Vierter band. 24 Juni 1914 bis September 1914 (Wien: 1924), 15.
\textsuperscript{135} ibid., 18; Sondhaus, \textit{Architect of the Apocalypse}, 139.
\textsuperscript{136} Conrad, \textit{Aus Meiner Dienstzeit IV}, 18.
\textsuperscript{137} See footnote 15.
\textsuperscript{138} See footnote 7.
viper in his tracks, one did not wait for a bite.” Conrad himself gives a different view of these proceedings, recalling the conversation with Berchtold in his memoirs, in which he claims to have said: “The police minister might calm the Serbs, but the only effective method is power.” What is striking is that Conrad himself claims that he agreed they had to wait for the outcome of the investigation. This is in stark contrast to his letter to Gina on June 28th and to his words spoken in a meeting with Franz Joseph on July 5th where he repeated his call for immediate action.

Berchtold, who, as foreign minister for the Dual Monarchy, acted as a prime minister, took command of the Austro-Hungarian response to the assassination, but he was attacked by Conrad for causing the situation through his hesitant approach of the 1912 and 1913 crises. On the other hand Berchtold had to deal with Tisza, who favoured a hesitant approach. In his outcry for war with Serbia Conrad was not alone, he was supported by War Minister Krobatin, Prime Minister for Austria Stürgh and joint Finance Minister Biliński, who all favoured immediate action against Serbia. One of the most fiercest hawks was Conrad’s rival and Governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina Oskar Potiorek. Potiorek argued that action against Serbia might help resolve the Habsburg’s domestic troubles in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was this argument that both Conrad and Berchtold adopted in convincing the other decision makers in following their advocacy for war. Berchtold quickly adopted a more direct response to the assassination and already on June 30th he talked of a “final and fundamental reckoning” with Belgrade.

Some consider the Austro-Hungarian stance on war with Serbia the product of Conrad’s war mongering, but this statement cannot be seen as completely valid. Of course, Conrad influenced people with his war mongering and since he was a high placed public figure one can assume that his influence was larger than average, however, as made clear in the previous section, Conrad was not alone in his war mongering. It can perhaps be said that he was most outspoken and it is clear that Conrad longed for war. Since he now had the confidence he had Berchtold on his side – and Franz Ferdinand was no longer present to restrain him – this was the moment for him to push through; war should be the only option available to Vienna.

Yet, the crisis developed slowly. Decision makers in Vienna waited for the reply Hoyos was to bring back from Berlin as Franz Joseph wanted to wait on his ally’s assurance of backing any action against Serbia. Next to this they were awaiting the results of the inquiry into Serbian complicity as Tisza was refusing to agree to any type of action against Serbia, even diplomatic, until their complicity in the assassination was proven. On July 6th Conrad met with Berchtold again and Berchtold suggest to Conrad a premobilisation against Serbia as he considered it likely that Germany would indeed support an Austro-Hungarian action. Conrad, however, dismissed this premobilisation, stating that, keeping in line with his war plans, only a full mobilisation was possible.

Following the cabinet meeting on July 7th, in which Hoyos ‘presented’ the Blank Cheque, Vienna decisively started to push towards war. Austria-Hungarian decision makers, Tisza ex-

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139 Williamson Jr. and Van Wyk, Soldiers, Statesmen, 57.
140 Conrad, Aus Meiner Dienstzeit IV, 33; Williamson Jr. and Van Wyk, Soldiers, Statesmen, 58.
141 Conrad, Aus Meiner Dienstzeit IV, 36-38.
142 Clark, Sleepwalkers, 396.
143 Williamson Jr., Austria-Hungary, 193-194; Clark, Sleepwalkers, 394.
144 Williamson Jr., Austria-Hungary, 194.
145 Conrad, Aus Meiner Dienstzeit IV, 36.
146 Clark, Sleepwalkers, 429; Geiss, Julikrise, 63.
147 Conrad, Aus Meiner Dienstzeit IV, 40.
cluded, agreed that anything but a decisive military victory over Serbia would be worthless. In this process of acquiring a military victory they seemed to be willing to risk all. When Tisza enquired to Conrad about his predictions of a war against Serbia supported by Russia, Conrad answered that he regarded the Austro-Hungarian chances of victory as very slim.\textsuperscript{148}

So far Conrad advocacy of war seems to have little to do with the main theme of this thesis, at first point there does not seem to be any sign of vertigo in the actions made by Conrad. Rather they can be traced to his views on social Darwinism and personal views on Austria-Hungary’s neighbours.\textsuperscript{149} Conrad advocated war in the preceding years, up to the point where he resigned from his post in 1911. His advocacy for war in 1914 is thus not uncommon. The overall Austro-Hungarian reactions and proposed actions seem to fit in well into the Chicken Game that was introduced in the third chapter. Decision makers in Austria-Hungary believed they were on a crashing course with Serbia, and other countries on the Balkans, deviating from this course would result in a severe loss of face that could, and would, be exploited by Austria-Hungary’s enemies. Thus they were happy to remain on course for the big crash, even if it came to a crash, which would most probably be lost, the results would at worst be the same.

After the cabinet meeting of July 7th Tisza, while still demanding enquiry into Serbian involvement, slowly became convinced of the need for war, however, he posed a strict condition: Serbia was to be send an ultimatum first. One formulated with “stiff terms for Serbia but not terms that would clearly betray [Austro-Hungarian] intention to make impossible demands. Otherwise [Austria-Hungary] should have an untenable juridical basis for a declaration of war.”\textsuperscript{150} It was clear that after Tisza’s change of mind Vienna was on a clear crashing course,\textsuperscript{151} Berchtold even enquired with Conrad what should be done in case Serbia refused to fight. Both men wanted to humiliate it militarily, but Berchtold had doubts that Serbia would put up a fight. Conrad claims to have assured Berchtold that Serbia would in this case be occupied until war reparations would be paid and the army would be demobilised and disarmed.\textsuperscript{152} While the planning for the ultimatum was thus already underway Tisza still need to be won over and give his consent to the ultimatum, Berchtold finally succeeded in this on July 14th.\textsuperscript{153} Two days earlier Conrad had left Vienna to go on a short leave until July 22th, when Vienna planned to send the ultimatum to Serbia, this scheme was thought up by Berchtold to keep up the suspicion that Vienna was not planning any type of military action.\textsuperscript{154}

Between June 28th and his departure on July 12th Conrad seems to have slowly changed his mind about the speed of action. In the first few days of the July Crisis he had called for immediate action, but he slowly became more hesitant as the days past. When Germany advised Austria-Hungary to strike at once, Conrad did not jump on this and demand the immediate action that he had urged on in June. Rather he let it be, informed Archduke Friedrich, Franz Ferdinand’s successor as deputy Commander in Chief of the Austro-Hungarian army, of the possible action that could be undertaken and discussed measures that needed to be taken if Vienna de-

\textsuperscript{148} ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{149} Among others Conrad had called for war with Serbia on at least 25 occasions before 1914. Koch, Kleine geschiedenis, 50.
\textsuperscript{151} Clark, Sleepwalkers, 425.
\textsuperscript{152} Conrad, Aus Meiner Dienstzeit IV, 61-62.
\textsuperscript{153} Albertini, Origins II, 174-176.
\textsuperscript{154} Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 143.
cided to mobilise.\textsuperscript{155} This can be placed in line with the fact that mobilisation in early July proved impossible to Conrad. He had allowed soldiers from the countryside to go on harvest-leaves to help their family with the harvest. Revoking these leaves would alert the other countries to Austro-Hungarian intentions. Thus he himself decided that he would have to wait for the soldiers to return from their leaves. Conrad’s own organisational arrangements prevented the preventive strike on Serbia that he had advocated.\textsuperscript{156} As the July Crisis progressed and Austria-Hungary continued its efforts for war Conrad’s role in the events of the crisis became ever smaller, rather he took the role for which he was hired, that of Chief of General Staff. On July 12\textsuperscript{th} Conrad made it clear to Berchtold that the Austro-Hungarian could not mobilise until July 28\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{157} Furthermore he stated that he needed a whole 16 days to mobilise the army.\textsuperscript{158} After the ultimatum had expired and was rejected by Serbia Conrad again met with Berchtold and made it clear that he did not expect to be able to start operations against Serbia until August 12\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{159} Conrad’s war mongering thus seemed to have made place for sheer realism. By July 7\textsuperscript{th} he got the war that he wanted, after that date he started planning to try and bring it to a fruitful end, even if that went against his own predictions.

The question can thus be asked whether Conrad’s actions in late June and early July can be seen as a manifestation of vertigo. At first Conrad’s actions, his advocacy for war with Serbia, seems to be driven by different factors: his opinion on Austria-Hungary’s neighbouring countries, his belief in social Darwinism and his love for Gina von Reininghaus are the most important. Conrad deeply believed that Austria-Hungary’s neighbours threatened the existence of the Habsburg Monarchy. Countries such as Italy, Serbia, Bulgaria and Rumania were nibbling away at the Austro-Hungarian periphery, hence his repeated calls for preventive attacks on any of these countries. Social Darwinism played an important role in the life of Conrad. It was part of his personal philosophy. Not only did he believe in the offensive, he also advocated modernisation throughout his military career. He recognised the need for the Austro-Hungarian army to become better trained and better equipped would it have to fight in an inevitable struggle for existence. As such he introduced realistic field training to the units he commanded, instead of the traditional drill ground training.\textsuperscript{160} and advocated to adoption of a pike grey uniform, instead of the traditional brightly coloured blue uniform.\textsuperscript{161} Conrad referred to social Darwinism in several of his writings: he named the Second Boer War as a struggle for existence, which gave the Boers a strength that could be attributed to their race.\textsuperscript{162} Combined, Conrad’s antagonistic view of other countries and his social Darwinist beliefs contributed to his war mongering during the July Crisis. It can almost be seen as the natural thing for him to do.

One other factor can be seen as attributing to his advocacy of war, one more personal and already alluded to above; Conrad was deeply in love with Gina von Reininghaus.\textsuperscript{163} While

\textsuperscript{155} For Conrad’s reaction to the Blank Cheque brought back by Hoyos see: Conrad, \textit{Aus Meiner Dienstzeit IV}, 42.

\textsuperscript{156} Williamson Jr., \textit{Austria-Hungary}, 200.

\textsuperscript{157} Conrad, \textit{Aus Meiner Dienstzeit IV}, 72.

\textsuperscript{158} Clark, \textit{Sleepwalkers}, 518.

\textsuperscript{159} Conrad, \textit{Aus Meiner Dienstzeit IV}, 72.

\textsuperscript{160} See Sondhaus, \textit{Architect of the Apocalypse}. Primarily chapter three.

\textsuperscript{161} ibid., 68.

\textsuperscript{162} Franz Conrad von Hötendorf, \textit{Infanteristische Fragen und die Erscheinungen des Boerenkrieges} (Wien: 1903), 30.

\textsuperscript{163} For a complete recollection of the affair between Conrad von Hötendorf and Gina von Reininghaus one is referred to Gina Conrad, \textit{Mein Leben} and chapter six of Sondhaus, \textit{Architect of the Apocalypse}, which draws heavily from this first source.
she was married to Hans von Reininghaus, an industrialist from the Styria region of Austria. Conrad asked her to marry him on several occasions, which she declined. After an initial visit in early 1907 Conrad starting visiting Gina frequently, seeing her every sixth day, as long as his duties allowed him to. Gina was receptive of his visits and confided to Conrad that the love had gone out of her marriage with Hans von Reininghaus. However, for the time she preferred to stay with her children, the youngest only a year old. Nevertheless Conrad’s fascination with Gina remained strong; between 1907 and 1915 Conrad wrote her more than 3,000 letters. The length of the affair between Conrad and Gina is not fully known, but Conrad’s biographer Sondhaus considers it highly likely they were lovers by 1908. Conrad still nursed the hopes of ever marrying Gina, but, as stated on page 25 of this thesis, he felt that he needed to return from a war a hero in order for their marriage to be accepted by society.

All of this, Conrad’s contempt of neighbouring countries, his social Darwinism and his love of Gina von Reininghaus, do not appear to help explain his actions as vertiginous. Rather than a desire to jump, he seems to present a well thought out willingness. Conrad at first did not seem to flee forward into the unknown. For him the future appeared known, either it was victory and marriage to Gina or it would be defeat and the end of the Habsburg monarchy. He accepted both outcomes. Evidence of fleeing forward is visible in writings by Conrad from the winter of 1912/1913 onwards. His position of Chief of General Staff started to work as a strain on his nerves. He wrote to Gina in December 1912, he was getting more stressed by the ongoing crises and the increasingly worse international position of Austria-Hungary. An observation of Conrad’s increasing stress was also made by politician Joseph Redlich at a dinner party, where he noticed that Conrad’s seemed to be “depressed.” Conrad himself again shared the strain his responsibilities as Chief of General Staff were having on him with Gina in September 1913. Earlier that month he had accompanied Franz Ferdinand to the Kaiser-manoeuvre near Leipzig, after which he travelled with Franz Ferdinand to Chotowin in Bohemia for the Austro-Hungarian manoeuvres. Conrad mentioned an increasing number of arguments with Franz Ferdinand, in a letter to Gina dated September 16th 1913, which led him to consider resigning from his post:

> “Die Unstimmigkeiten mit dem Erzherzog dauern fort und mehr sich. Der dienstliche Verkehr hat Formen angenommen, die es mir unmöglich machen, weiter noch in dieser widerwärtigen, schiefen Stellung zu verbleiben, und wenn ich nicht heute schon mein Gesuch um gänzlichen Rücktritt vorlege, so ist es nur, weil ich an einen so folgenschweren Entschluss nicht ohne reiflichste Überlegung herantreten will.”

164 Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 64.
165 ibid., 109.
166 Gina Conrad, Mein Leben, 14; Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 109.
167 Sondhaus, Architect of the Apocalypse, 114.
168 ibid., 122.
170 “The disagreements with the Archduke continue and seem to increase. The official contacts has adopted a form that make it impossible for me to remain in this revolting and crooked position, and if I did not already present my application for resignation, it is only because I do not want to make such a momentous decision without careful deliberation.” Franz Conrad von Hützendorf, Letter to Gina von Reininghaus, September 16, 1913. Reprinted in: Gina Conrad, Mein Leben, 75-76.
In the same letter to Gina, dated September 16th 1913 he stated that he had a burning desire to get out of the intrigue and find rest. Two days later he send a letter of resignation to Franz Ferdinand, stating that, in his opinion, he did no longer contribute to the office he held. Conrad ended up not resigning from his post on the insistence of Franz Ferdinand himself, who beseeched him to stay on over the winter, fearing Conrad’s resignation might damage relations with Germany. Conrad’s stress, however, did not lessen. Conrad’s desire for rest stayed and on July 2nd 1914, several days into the July Crisis, Conrad wrote August Urbanski von Ostrymiecz, chief of the Austro-Hungarian Military Intelligence Bureau and one of his biographers, that he still had “eine wahre Sehnsucht nach etwas Ruhe”.

At this point it is possible to view Conrad’s acts as those of a man fleeing forward. Conrad seems to have been feeling trapped in his position. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, whom he had not been on good terms with for the last two years or more, allowed him a way out. He fled forward, advocating a war that, he expected not to win and he knew he was not prepared for. Only after the July 7th, when war had proven to be the only course for Austro-Hungarian decision makers, who fell strengthened by arguments that were brought in by Conrad, among others, did he start to think clearly again; finding that the army was not ready to mobilise and not ready to start operations against Serbia. But by then it had proven too little, too late. It cannot be said that the course of the July Crisis would have been different had Conrad acted differently; different opinions are expressed by different historians. What can be said is that Conrad’s act of fleeing forward, his decision to act before thinking, did not contribute to another solution of the crisis. His vertiginous action brought Austria-Hungary even deeper into the grave it appeared to be digging for itself.

Moltke, loss of control

“So werden und müssen die Dinge sich entwickeln, wenn nicht, fast möchte man sagen, ein Wunder geschieht, um noch in letzter Stunde einen Krieg zu verhindern, der die Kultur fast des gesamten Europas auf Jahrzehnte hinaus vernichten wird.”

― Helmuth von Moltke, German Chief of General Staff

Like the last chapter concerning Franz Conrad von Hötendorf this chapter will discuss one of the main ‘characters’ of this thesis: Helmuth von Moltke. Like Conrad, Moltke is often named as one of the instigators of the First World War; famously, and stubbornly, proclaiming “Your Majesty, it cannot be done” to Kaiser Wilhelm when the latter enquired whether it was possible to make changes to the war plans to try fighting a one front war, making it clear to him that there was no going back for Germany, the war that would become the First World War had begun. Due to this statement, Moltke is often seen as a great supporter of the war, working out of view of the Kaiser to get the war going. At the moment it was possible to him, it is said he ordered mobilisation, knowing there would be no way back from conflict as soon as Germany would mobilise; her war plans simply did not allow it. Like the previous chapter, it will first give a short biography before going into further detail of Moltke’s actions during the July Crisis. Finally it shall review this actions and connect them to the concept of vertigo which was introduced in the third chapter of this thesis.

Helmuth Johann Ludwig von Moltke was born May 23rd 1848 on the rural estate of Gersdorff in the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, one of the future states of the German Empire. Moltke was named after his uncle Helmuth Karl Bernhard von Moltke, who would become known as the hero of the Wars of Unification. He was the second son of Adolph von Moltke and Augusta Krohn. The Moltke family, a minor noble house, can trace back its genealogy to the era of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry II, but lost great fortunes after the Napoleonic Wars. After the birth of Helmuth von Moltke his father took up employment as administrator in

175 “This is the way things will and must develop, unless, one might almost say, a miracle takes place to prevent at the eleventh hour a war which will annihilate the civilization of almost the whole of Europe for decades to come.” Helmuth von Moltke, Der Große Generalstab an den Reichskanzler, July 29, 1914.
176 Although it should be said that no historian or author who quotes this passage provides a reference to any type of primary source.
177 No complete, standard biography for the life of Helmuth von Moltke the Younger exists. While, like Conrad, he had his role during the July Crisis extensively discussed no biography was ever written about him. The main available source of information is the introductionary chapter by Jens Heisterkamp in the first volume of Moltke’s collected works, Jens Heisterkamp, “Helmuth von Moltke – eine Lebensskizze,” in Helmuth von Moltke 1848-1916: Dokumente zu seinem Leben und Wirken, Band 1, ed. Thomas Meyer (Basel: 1993). Yet this biography concentrates for a great deal on the anthroposophist nature of Moltke and his relation to Rudolf Steiner and like the book by Meyer on the relation between Moltke, his wife and Steiner, Light for the New Millennium, which, among others, deals with ‘after-death messages’, should be used very carefully. A more reliable source is the book Helmuth von Moltke and the origins of the First World War by Annika Mombauer. This book however concentrates mainly on his role during the First World War and the planning for the war, it only briefly provides a biography of Moltke’s early life.
179 The two men are distinguished between as Moltke the Elder and Moltke the Younger.
the county of Rantzau, which was part of Denmark.\textsuperscript{180} In Rantzau the Moltke family grew with a further six children.

Moltke attended the Gymnasium at Altona, near Hamburg but located inside the Duchy of Holstein, which was in personal union with the Kingdom of Denmark. The education received here formed Moltke’s simple nature, which would dictate his later ambitions. After finishing Gymnasium Moltke entered a military career in Prussia, which was made more easier to him, a Danish citizen, by the fame his uncle had acquired.\textsuperscript{181} Aged 22 and ranked a cadet\textsuperscript{182} Moltke took part in the Franco-Prussian War, which was led by his uncle, fighting with his unit, the 7\textsuperscript{th} Gren-

\textsuperscript{180} Heisterkamp, “Helmuth von Moltke,” 26.
\textsuperscript{181} ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} The official rank of the Prussian Army is Fähnrich.
Moltke, at the Battles of Wœrth and Sedan and the Siege of Paris. In September 1870 he was promoted to lieutenant. He joined the 1st Foot Guards Regiment in 1872 and was subsequently promoted to senior-lieutenant. Throughout his career Moltke was stationed in and around Berlin and Potsdam. Moltke was enlisted in the War Academy in Berlin between 1875 and 1878 and he joined the General Staff in 1880. During his time at the War Academy Moltke met his future wife countess Eliza von Moltke-Huitfeldt. The couple married in 1878.

Like Conrad, Moltke developed an avid interest in reading, mostly of philosophical and scientific books published in the mid-1800s, reading the philosophical works of Hartmann and the political works of Chamberlain and Bebel, among others. Another thing in common with Conrad was his interest in the arts, Moltke played the cello and had a personal painting studio.

Moltke was made adjutant to his uncle, who was Chief of General Staff, in 1882, a function he held until his uncle's death in 1891. In this function he was promoted to major in 1888. After his uncle's death, Moltke was appointed to be personal adjutant to the Kaiser himself. As personal adjutant Moltke visited many countries and courts in Europe. In 1893 Moltke was promoted to lieutenant-colonel and he became commander of the Prussian Palace Guard. Subsequently Moltke was promoted again, in 1895, to the rank of colonel and received command of the 1st Guards Grenadiers Regiment 'Kaiser Alexander' the following year. In 1899 he was made major-general and given command of the 1st Guards Infantry Brigade, while all this time remaining adjutant to the Kaiser. Following another promotion, to lieutenant-general in 1902, Moltke was named commander of the 1st Guards Infantry Division. In 1904 the Kaiser personally added Moltke to the General Staff and named him Generalquartiermeister, deputy to the Chief of General Staff Count Schlieffen. This made Moltke a likely candidate to succeed Schlieffen following his pending retirement. On January 1st 1906 Moltke was named Chief of General Staff, being the Kaiser's personal candidate. Regarding this assignment the Kaiser had told Moltke a year prior: "Sie kenne ich und zu Ihnen habe ich Vertrauen." As Chief of General Staff Moltke inherited the Schlieffen Plan, Germany's famous war plan to avoid a prolonged two front war by aiming for a quick victory over France before turning all armies east to fight Russia. The plan choose to ignore the heavily defended Franco-German border, instead sending the German armies through neutral Belgium in a circling movement bringing the armies past Paris. This route through Belgium risked bringing Great Britain, which guaranteed Belgium independence and neutrality since the Treaty of London of 1839, into the war. Moltke adapted the plans on several occasions, moving extra units to the

183 Mombauer, Helmuth von Moltke, 48.
184 Ibid.
185 Eliza von Moltke-Huitfeldt was part of the Swedish/Danish lineage of the House of Moltke.
188 Mombauer, Helmuth von Moltke, 49.
189 Bosch, Franz, and Hofmann, Wörterbuch, 1923-1924.
191 The German rank of Generalquartiermeister is not equivalent to the Anglo-American rank of quarter-master general, he does not deal with supplies, but rather with operational planning.
192 Ibid.
German defence of Alsace-Lorraine, in an effort to perfect it even further. This cautious nature of Moltke can also be seen in other decisions he made; trying to make measured decisions in an effort to remain in control of the situation.

While Conrad had a rather active role during the July Crisis the same cannot be said for Moltke, as the latter was on leave until the 25th of July, the day the Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia expired. He was visiting a spa in Karlsbad where he arrived on June 28th. Moltke played no important role in German decision making until his infamous Zur Beurteilung der politischen Lage, a letter written to Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg on July 29th. However, Moltke’s, and other German military leaders, absence during the first four weeks of the July Crisis could be seen as of little significance, as it was only the last week that really mattered. In the weeks leading up this pivotal last week German decision makers only gave the Blank Cheque to Austria-Hungary, an important document, but not a document that immediately implied European War. German historian Annika Mombauer adapted the Fischer thesis, which was briefly introduced in the introduction to this thesis, in not seeking the blame of the war with Bethmann-Hollweg and the German Foreign Office, who, as some say, took a calculated risk, but with Moltke and the General Staff. According to Mombauer Moltke and the other military leaders saw an opportunity in the developing July Crisis, sensing a possible war with Russia, which was sometimes seen as inevitable and would better be fought sooner than later seeing the Russian rearmament programme which was scheduled to be completed in 1917. This was also the scope of Moltke’s letter of July 29th to Bethmann-Hollweg:

"Was wird und muß die weitere Folge sein? Österreich wird, wenn es in Serbien einrückt, nicht nur der serbischen Armee, sondern auch einer starken russischen Überlegenheit gegenüberstehen, es wird also den Krieg gegen Serbien nicht durchführen können, ohne sich gegen ein russisches Eingreifen zu sichern. Das heißt, es wird gezwungen sein, auch die andere Hälfte seines Heeres mobil zu machen, den es kann sich unmöglich auf Gnade und Ungnade einem kriegsbereiten Rußland ausliefern. Mit dem Augenblick aber, wo Österreich sein ganzes Heer mobil macht, wird der Zusammenstoß zwischen ihm und Rußland unvermeidlich werden. Das aber ist für Deutschland der casus foederis. Will Deutschland nicht wortbrüchig werden und

194 Mombauer, Helmuth von Moltke, 185.
195 The letter itself was written on July 28th, but it was not send to Bethmann-Hollweg until a day later. Hence Moltke’s influence on the July Crisis is, in time, very limited. He is only involved in decision making in the last six days of the crisis.
196 Mombauer, Helmuth von Moltke, 185.
197 This view is not shared among all historians, there are those who state that Germany’s Blank Cheque did exactly imply war, as war was what Germany was after. Most famous is the Fischer thesis, introduced above, written by Fritz Fischer (Griff nach der Weltmacht). Fischer tries to explain the First World War as a continuous event, developing from earlier events. He does not accept the discontinuity that is the First World War. Fischer states that Germany knew that the Blank Cheque would push Austria-Hungary towards starting a war, claiming that Germany wanted war ever since the Council of 1912. Furthermore he states that only after Britain made it clear that it would intervene in the war Bethmann-Hollweg started pushing Austria-Hungary for a peaceful solution. This, however, does not correspond with the statement by the Kaiser made on July 28th after the Serbian response to the ultimatum, as already quoted on page 9 of this thesis. While it is true that the Blank Cheque risked war, it cannot be bluntly said that the Blank Cheque made war inevitable.
198 Koch, Kleine Geschiedenis, 68.
199 Mombauer, Helmuth von Moltke, 185.
200 Koch, Kleine Geschiedenis, 62; Strachan, First World War, 73.
As is clear from the quoted text from the letter Moltke shows a clear fatalism in his way of reasoning. He stated several events to take place which he saw as inevitable and to which, in his opinion, Germany should take a clear headstart. In his view partial Austro-Hungarian mobilisation, which had taken place a day earlier upon the declaration of war on Serbia, would only lead to partial Russian mobilisation, which Russia was preparing at the time of the letter, to Germany's knowledge. Since this Russian mobilisation would threaten Austria-Hungary the only response, to Moltke, would be general mobilisation in Austria-Hungary, followed by general mobilisation in Russia. This would be Germany's cue to mobilise, resulting only in an escalation of the conflict as France would in turn mobilise, resulting in, as Moltke put it, "the destruction of the civilised states of Europe."

German decision making before Moltke's letter to Bethmann-Hollweg was largely decided by Bethmann-Hollweg. This changed not so much by to letter send by Moltke, but by news from Britain. Foreign Secretary Edward Grey had made it clear to Bethmann-Hollweg that Britain would not remain neutral in the event of a continental war. Bethmann-Hollweg realised that his policy of the calculated risk and localisation of the conflict had failed and despaired. In a last attempt he send an attempt of mediation to Vienna on July 30th and proposed the 'Stop in Belgrade', that had been proposed by Grey and by the Kaiser two days earlier, when Bethmann-Hollweg had rejected it. Vienna however rejected any possible change of plans, Counts Forgách and Hoyos, two hawks within the Austro-Hungarian government told the German Am-

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201 "What will and must the consequences be? If Austria marches into Serbia, it will confront not only the Serbian army but a vastly superior Russian force. Hence, Austria will not be in a position to wage a war against Serbia without first protecting itself from Russian intervention. This means it will also be forced to mobilize the other half of its army, for it cannot afford to place itself at the mercy of a Russia that is prepared to go to war. Nonetheless, the moment Austria mobilizes its entire army, a clash with Russia is inevitable, and this will be the casus foederis for Germany. If Germany does not wish to renge on its word, if it does not want its ally to be crushed by superior Russian forces, it must also mobilize. This will lead to mobilization in Russia's other military districts. Then Russian will be able to state categorically that it is being attacked by Germany. It will secure France's support, which is contractually bound to take part in a war if its ally Russia is attacked. The French-Russian Treaty, so often praised as a purely defensive alliance established only to counter German attack plans, will be activated, and the mutual destruction of the civilised states of Europe can begin." Reprinted in: Imanuel Geiss, Julikrise und Kriegsausbruch 1914: Band II, eine Dokumentensammlung (Bonn: 1976), 261-263.


bassador Tschirschky: “daß mit Rücksicht auf die Stimmung in Armee und im Volke Einschränkung der militärischen Operationen ihrer Ansicht nach ausgeschlossen sei.”

Seeing the impending war, events were taken out of the control of Bethmann-Hollweg and placed into the control of Moltke and the army. Germany started to prepare for war. On July 29th Russia had already partially mobilised against Austria-Hungary, but on July 30th appeared to order a general mobilisation which prompted the need for reply in Germany. Strangely enough, while calling for mobilisation in his letter to Bethmann-Hollweg, on July 29th, in a meeting with the Kaiser, Moltke had still disagreed to the declaration of a State of Imminent Danger of War, the last step before general mobilisation, as was proposed by Minister of War Falkenhayn. Even on the news of Russian partial mobilisation Moltke is said to have opposed to German mobilisation. Since Bethmann-Hollweg, who still tried to localise the war as an Austro-Serbian war at this point in the crisis, sided with Moltke the Kaiser decided that no steps would be taken on the 29th. News of the Russian mobilisation reached Berlin on July 30th, which resulted by a declaration of a State of Imminent Danger of War by the Kaiser just after noon that day, after Moltke changed his mind and sided with Falkenhayn, itself followed by preparations for mobilisation. Mobilisation handed decision making into the hands of Moltke; it meant that Germany would automatically prepare for war and implement the Schlieffen Plan.

Italian historian Luigi Albertini, who wrote the famous three volume work *The Origins of the War of 1914*, explains Moltke’s change of mind regarding mobilisation as hailing from an initial change of mind by the Kaiser. As long as the Kaiser opposed war, Albertini states, Moltke opposed war, but when the Kaiser apparently changed his mind, following the news of partial Russian mobilisation which he received on July 30th, Moltke followed suit. Albertini claims that Moltke, a loyal servant and friend to the Kaiser, would not want to go against the Kaisers wishes, but seeing the events that took place two days later this does, at first, not feel as an acceptable explanation.

On August 1st news reached Berlin that Grey was offering to stay out of the war if Germany would refrain from attacking France. Grey went even further in offering French neutrality in a war between Germany and Russia. This prompted the Kaiser to call for a halt for any move made against France, in which he was supported by Bethmann-Hollweg, Foreign Minister Jagow and Secretary of State for the Navy Tirpitz. Moltke, however, objected, stating that once the Schlieffen Plan was put in motion, by mobilising, there was no stopping it. The argument continued, as the Kaiser wanted to reverse the already ongoing occupation of Luxembourg, which Germany needed for its railway routes. In the end, while Moltke came to a compromise and the Schlieffen Plan was continued up to the point that no army was to cross the French border, he is said to have been “a broken man, because this decision by the Kaiser demonstrated to him that the Kaiser still hoped for peace.”

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204 “Seeing the sentiment among the army and the people any restriction of military operations is out of the question,” see: Heinrich von Tschirschky, Der Botschafter in Wien an das Auswärtige Amt, Telegramm 142, July 30, 1914, reprinted in: Kautsky, Deutsche Dokumente II, 184-185.
205 Clark, Sleepwalkers, 525.
209 Spoken by Minister of War Falkenhayn, quoted in: Clark, Sleepwalkers, 531.
As such it is possible to see Moltke’s decision to push for mobilisation as a rather rash decision. He believed the Kaiser would now favour war and pushed for it accordingly. He set in motion the mobilisation plans and activated the Schlieffen Plan accordingly, so Germany would not lose vital preparation time in comparison to Russia. Moltke himself is once said to have said: “I lack the power of rapid decision. (...) I lack the capacity of risking all on a single throw, that capacity which made the greatness of such born commanders as Napoleon, or our own Frederick II, or my uncle.”

This does put the action of Moltke on July 30th in perspective. For once Moltke did act rapidly, believing the time had come for him to act and, to his own account, he was wrong. The encounter with the Kaiser on August 1st is said to have caused stress onto Moltke who suffered a mild stroke as a consequence of this. After recovering from the stroke Moltke did command the armies in the field during the Battle of the Frontiers, the Great Retreat and the Marne Campaign, but after the defeat at the Marne and suffering another breakdown, he reported sick on September 14th, after which he was replaced Falkenhayn. At the defeat of the German western flank and the subsequent retreat, which marks the abandonment of the Schlieffen Plan Moltke is said to have spoken the infamous words “Your Majesty, we have lost the war” to the Kaiser. At the Marne the German army, in the first month of the war, reached its farthest

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210 Quoted in: Otto Friedrich, Blood and Iron: From Bismarck to Hitler, the von Moltke’s Family’s Impact on German History (New York: 1995), 227. Something which can also be seen is his precarious adapting of the Schlieffen Plan.

211 eg. Clark, Sleepwalkers, 531.

212 Falkenhayn would not officially replace Moltke until November 3rd: Strachan, First World War, 262.
point of advance of the entire war.213 After the Marne mobile warfare made place for trench warfare and Germany became locked in a prolonged two front war. The Schlieffen Plan had failed and Moltke was, partly, blamed for the lack of victory.

It seems that it can be said that Moltke’s action seemed rash or, in line with the wording used in this thesis, that he fled forward, not wanting to stand idle at a time he thought decisions were needed to be taken. To him, as he made clear in his letter to Bethmann-Hollweg on July 29th, there seemed to be little options; Austro-Hungarian mobilisation activated a string of events that he believed would take place and to which Germany needed to react to come out on top. Where Zagare presented a game with multiple outcomes, as presented in chapter three, the outcome to Moltke was clear: there would be conflict and Germany would do best to precede the inevitable events that were to come. This apparent willingness to go to war contrasts with what Moltke wrote almost a decade before. In a letter to his wife, dated January 29th 1905, he stated that he expected the coming war, which he saw as inevitable already at that point, to be devastating to Germany even if it would come out as the victor:


It is the last sentence of this quote which is most striking when compared to Moltke’s willingness to suddenly prepare for war on July 30th 1914. Moltke expected a war that would, at the very least, deplete Germany entirely. If we take the car crash in the Chicken Game as a frame of reference, he expected Germany to come out of the crash very severely injured. Yet, unlike Conrad, who stated that the war was not only inevitable, but also necessary, Moltke never made such a statement, he only claims that the inevitable war would best be fought sooner than later, so it could be fought on terms more positive to German. At no point however does Moltke call the war Darwinistically necessary.215 It is not clear how Moltke viewed the events leading up to

213 Only at the Second Marne, during the German Spring Offensives of 1918 would the Germans reach the same line of advance again. It could be said that in August and early September 1914, in what was the first month of a four year long war, the Germans were as closest to victory they would ever be.

214 “We have at the present a period of over thirty years of peace behind us and I believe that in our outlook we have become very unwarlike in many ways. How, if at all, it will be possible to lead as a unit the immense armies we shall create, no man, I think, can know in advance. Our opponent has changed as well, we will no longer have to deal with an enemy army, which we can approach with superior power, but with a nation at arms. It will be a "People’s War", which cannot be won with a deciding battle, but which will be a long, difficult struggle with a country, which shall not surrender until the entire power of the people will be broken, and which will also exhaust our people, even if we would win, to the utmost.” Helmuth von Moltke, Letter to Eliza von Moltke, January 29, 1905. Reprinted in: Moltke, Erinnerungen, 308.

215 Moltke did, however, use racial terminology often associated with social Darwinism, calling the upcoming struggle one between Germanic and Slavic people (Letter to Eliza von Moltke, July 22, 1913). Yet,
the last week of the July Crisis, as he did not make any decision of note until the pieces of the
game were already in place. Moltke had no real influence on decision making until after his let-
ter to Bethmann Hollweg, when Austria-Hungary had already declared war on Serbia and when
Russia had already decided to partially mobilise. This did not leave any other routes to Moltke
than the one he took, he firmly believed in a conflict between Austria-Hungary and Russia,
which thus needed German intervention on Austrian side as it would otherwise lose its casus foederalis. Any other ways out of the crisis were no longer possible, Germany needed to push
for war and the only peaceful way out of the crisis would be restraint from Russia, which Moltke
believed would not happen.

Moltke was introduced to the crisis when it was already running out of control. While
Mombauer attributes to him a vital role in bringing about the war, a role that had been given to
Bethmann-Hollweg by historians such as Fischer and Geiss, this view does not necessarily need
to be true. As is evident from the events presented above it was not until his sudden change of
heart on July 30th that Moltke made a decision that pushed Germany towards war. This decision
was, however, to be his Rubicon-moment; from here on, for Moltke, there was no way back.
The declaration of a State of Imminent Danger of War lead to mobilisation and mobilisation re-
quired the activation of the Schlieffen Plan, which required an attack on Belgium and France to
take place within a matter of days. To Moltke’s liking the bridges behind him were burned,
onece Germany mobilised it was on a track towards war. Back to points raised by Mombauer and
others it must be said that Moltke did indeed prefer war, if it would come, sooner than later, as
he told Baron Eckerstein: “we are ready and the sooner the better for us.”

On the other hand Moltke had nothing to do with the Blank Cheque, which instigated Austria-Hungary to push for
war, he only got into the crisis at the very last moment, but did indeed try to take control of the
situation. He contacted Conrad on July 30th and assured him Germany would mobilise if Russia
would. This is seen as the moment the politicians lost control of the crisis to the generals and
when an Austrian official is said to have proclaimed: “Who rules in Berlin, Moltke or Bet-
chmann?”

Moltke tried to take control of the crisis, or at least try to push it in the direction he
wanted it to go. He can be seen as someone who felt the need to act, rather than sit idle on the
side-lines. His change of mind contributed to German mobilisation, but it cannot be said that
Moltke was thus responsible for causing the First World War. At this point Austria-Hungary and
Serbia were already formally at war and Russia was already partially mobilising. Moltke only
did what he was told to do according to the German war plans. When the Kaiser and Bethmann-
Hollweg were still indecisive about the upcoming war in the meeting on August 1st Moltke
pushed on, not wanting to slip back and lose momentum. To him Germany was already com-
mited to war, the only thing he could do, as Chief of General Staff, was is job, which constituted

here too it must be said that Moltke did not call for that struggle to be fought out, he merely expected it to
happen, unlike Conrad who saw the Slavic populations as a threat to his monarchies own existence.

Albertini, Origins III, 11.


218 Among others the Schlieffen plan stated that Liege should be taken on the tenth day of mobilisation.
See: Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, and Gerhard P. Groß, ed., Der Schlieffenplan: Analysen und Dokumen-
te (Paderborn: 2006), 480-481.

History 12, no. 45 (1965), 311.

220 A line attributed to both Berchtold and Conrad.
setting in motion the Schlieffen Plan and leading Germany to victory no matter the cost. His rejection of the Kaiser’s proposal to concentrate on the eastern front and not attack into France, which was against his own instinct of objecting to the Kaiser,\(^\text{221}\) can thus be viewed as an instant of ‘tunnel vision’. In his mind-set Moltke only had eyes for the task with which, as Chief of General Staff, he was instructed.\(^\text{222}\)

Considering the change of heart Moltke had on July 30\(^\text{th}\) it might be suggested that he fled forward into the unknown. A mere day earlier he had opposed to mobilising, but now he felt the time was right, sitting idle was no longer the thing to do. There was much confusion in Berlin about the real state of events,\(^\text{223}\) which was broken by committing to vertigo, by simply taking an action for the sake of taking an action. The final section of this chapter shall review what might have fuelled Moltke’s moment of vertigo.

Moltke has, throughout his career as Chief of General Staff as well as after his death, been closely associated with Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy. A connection that is too often mentioned in works on Moltke to be completely negated in this thesis. This association caused outrage at his appointment as Chief of General Staff.\(^\text{224}\) Moltke was seen as a spiritualists and was said to have held séances both at his own house as at his official residence as Chief of General Staff. While these events are used by historian Thomas Meyer to provide an active link between Moltke and Steiner,\(^\text{225}\) they can best be seen as attempts to discredit Moltke as there is no prove that they ever took place.\(^\text{226}\) The Kaiser himself demanded that Moltke stopped “dabbling” in the supernatural on his appointment as Chief of General Staff, something to which Moltke obliged.\(^\text{227}\) Moltke, however, remained in contact and even during the July Crisis he wrote to his wife stating his eagerness to meet with Steiner again.\(^\text{228}\) Yet, no matter how often Moltke’s relation with Steiner is used against him it cannot be used as an explanation for his actions during the July Crisis, there is simply no evidence that Moltke, in his decision making, was ever influenced by Steiner.\(^\text{229}\)

While Moltke, like Conrad, has been named a social Darwinist by various historians it is not social Darwinism that should be seen as an explanation for his actions on July 30\(^\text{th}\). Social Darwinism might be able to explain Moltke’s vision on the, in his view, inevitable war with Russia, although this does not explain his willingness to go to war. Moltke indeed viewed war with Russia as inevitable,\(^\text{230}\) he believed in the inevitability of the struggle, which is at first sounds very Darwinist, but which can also be seen as a general way of thinking in the nineteenth centu-


\(^{222}\) Johnson and Tierney, “Rubicon,” 15-16.


\(^{224}\) Mombauer, \textit{Helmuth von Moltke}, 52.


\(^{226}\) Mombauer, \textit{Helmuth von Moltke}, chapter 2: footnote 44.

\(^{227}\) ibid., 53.


\(^{229}\) It might also be best to view Moltke’s interest in the ideas of Steiner as part of a general increase in interest in such ‘ideas’ during the turn of the century. See: Laqueur, “Fin-de-siècle,” 34.

ry and can be found, among others, in the Rankian *Primat der Außenpolitik*. The reason for Moltke’s ‘desire’ for war with Russia can be found in the Russian modernisation which was scheduled to be completed in 1917. This, however, also does not explain his sudden change on July 30th, as a mere day earlier he had still opposed war.

Sometimes Moltke’s change of mind is explained as a reaction on Russian mobilisation, which was not known to Germany until the next day, but which was expected by many in Berlin. Yet, this too does not feel as a sufficient explanation of his change of mind; after all, in his letter to Bethmann-Hollweg, which was penned down on July 28th, he had already made clear the events as he expected them to happen following Austro-Hungarian mobilisation. It does not make sense that Moltke would not have expected Russian mobilisation on July 29th, while, after not receiving any new information on the matter, on July 30th he would have expected this mobilisation. Thus it is even difficult to see Moltke’s decision as an effort to create an advantage for Germany, would he have wanted that advantage he could have supported Falkenhayn in the meeting of July 29th. The so-called ‘cult of the offensive’ that existed at the eve of the First World War can indeed be seen in Moltke’s letter to Bethmann-Hollweg, but is not followed by his actions.

As such, as stated above, it is best to view Moltke’s change of mind as a moment of vertigo, possibly believing that the Kaiser was on his side – although this is dubious – he now joined with Falkenhayn in calling for a State of Imminent Danger of War, thus convincing the Kaiser of the need to proclaim this premobilisation status, which in turn brought about a given chain of events that, according to the war plans, needed to happen accordingly and finally helped escalating the conflict to a European war. He fled forward, not wanting to stick around and wait for events to happen around him. In the words of Runia, quoted earlier this thesis: “giving in to vertigo is a strategy for escaping from an unbearable tension by doing something.” There can be little doubt there was a lot of tension in the last days of the July Crisis, Moltke tried to escape this tension and started events rolling, events that proved as worse as he expected them to be.

231 Unlike Conrad, Moltke never stated that he believed in an inevitable struggle for existence or the necessity of a war with Russia. He only stated that the war seemed inevitable and thus, would Germany want to fight it, it would do better fighting it sooner than later. He did, however, never appear to openly call for war, as Conrad did with Italy and Serbia, to name some countries.

232 ibid., 164.

233

Conclusion

"Sie versicherten mir beide, daß mit Rücksicht auf die Stimmung in Arme und im Volke Einschränkung der militärischen Operationen ihrer Ansicht nach ausgeschlossen sei."

— Heinrich von Tschirschky, German ambassador in Vienna

The previous two chapters of this thesis have been empathising the roles of Franz Conrad von Hörzendorf and Helmuth von Moltke the Younger during the July Crisis of 1914 and the probable role which vertigo played in their actions. So far I have mentioned the vertiginous character of their actions; Conrad with his war mongering in the first few days of the July Crisis and Moltke with his change of mind on July 30th. Before reaching a final conclusion about their respective decisions, it is important to view the nature of their decisions. In the third chapter of this thesis I have introduced several game theories that can help describe the nature of decision making during the July Crisis. It is not to be said that these game theories are all-conclusive, perhaps one could introduce different game theories that might also be able to describe decision making at an interstate level, but seeing the nature of the July Crisis - countries being on a collision course with each other – both the Chicken Game and the Hawk-Dove Game seem well applicable to the July Crisis and show how the countries were locked in an ever worsening situation that left little doubt over what the outcome could be.

As I have made clear in the final section of the third chapter both men acknowledged the fact that the different countries were on a collision course. Conrad believed that Austria-Hungary's neighbours had been on a collision course with her for a long time and he strongly believed that Austria-Hungary needed to act against it. He favoured a clash, as his social Darwinist thinking made him believe in a struggle for existence that needed to be won decisively. For Conrad, as well as many Austrians, there was a clear case; Serbia needed to be dealt with before it became even a bigger threat. Next to this Austria-Hungary could not afford a loss of face by not acting. In words of the Chicken Game: it needed to stay on the collision course, would Serbia subsequently decide to swerve off its own collision course Austria-Hungary would gain its diplomatic victory. Since this did not satisfy Conrad he suggested Serbia to subsequently be disarmed and demobilised, to humiliate it militarily as well. When using the Chicken Game to describe the decision available to Austria-Hungary, it is striking to see that people like Conrad, who advocated the collision, also expected Serbia to stay on its course. The ultimatum ushered to Serbia even implied this, it was famously written so that it had to be rejected, making the crash inevitable.

To Conrad the clash with Serbia, and probably with several other neighbouring countries he had been advocating to attack, was inevitable and necessary. The moment of fleeing forward should not be found in his advocacy of war. Even though it might appear strange to advocate a war one expects not to be able to win, this can be explained through Conrad's belief

235 “They confirmed to me that seeing the sentiment among the army and the people any restriction of military operations is out of the question,” Report of a meeting between Tschirschky, the German ambassador in Vienna and Counts Forgách and Hoyos, two hawks within the Austro-Hungarian government. Heinrich von Tschirschky, Der Botschafter in Wien an das Auswärtige Amt, Telegramm 142, July 30, 1914, reprinted in: Kautsky, Deutsche Dokumente II, 184-185.

236 See page 32 of this thesis.
in social Darwinism and his conviction that he needed glory to be able to marry Gina von Rine-
inghaus. Decision theoretically speaking Conrad's call for war with Serbia was not a strange
tinghaus.
thing to do, one could say it fits his profile. What makes Conrad's actions those of a man fleeing
forward, not wanting to sit down while the events around him unfolded, is his determination to
strike fast at Serbia – his relentless calls for war with Serbia – something he was determined to
have for a long time, while only realising afterwards that the war he wanted was impossible for
him to conduct. In his desire to rest he fled forward in doing what he did best, advocating war.
No longer held back by Franz Ferdinand he called for war and got what he wanted.

Perhaps more so than Conrad Moltke's reasoning for war can be explained using models
from game and decision theoretical models. As Moltke showed in his letter of July 29th to Beth-
mann-Hollweg his view of events was simple. To him the cascade of mobilisations that followed
the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia was inevitable. Using the steps of Tripartite
Crisis Game it is clear that all players were determined in their steps, making conflict the only
possible outcome. What followed is, following the terminology of the Hawk-Dove Game, several
countries escalating in order to achieve their goals. Mere 'displaying' was no option for these
countries; backing down if the other countries meant business, would result in a serious loss
of face and a possible end to the alliances that protected the respective countries. Germany
found itself in the precarious position where it was limited to the options of an all-out conflict or
alienating Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary itself was split between the decision of conflict
and letting Serbia of another time, which many in Vienna expected to be the beginning of the
end for the Habsburg Monarchy. France could not risk alienating Russia, as they believed the
Franco-Russian alliance protected them against a German attack.237 Russia finally could not af-
ford another loss of face, as it had experienced after losing the Russo-Japanese War in 1905.238
To Moltke war was thus the only logical outcome from the moment Austria-Hungary declared
war on Serbia. Perhaps war could have been prevented by stopping events from reaching this
point, but this was outside his own scope of influence. Next to that, Austria-Hungary seemed
determined in their course from the early days of the July Crisis.

Following the terminology of the Hawk-Dove Game the German war plans did not even
leave the option of mere 'displaying' open to Moltke. As he made clear by his refusal to the Kai-
er's suggestion that the advance against France by occupying Luxembourg should be halted –
by which the Kaiser tried to avoid an escalation of the war on the western front – backing down
from the war plans was not possible and the Schlieffen Plan dictated a quick advance into
France to try and prevent a prolonged war on multiple fronts.

For Moltke, like it did for Conrad, war seemed like a 'logical' option to strive towards,
therefore his moment of fleeing forward should not be sought in a decision that seemed to devi-
ate from the 'logical' line of reasoning. Moltke had predicted war in his July 29th letter, but also
advised restraint. A day later, however, it seems that he felt the time was right to act. No longer
would he sit by and see how events would evolve. He put his 'deeds' before 'words', not waiting
for news from Russia, Austria-Hungary or even France he decided to act. When news came in
two days later that Britain was offering for it and France to stay out of the war the cards were
already on the table, there was no way back.239 The Kaiser's desire for peace caused such an

237 Clark, Sleepwalkers, 124.
238 See for example: Clark, Sleepwalkers, 152-156.
239 It cannot be said for certain that war could have been avoided had Moltke shown more restraint, but it
could be considered a possibility. Next to that the news from Britain, for it and France to stay out of the war,
would soon prove to be false.
upset to Moltke that he subsequently suffered a breakdown; whereas Conrad’s fleeing forward was caused by a nervous breakdown, Moltke’s fleeing forward caused him to have one.

The main question, as asked in the introduction to this thesis, posed a clear question: can it be said that Conrad and Moltke gave in to vertigo during the July Crisis? As made clear in the two latest chapters of this thesis and the previous section of this conclusion, I think it is possible to suggest they did. In this it is important to note that neither men appeared to have experienced a long period of fleeing forward. They did so on single occasions. These occasions, however, did help in worsening the crisis that was already there. That said it is hard to follow the arguments presented by Sondhaus, in naming Conrad the architect of the apocalypse, or Mombauer, who seeks the guilt for the First World War with Moltke and the German general staff. Yes, both men did help bring the crisis to a further level. Yet, it is hard to put the blame of an event as big as the First World War in the shoes of just two men. Although it can almost certainly be said that neither of the men helped in preventing the crisis from escalating. However, in that case one also needs to look at the possibility both men had, had they had the willingness, to limit the crisis.

In Austria-Hungary it was Berchtold, as joint foreign minister who made the decisions and conveyed them to Franz Joseph. Berchtold, like Conrad, was set for war from a point early in the crisis. Although he at first tried to follow a diplomatic course, he became fully convinced of war as the only solution by July 3rd. Conrad, in his advocacy for a fast strike against Serbia in the preceding days, had certainly not helped steering Berchtold in a different direction with his moment of fleeing forward. His relentless demands for war are often seen as having helped change Berchtold’s mind about war against Serbia. Whereas in earlier crises on the Balkans it was Franz Ferdinand who managed to restrain Conrad, this factor was now gone, and Berchtold was won over by the hawks in Vienna. From this point onwards Conrad came to his senses and started the actual planning for the war. Even though he preferred to delay mobilisation, it cannot be said that he wanted to postpone the war. War is what he wanted and what he had been demanding well before Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo.

Moltke landed in the crisis when it had already reached its boiling point. German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg had kept up a policy of trying to keep the conflict localised, but Moltke expected it to grow. It is often claimed that the German High Command steered towards war. Annika Mombauer claimed it was Moltke who had an important role in this, while the Fischer thesis implies that it was part of the general policies of the German top echelon during the years leading up to the war. Even if Moltke had been steering towards war in the preceding years he had little influence on the German decision making in first weeks of the July Crisis, as he did not return to Berlin until after the deadline for the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia expired. Perhaps it is best to follow Koen Koch in his analysis of the last days of the July Crisis; it was Austria-Hungary that declared war on Serbia to frustrate any attempt at mediation. The Blank Cheque provided them with the opportunity to do so, but Moltke had no influence on giving out this cheque. What can be said is that his change of mind on July 30th certainly did speed up the events, German mobilisation made war inevitable.

I want to end this thesis by stating that it is, for obvious reasons, not possible to conclude with complete certainty that both Conrad and Moltke committed to vertigo during the July Crisis. It is only possible to suggest that fleeing forward was something they experienced during

240 Koch, Kleine Geschiedenis, 60.
241 ibid., 77.
the weeks leading up to one of the most devastating wars in world history. There is good evidence that both men made a crucial decision for the sole sake of acting. Both Conrad and Moltke seem to have been influenced somewhat by social Darwinist ideology. They felted the need for adaptation, in order to stay ahead in an ‘evolutionary race’, and instinct told them to act accordingly, allowing them to act before thinking. Especially Conrad had been constraint for a long time. He was influenced both by stress and love and the opportunity arrived to escape from the present. While he tried to remain rational and clear of thought in the preceding years, choosing not to resign from his post, he suddenly fled forward in late June and early July 1914 and acted. A contrast that only emphasises the rashness of his action. Moltke had experienced much of the July Crisis from the side-lines, being on leave until July 25th and not returning to the scene until July 29th, after the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia. For a man so precarious in planning his war plans, not relying on rapid decisions and adjusting the famous Schlieffen Plan several times over into the finest details, it can be suggested that he experienced a loss of control. At a moment when he thought he could regain control of the situation and set events to his hands he choose to act. The misperception that guided him allowed him to flee forward, calling for mobilisation of the army while believing he had the backing of the Kaiser; when he found out his judgement was wrong he suffered a breakdown.

What remains is to briefly discuss the usage of vertigo when studying the origins of the First World War. What can vertigo contribute to our knowledge of the July Crisis? When using the concept of vertigo to explain the actions of Conrad and Moltke during the July Crisis one begins to seriously doubt the thesis of the calculated risk that is sometimes used to describe German and Austro-Hungarian attitude towards the European war. Canadian historian Holger Herwig dismissed the ‘stumbling into war’ notion, put forward by Barbara Tuchman, stating: “rather, as in July 1914, statesmen and soldiers carefully asses their situations, weigh their options, calculate the risks involved, and then decide on war or peace.” The thesis of the calculated risk was already refuted up to a point by Australian historian Christopher Clark in his recent book The Sleepwalkers who saw the decision makers in the July Crisis as “sleepwalkers, watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world.” Clark shows how each move and countermove by many different players led to a colossal checkmate. Clark notes that the statesmen and soldiers did indeed make calculations, but that their views were distorted and clouded. Calling them miscalculations might even give too little credit to the way they ‘sleepwalked’ their way into war. Vertigo goes even further, stating that no calculations were made – or if they were made they were ignored – and that the agents made their decisions without proper premeditation, or even without any premeditation. In the end it is best to conclude that vertigo does not answer why the war happened, it can only provide an answer to the question how the war happened.

244 Clark, Sleepwalkers, 562.
Epilogue

Recent visits of the University of Groningen’s Master Thesis Database have attended me to the fact that it almost seems customary to start or end with a word of thanks. I do not wish to do so, even though I did do so when finishing my first master in Art History and Archaeology, the reason for this is twofold. First of all even though I am finishing this master thesis I do not feel I am finishing this study, I have a year to go before I will get my qualification as a history teacher. Secondly I do not feel that my own study into vertigo at the brink of the First World War is anywhere near concluded. To me personally, no matter how strange this may sound, this thesis feels more as an exploratory study than a finished master thesis. This begs me to make one final personal note on the use of vertigo and fleeing forward in historical events such as the First World War:

Whether we will conclude in the end, when all possible history about the First World War has been written – if such a thing is even possible, that we have found the one true history of the war, the discussion of vertigo will always remain relevant. It will not matter whether we accept the Fischer thesis when discussing the cause of the war or whether we view Ferguson’s blame of Britain as the single true fact. The same can be said for the necessity of the war; whether we view the war as a grand plan or as the cause of misconceptions does not matter: vertigo can, in any case, be committed. And while this thesis explores Moltke and Conrad it is not to say that they were alone in fleeing forward into the unknown. Perhaps we will be able to conclude that society in general, from the Kaiser to the most simple labourer who enlisted as a volunteer in August 1914, fled from the world as they knew it, ”and they felt fine.”
Bibliography


