

## 6 • Culture and French Military Doctrine Before World War II

*Elizabeth Kier*

When war broke out in May 1940, the French army found itself saddled with a highly defensive doctrine that was incapable of breaking the German assault. France used the interwar period to bolster its military and was well prepared to fight a war against Germany—but only if Hitler fought the war on French terms. As a result, few defeats were as rapid or as devastating as the May–June campaign in Western Europe. Making sense of the French defeat as well as the more general question of the origins of choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines requires casting aside traditional theoretical approaches. Neither the civilians nor the military behaves as hypothesized by structural or functional analyses. Instead, changes in military doctrine are best understood from a cultural perspective.

First, dominant domestic political actors hold assumptions about the military's role in society, and these beliefs guide civilian decisions that often affect doctrinal developments. Restricting the sources of military

doctrine to the calculations of balance of power politics inadequately depicts the influence of civilian policy makers and the external environment. Civilians address their concerns about the domestic distribution of power before they consider the structure of the international system. Second, military organizations differ in how they view their world and the proper conduct of their mission, and these organizational cultures determine the myriad preferences of such organizations. We should not assume that most military organizations, most of the time, prefer offensive military doctrines; a functional view of the interests of military organizations fails to capture the variety in organizational behavior. What the military perceives to be in its interest is a function of its culture. In short, by accounting for policy makers' cultural environment, we can better explain choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines.

By focusing on the ways in which culture affects the formation of military doctrine, this essay endorses this volume's general lesson on the importance of sociological approaches to understanding international security questions. Culture may be an effective tool in the hands of political entrepreneurs, but an acknowledgment of culture's instrumental role does not require a denial of its causal one. Unlike rationalists who take interests as given, this essay explores the ways in which culture and the meanings that actors attach to certain policies shape actors' interests. Independent exigencies such as the distribution of power, geographic factors, or technological discoveries are important, but culture is not merely derivative of functional demands or structural imperatives. Culture has (relative) causal autonomy.

Making the case that culture is important to explaining choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines requires taking three steps. Since the origins of military doctrine have already received sophisticated attention from scholars in a rationalist tradition, I first summarize and critique their work. Then, having highlighted some of the limitations of this more conventional work, I set out my argument, outlining how culture affects civilian and, especially, military decisions about doctrinal developments. The final section uses the case of the French army during the 1920s and 1930s to illustrate the power of a culturalist approach.<sup>1</sup>

I would like to thank Jonathan Mercer, Scott Sagan, Kathryn Sikkink, Jack Snyder, Stephen Walt, and two anonymous readers for Columbia University Press for their thoughtful comments and criticism. A more detailed version of some of the arguments presented in this essay appears in Elizabeth Kier, "Culture and Military Doctrine: France Between the Wars," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (Spring 1995): 65–93.

1. This essay is based on a larger study of doctrinal developments in the British and French army and air force during the 1920s and 1930s. For a discussion of the case selection, see Elizabeth L. Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, in press).

## Alternative Explanations

Barry Posen and Jack Snyder's pioneering work on military doctrine uses structural and functional arguments to explain choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines.<sup>2</sup> Although these scholars disagree on the role of domestic politics and the explanatory weight of organizational factors, they agree on two important points. Both see the international system as providing accurate cues for civilian intervention in doctrinal developments. While Snyder argues that it is the civilians' absence that allows the military to adopt its self-serving doctrine, Posen accords an active role to civilians, arguing that as the international system becomes more threatening, civilians intervene in doctrinal developments in accordance with systemic imperatives. The civilians are painted as the champions of the national interest and the principal architects of well-integrated military plans.

In contrast, the military is portrayed as choosing doctrines that serve its parochial interests, not national objectives. These scholars argue that military organizations use the adoption of offensive doctrines to further their quest for greater resources, certainty, autonomy, and prestige. For example, Posen argues that the greater complexity involved in the execution of offensive doctrines justifies increased expenditures, and Snyder claims that quick, decisive, and offensive campaigns enhance the army's prestige and self-image. According to a functional logic, these beneficial consequences cause this behavior. Discounting the imperatives of the international system, the military adopts the offensive doctrine that corresponds to its functional needs.

### *The Civilians' International Vision*

The argument that civilian intervention in doctrinal developments corresponds to the international system has weak theoretical and empirical foundations; it exaggerates the power of systemic imperatives and misses

2. Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). Also see Stephen Van Evera, "The Causes of War" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1984), esp. pp. 206–398. The quantity and quality of scholarship that Posen's, Snyder's, and Van Evera's work has generated testifies to the power of their ideas. See especially Deborah D. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); and Kimberly Marten Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovations, 1955–1991* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

the focus of civilian concerns. This is true even in an easy case for balance of power theory, such as France during the 1920s and 1930s. If there is any example where the international system should determine a state's doctrinal orientation, this is it. French policy makers understood the nature of the threat that they faced and devoted extensive resources to ensuring France's security. The objective international requirements were neither misperceived nor seemingly not addressed. France had spent twenty years preparing for the German assault.

As compelling as the international system was, it cannot account for doctrinal developments in France. And in general, the international system does not provide determinate explanations for choices between offensive and defensive doctrines.<sup>3</sup> Although revisionist states require offensive doctrines, both offensive and defensive doctrines can defend a status quo state, and states often ignore alliance commitments that require offensive capabilities. Most important, a state's relative power is indeterminate of doctrinal choice.

Throughout the interwar period, French policy makers understood France's weakness relative to Germany. In the 1920s Paris argued that France had to strike out offensively and win quickly. Engaging in a long war of attrition, the reasoning went, could only result in the eventual triumph of Germany's superior economic strength and industrial mobilization. An official report in the early 1920s explained that "an offensive conception was the only one that would permit us to compensate for the inescapable causes of our weakness which result from the inferiority of our population and industrial strength."<sup>4</sup> France's relative weakness required an offensive orientation.

This argument was turned on its head a decade later. Now, it seemed, France must stay on the defensive in the opening battles of a conflict with Germany and throw all its resources into defeating the initial German assault. France's only hope, it was now argued, was that the initial resistance to a German offensive would provide the necessary time for the injection of allied assistance. France could only win a long war. In other words, France's relative weakness led to support for an offensive orientation in the 1920s and a defensive doctrine in the 1930s. French policy

3. Unlike Waltz, who refined balance of power theory to explain why balances recur, Posen uses balance of power theory to explain specific states' military doctrines; see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

4. Quoted in Paul-Émile Tournoux, *Haut commandement, gouvernement et défense des frontières du Nord et de l'Est (1919–1939)* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1960), p. 334.

makers were not misguided, nor did they misunderstand France's strategic position. Either an offensive or a defensive posture is a sensible response to the systemic demands of a relatively weak state.

The indeterminacy of the external environment makes clear why dramatic doctrinal shifts occur in the absence of systemic variation, or why changes in the structure of the international system do not lead to shifts in states' doctrinal orientations. For example, although both the French and the British armies shifted from offensive to defensive doctrines from 1914 to 1939, conditions in the international system remained relatively static from one period to the next. Similarly, although India's strategic position changed dramatically upon independence in 1947, it was not until the early 1980s that the Indian army began to shed the doctrinal orientation of its British predecessor.<sup>5</sup>

Realists might dismiss the above critique of the indeterminacy of the external environment by arguing that France's position in the international system changed between the 1920s and the 1930s; it is this shift in the distribution of power that explains doctrinal developments. After all, Germany had virtually no army in the 1920s. There seems to be a powerful correlation between German power and French doctrine. Germany is relatively weak in the 1920s and the French army has an offensive orientation; Germany is strong in the 1930s and the French army has a defensive doctrine.

This argument cannot be sustained. It did not take German rearmament for the French to worry about German power. The French sought to use the Versailles negotiations to harness German power, and France's Eastern diplomacy during the 1920s discredits any notion that it took Hitler's rise to power and German rearmament to wake the French up to the potential threat on their doorstep. More important, France switched to a defensive doctrine five years before Hitler's seizure of power, seven years before the reinstatement of conscription, eight years before the remilitarization of the Rhineland. . . . It was in 1929 that the French war plans became unabashedly defensive—before Hitler came to power and German rearmament began. There is not a correlation between French doctrine and German power: the French army switched to a defensive doctrine *long before* Germany had begun to rearm.

5. Ravi Rikhye, *The War That Never Was: The Story of India's Strategic Failures* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1988), p. 23; Colonel Gurdial Singh, "Let Us Reorganize Our Logistical Services," *Journal of the United Service Institution of India* 111/463 (January–March 1981), p. 64.

Even if this timing had not been off, the correlation would be unsupported by process-tracing.<sup>6</sup> When France switched to a defensive doctrine in the late 1920s, the French army repeatedly and explicitly linked the change to the government's decision to reduce the length of conscription. The French army did not connect the rise of German power with the adoption of a defensive doctrine. There is neither correlation or causation between German power and French doctrine.

Barry Posen provides a sophisticated defense of the ability of balance of power theory to explain French army doctrine during the interwar period. Posen argues that because of France's relative weakness, French policy makers focused on external balancing—in particular, on gaining British support to allow France to "pass the buck." This required, according to Posen, the adoption of a defensive doctrine in order to avoid appearing bellicose in British eyes.<sup>7</sup>

Though logically compelling, this argument is empirically problematic. The French did seek Britain as an alliance partner, but we are provided with no evidence that the political repercussions of an offensive doctrine concerned Paris or London, or that the French were motivated by a desire to avoid antagonizing Britain. Across a whole spectrum of issues, France was more than willing to court British displeasure. On an economic front, the French attempted to exploit their ability to undermine the international monetary regime and to weaken its leader, Great Britain.<sup>8</sup> In foreign policy, the British were far from pleased with French behavior during the Chanak crisis and the occupation of the Ruhr. And in military policy, French war plans were explicitly designed to draw Germany into Belgium in order to threaten the security of the British Isles. This is hardly an action of a state seeking British approval. Also, if French policy makers desired a defensive doctrine in order to present a reassuring image to their British allies, why did French war plans continue to be offensive until 1929?

In addition, if external balancing took precedence, French recognition of British reluctance to make a continental commitment should have encouraged France to seek alternative sources of assistance. French policy makers could have ensured that France had the military capabilities to

6. Alexander George and Timothy J. McKeown, "Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision-Making," *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations* 2 (1985): 34–41.

7. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, pp. 105–40.

8. Jonathan Kirshner, *Currency and Coercion: The Political Economy of International Monetary Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), ch. 5.

honor alliance commitments in Eastern Europe or formed a military alliance with the Soviets. France did neither.

Finally, there is little support for the claim that French policy makers sought to "pass the buck" through external balancing. To the contrary, there is evidence that French civilians strongly objected to such an idea. During a meeting of the Superior Council of War in December 1927, one of the military officers remarked that France could aid itself only with the help of allies. The (civilian) minister of defense quickly responded that such a remark was extremely serious, useless, and dangerous.<sup>9</sup> France did of course seek allied support, but to accuse French policy makers of buck-passing slights the substantial financial resources that French defense spending consumed throughout the interwar period—even during periods of economic crisis and left-wing governments.<sup>10</sup>

Contrary to what one would expect from balance of power theory, much of civilian behavior in France during the 1930s seemed immune to the quickening pace of international events. Many of Hitler's policies severely compromised France's security system, but French civilians did little to realign French army doctrine with the new strategic realities. For example, even though French policy makers recognized that the Belgian declaration of neutrality and the German remilitarization of the Rhineland weakened France's strategic position, these moves met little response from Paris. After the German invasion of Poland and in an attempt to maintain morale during the "phony war," the French command took the dramatic action of instructing the troops to plant rosebushes around the Maginot Line.<sup>11</sup> The rosebushes were planted, but General Charles de Gaulle's calls for the creation of an armored force capable of offensive strikes were ignored.

By establishing constraints, civilian decisions affect doctrinal developments, but civilians rarely participate actively in the formation of army doctrine. During the 1920s and 1930s, French civilians deferred to the military on questions of doctrine.<sup>12</sup> Their British counterparts did like-

9. Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre (SHAT), 1 N 20, "Résumé succinct des séances du Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre (CSG)," December 14, 1927.

10. For example, see Robert Allan Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster: The Development of French Army Doctrine, 1919–1939* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1985), p. 183; and Robert Frankenstein, "A Propos des Aspects Financiers du Réarmement Français (1935–1939)," *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale* 102 (April 1976): 2–9.

11. Serge Bernstein, *La France des années 30* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1988), p. 164.

12. See Jeffrey Johnstone Clark, "Military Technology in Republican France: The Evolution of the French Armored Force, 1917–1940" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1968), p. 178; and Henri Michel, *Le Procès de Riom* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), p. 220.

wise; neither the British cabinet nor the parliament concerned itself with army doctrine.<sup>13</sup> In fact, civilian intervention can be counterproductive to doctrinal change. Given the state of civil-military relations in France during the 1930s, civilian intervention in doctrinal developments was probably the best way to guarantee that a change would *not* occur. In 1936 de Gaulle sought the aid of a parliamentarian, Paul Reynaud, in his quest for the adoption of an offensive doctrine. As a result, de Gaulle's reputation within the army plummeted, and as Edward Pognon explains, "Rare, very rare are those among his comrades who were not scandalized by his appeal to a politician."<sup>14</sup> The following year, the High Command, seeking to demonstrate displeasure with de Gaulle's ideas and his appeal to civilian intervention, dropped him from the promotion list.<sup>15</sup> Far from fostering doctrinal innovation, civilian intervention frustrated de Gaulle's efforts.

This does not mean that civilian decisions are not important to doctrinal developments. They frequently are. But the proposition that civilians intervene in doctrinal developments in accordance with systemic imperatives is more problematic than it first appears to be. The international system is indeterminate, civilians infrequently intervene, and most important, civilian decisions constraining doctrinal developments are rarely in response to the structure of the international system. Instead, military doctrine frequently corresponds to policy makers' concerns about the distribution of power domestically.

### *The Military's Parochial Interests*

According to a functional argument, offensive doctrines are powerful tools in a military organization's pursuit of greater resources, autonomy, and prestige. The pursuit of these goals, however, is largely indeterminate of choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines. Even if these goals could be fulfilled only with an offensive doctrine, military organizations often forfeit the attainment of them. This pattern holds true even in the case of the preference for greater resources. Furthermore, without civilian prompting, military organizations ostracize those officers who advo-

13. Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 41; Franklyn Arthur Johnson, *Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence, 1885–1959* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 12–13; and Norman Henry Gibbs, "British Strategic Doctrine, 1918–1938," in Michael Howard, ed., *The Theory and Practice of War*, p. 187 (New York: Praeger, 1966).

14. Edward Pognon, *De Gaulle et l'armée* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1976), p. 95.

15. Brian Crozier, *De Gaulle: The Warrior* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), p. 74.

cate a more offensive orientation and willingly and dogmatically endorse defensive doctrines.

Although Posen and Snyder argue that the preference for the reduction of uncertainty encourages the adoption of offensive doctrines, defensive doctrines can also structure the battlefield and reduce the need to improvise. An integral aspect of the French army's excessively defensive doctrine before World War II was the concept that the French termed the *methodical battle*. Instead of allowing for initiative and flexibility, *la bataille conduite* ensured tightly controlled operations in which all units adhered to strictly scheduled timetables. As a German officer explained, "French tactics are essentially characterized by a systematization which seeks to anticipate and account for any eventuality in the smallest detail."<sup>16</sup> The French army's *defensive* doctrine maximized the centralization of command and reduced spontaneity to a minimum.

Similarly, military organizations use both offensive and defensive doctrines to insulate themselves from civilian interference. The French army's endorsement of a defensive doctrine after 1929 is partly attributable to its being part of a larger package that allowed the army to retain what it most treasured—a small (and relatively autonomous) professional force. With the exception of the air force, there is a weak connection between autonomy and offensive doctrines. Civilians, and especially those in the foreign office, would be more likely to interfere in military planning if these operations included offensive strikes into a foreign country. Civilians are not likely to take a hands-off approach if their armed forces are invading a neighboring country.<sup>17</sup> Air forces have exploited strategic bombing (an offensive doctrine) to ensure their independence. During the 1920s and 1930s, both the French and the British air forces used an offensive doctrine in their efforts to obtain institutional autonomy. But the extent to which each service manipulated its doctrinal preferences to defeat the army and navy attack on its independence does not correspond to the expectations of a functional perspective. While the French air force fought bitterly and unsuccessfully for its independence, French airmen only halfheartedly endorsed the offensive doctrine that, according to a functional argument, could have furthered

16. Quoted in Alvin D. Coox, "French Military Doctrine, 1919–1939: Concepts of Ground and Aerial Warfare" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1951), p. 108. Although for different reasons, Posen argues that the French army adopted a defensive doctrine because it would reduce uncertainty (Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, p. 118).

17. I thank Scott Sagan for this point.

their quest for autonomy.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the Royal Air Force (RAF) gained institutional autonomy relatively easily but remained enamored of strategic bombing long after it had cemented its independent status as the third service.

Even when military organizations could gain greater resources, autonomy, or prestige through the adoption of an offensive doctrine, they often fail to do so. This is true even in such easy cases for a functional analysis as the French and British armies during the interwar period. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the British army was starved for resources and was the lowest (financial) priority among the British armed services. The army command was familiar with the concept of offensive mechanized warfare and had even led its development during the 1920s. British civilians did not intervene in doctrinal decisions or advocate the adoption of a defensive doctrine. In short, the British army had the (functional) need, the freedom, and the knowledge to advocate the adoption of an offensive doctrine in order to increase its modest budgetary allocation. It is hard to imagine a military organization better positioned to behave as hypothesized by a functional analysis. Nevertheless, the British army ignored this opportunity and adopted a defensive doctrine.

Similarly, throughout the 1930s, the French army had access to the ideas of mechanized warfare and freedom from civilian interference. Unlike the British army, it was not on a strict budgetary diet—the functional need for an offensive doctrine was less compelling. However, the French army's desire for autonomy from the civilians could hardly have been more extreme. With the recurrent instability of the Third Republic, the rise of the Left, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the army became increasingly fearful and distrustful of the republic. If military organizations seek autonomy through the adoption of an offensive doctrine, we should see it here. The French army had the (functional) need, the money, the ideas, and freedom from civilian intervention. Nevertheless, instead of adopting an offensive doctrine in order to increase its independence from the government, the French army became dogmatically committed to a defensive doctrine.

Still more surprising from a functionalist perspective is the budgetary behavior of the French and British military during the interwar period. In

18. Pascal Vennesson, *L'Institutionnalisation de l'armée de l'air en France* (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1996, in press); Pascal Vennesson, "Institution and Airpower: The Making of the French Air Force," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 18, no. 1 (March 1995): 36–67.

1936, for example, the Popular Front government concluded that the budget request from the Chief of the French General Staff, General Maurice Gamelin, was insufficient. Léon Blum and Edouard Daladier augmented Gamelin's request for nine billion francs with an additional five billion francs!<sup>19</sup> All three British services show a similar budgetary modesty that baffles a conventional evaluation of organizational interests. The British army ignored the financial benefits that adoption of an offensive doctrine could have brought. In fact, although all three British services suffered from a lack of financial support, it was the civilians that consistently prodded the military chiefs to submit larger budget requests.

When leading military and civilian decision makers met in the mid-1930s to plan British rearmament, the RAF submitted modest budget requests, arousing the ire of the Foreign Office, which felt that the RAF was underestimating the strength of the Luftwaffe.<sup>20</sup> The air staff retorted that the Foreign Office was placing too much emphasis on the threat of a German air attack, and the programs eventually adopted exceeded what the services themselves considered necessary.<sup>21</sup> This reluctance to submit excessive, or in the Foreign Office's view, adequate budget requests, was equally true of the Royal Navy, leading one participant to comment that he found it "curious how, all throughout, the Chiefs of Staff have been the moderating influence."<sup>22</sup>

The generalization that military organizations prefer offensive doctrines cannot explain why some military organizations adopt, and at times dogmatically embrace, defensive doctrines. They do this on their own initiative, without civilian prodding, and despite adequate knowledge of and resources for the development of an offensive doctrine. In the French case, the civilians did not intervene in doctrinal developments to force a defensive doctrine down the throats of the reluctant high command. Similarly,

19. Robert Frankenstein, "A Propos des aspects financiers du réarmement français," *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale* 102 (April 1976): 7; Georges LeFranc, *Histoire du Front Populaire, 1934-1939* (Paris: Payot, 1965), p. 392.

20. Brian Bond and Williamson Murray, "The British Armed Forces," in Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness*, vol. 2, *The Interwar Period* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1988); Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972), p. 106; and Wesley K. Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 47, 56.

21. Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics, 1932-1939* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980), pp. 58-68.

22. Quoted in Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 29. Also see Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart: A Study of His Military Thought* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1977), p. 67.

the British army marginalized those officers advocating the offensive use of massed tanks. This does not mean that military organizations prefer defensive doctrines or that organizational goals do not drive military choices. Instead, what the military perceives to be in its interest is a function of its culture.

### *Legacy of Verdun*

The lessons of World War I seem to explain why a functional explanation cannot account for French doctrine. According to this argument, the 1920s and 1930s were an exceptional period: emerging from the carnage of the Great War, the subjective offense/defense balance was so skewed that an otherwise accurate generalization—that military organizations prefer offensive doctrines—appears to be incorrect. Given the French army's doctrine in 1939, it seems plausible that the leadership of the French army, marked by the bloody experiences of World War I, had prepared for a rematch of the previous war. Devastated by the disastrous results of the *offense à outrance*, and influenced in particular by the battle for Verdun, the French officer corps had learned their lesson and prepared to fight the next war behind the reinforced concrete of the Maginot Line.

Although this is the most popular explanation of the origins of the French army's defensive doctrine, this argument fails to recognize the considerable debate in the French army in the decade following the signing of the Versailles Treaty.<sup>23</sup> The French army eventually adopted a doctrine reminiscent of the trench warfare in World War I, but this was not the only lesson available, nor the only alternative considered. The extent to which offensive options were not only considered but also endorsed becomes clear by examining the debate about the potential use of fortifications, the war plans, and the discussions about the future of mechanization.

Within months of the armistice's signing, the French military elite began debating the potential use of prepared positions, in particular whether the fortifications would serve offensive or defensive functions.<sup>24</sup> While Marshal Pétain and others argued that fortifications were primarily defensive, Generals Berthelot, Debenev, Fillomeau, Foch, Guillemaut, Joffre, and Mangin were the primary partisans of an offensive use of fortifications. Concerned that too great an emphasis on fortifications might cripple the French army,

23. For example, see Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (London: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 2, 336.

24. For the most comprehensive account of the development of the Maginot Line, see Tournoux, *Défense des frontières*.

they argued that fortified regions should serve as centers of resistance to facilitate offensive actions. For example, Ferdinand Foch estimated that Philippe Pétain's attempt to guarantee the inviolability of the frontiers was a dangerous step. For him, "assuring the inviolability of the territory is not the army's most important goal. . . . Establishing a Wall of China would pledge ourselves to defeat." Similarly, Maxime Weygand argued that fortifications should be used to economize forces such that a greater portion of the troops could strike offensively into Germany.<sup>25</sup>

The controversy between these two schools of thought continued throughout the 1920s. In a meeting of the Superior Council of War in 1926, Generals Guillemaut, Berthelot, and Fillomeau attacked Pétain's proposal. Supported by Joseph Joffre and Eugène Debenev, General Guillemaut insisted that it would be dangerous to place greater importance on fortifications than on the equipment that would allow the prepared positions to be used as points of maneuver.<sup>26</sup> Foch agreed: "If we don't have the tool, it will not be the umbrella that will protect the country."<sup>27</sup> Guillemaut also spoke out strongly against Pétain's conceptions:

The Wall of France is a dream financially speaking, and from the military point of view can be a danger. It could lead us to subordinate all war plans. . . . It would be better to build a strong army capable of going on the offensive. Whatever money is remaining—if any does remain—could be used to construct fortifications that would serve as a base of departure.<sup>28</sup>

In their view, fortifications should be used to facilitate offensive actions and to avoid a repetition of the static defense of World War I.<sup>29</sup>

This debate continued for almost a decade, and this prolongation, according to a leading historian of the Maginot Line, is indicative of the "markedly offensive spirit of the French high command."<sup>30</sup> Pétain's conception of a continuous frontier eventually won out, but the debate over the fortifications and the earlier official endorsement of offensive uses belies the notion that the French officer corps left World War I convinced that only a defensive doctrine was possible.

25. Eugene Carrias, *La Pensée militaire française* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), p. 330.

26. SHAT, I N 20, "Résumé succinct des séances du CSG," December 14 and 15, 1926.

27. *Ibid.*, July 2, 1927.

28. Quoted in Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La Décadence, 1932–1939* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1979), p. 244.

29. Judith M. Hughes, *To the Maginot Line: The Politics of French Military Preparations in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 200.

30. Tournoux, *Défense des frontières*, p. 36.

The discussions about the potential of mechanized warfare further reveal the extent to which the French army was open to offensive possibilities in the aftermath of World War I. Just as there was no consensus among the military leaders over how best to use fortifications, there was also considerable disagreement in the 1920s about the optimum use of armor. While some officers advocated the development of independent tank units that could take advantage of the speed and maneuverability of this new technology, other officers argued that tanks should be assigned to fill traditional roles of support for the infantry in defensive operations.<sup>31</sup>

The war plans of the 1920s are additional evidence that the lessons of World War I did not determine French military thinking: these plans officially endorsed offensive operations. If a conflict with Germany occurred, the French intended to bring the battle to Germany and divide the country in two.<sup>32</sup> In a letter to the minister of defense in 1925, a French officer explains French intentions: "We must therefore, and at any price, have at our disposal at the beginning of a conflict offensive forces capable of decisive strikes into Germany such that Germany will be required to maintain the mass of her forces in the face of us and to fight on her territory."<sup>33</sup> Increasingly defensive plans later superseded these offensive plans, but the initial reaction to the threat of a resurgent Germany was once again to plan offensive strikes beyond the French frontier.

This is not to downplay the impact of the slaughter of World War I on the collective memory in France. It is only to argue that the French army did not leave World War I convinced that only a defensive doctrine was possible. Other lessons and interpretations were available and endorsed by important and influential sectors of the French army. As the lessons of World War I took on heroic proportions, however, it became increasingly difficult to remember that the Great War's defensive lessons were not the only ones available or supported.

31. One author estimated that in the early 1920s, two-thirds of the articles in professional military journals endorsed mechanized warfare. See, for example, Captain Fernand-Charles Grazin, "Essai d'emploi d'autos mitrilleuses sur chenilles aux manoeuvres de la Sarre," *Revue de cavalerie* 3 (1923); and Col. Jean Alphonse Louis Flävigny, "Manoeuvres de la 4e division de cavalerie en Rhénanie en 1928," *Revue de cavalerie* 9 (1929).

32. Anthony Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936–1939* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1977), p. 24; Jean Doise and Maurice Vaisse, *Diplomatie et outil militaire, 1871–1969* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1987), pp. 269, 276; and General André Laffargue, *Justice pour ceux de 1940* (Limoges: Charles Lavauzelle, 1952), p. 91; Tournoux, *Défense des frontières*, pp. 332–35.

33. SHAT, I N 27, file 3, "Rapports de présentation du CSG," March 9, 1925.

The lessons of history are multiple, and they frequently inform policy making only after a particular policy has been adopted. They are not necessarily the origin of the policy itself. In other words, the French army adopted a defensive doctrine in the interwar years *not* because of the trench warfare of World War I but for different reasons. Once this defensive orientation had been chosen, history began to be read and used in a particular way to justify or bolster the chosen policy or institution. As Jack Snyder has aptly stated in his study of the myths of empires, "Statesmen and society actively shape the lessons of the past in ways that they find convenient, more than they are shaped by them."<sup>34</sup>

## The Cultural Roots of Doctrinal Decisions

Some may think it foolish to argue that the conditions in the international system do not determine doctrinal developments by influencing the decisions made by civilian policy makers. If military doctrine, which is designed to defeat an adversary's armed forces, is not determined by the international system, one might reasonably ask what would be. I argue that it is counterintuitive to assume that military policy would respond only to the objective conditions in the international arena. Military doctrine is about state survival, but military policy is also about the allocation of power *within* society. After all, what could be more politicized than questions about who within the state has the support and control of the armed services? Designing military policy requires first and foremost that policy makers address their concerns about the distribution of power at the domestic level.

I expect fewer objections to the argument that implies that military organizations, constrained by their own culture, ignore international imperatives. It is commonly argued that military organizations pursue their parochial interests. Accurate explanations of military doctrine require an understanding of the often conflicting perspectives held by military organizations. Deducing preferences from functional characteristics is too general and too imprecise. Understanding the variation in organizational behavior requires an analysis of cultural characteristics and how these shape choices between offensive and defensive doctrines.

34. Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 30.

## Domestic Politics and Military Doctrine

The military plays a pivotal role in the state-building process, and this experience informs policy makers' views of military policy. The creation or stabilization of every state requires that a bargain be struck over the control of the military. For example, the United States Constitution ensured that the individual states would retain control of the militia and that Congress would control defense expenditures. The British Parliament, forever worried that a strong standing army would once again threaten English liberties, has refused to allow the military to become independent of legislative control. The critical divide in France was not between the national and the local levels, as in the United States, or Parliament and the Crown, as in England; instead, it reflected class divisions. The conservative, industrial, and landowning classes felt that only a professional army could ensure social stability and the preservation of the status quo, while the Left and the Republicans stressed that only a conscript army could guarantee republican liberties.

In other words, civilian choices in military policy often reflect fears about the distribution of power within the state, not the structure of the international system. These concerns often become institutionalized and shape decision makers' views of military policy. In many instances, they persist past their objective relevance so that when civilians make decisions about military policy, their perceived interests cannot be disentangled from their country's experience with the armed services and the role that it played in securing a particular distribution of power within the state.

To capture the role of domestic politics in choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines, I focus on *political military subcultures*—that is, civilian policy makers' beliefs about the role of armed force in the domestic arena. What is the perception of the role of the military in society? Do domestic political actors fear the latent force in particular military organizations? Should the armed services reflect the society at large, or are they viewed as separate and insular organizations? The questions focus on the importance of force in domestic politics; the answers usually originate in each state's experience with the military in the state-building process.

The way the civilians view the military varies from state to state. In some countries, all important political actors share the same view of the military. This was the case for Great Britain in the 1920s and 1930s, when there was general agreement across the political spectrum about the role of the armed forces in society. When only one subculture exists, this set of ideas and values can best be understood as approaching common sense: it

constrains behavior by establishing what is “natural” and makes other patterns of behavior unimaginable. In other countries, as we will see in the case of France during the same period, there are several competing conceptions. In these cases, the competing subcultures more closely approximate ideologies: they provide explicit, self-conscious guidelines for action.<sup>35</sup>

The presence of one or several subcultures also affects the extent to which civilian intervention in doctrinal developments corresponds to systemic imperatives. If there is more than one subculture, civilian decisions are more likely to respond to domestic considerations. Civilians are first and foremost concerned with securing the preferred domestic distribution of power. In contrast, with a consensual subculture, the civilians will not be consumed by domestic battles over military policy, and as a result their decisions are more likely to reflect the external environment.

### *The Organizational Culture of the Military*

Encouraged in part by the economic success of Japanese companies, organizational theorists began studying how the *culture of an organization* affects organizational behavior and decisions.<sup>36</sup> Although analysts have adopted different definitions, I define organizational culture as the set of basic assumptions, values, norms, beliefs, and formal knowledge that shapes collective understandings. The culture of an organization shapes its members’ perceptions and affects what they notice and how they interpret it; it screens out some parts of “reality” while magnifying others.

Organizations’ perceptions of their world frame and constrain the decision-making process. This is particularly true of military organizations. Few institutions devote as many resources to the assimilation of their members as does the military. The emphasis on ceremony and tradition, and the development of a common language and an esprit de corps, testify to the strength of the military’s organizational culture.

The culture of a military organization is the collection of ideas and

35. I am indebted in this discussion to Ann Swidler’s article “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (April 1986): 273–86.

36. For useful discussions of organizational culture, see Terrence E. Deal and Allen A. Kennedy, *Corporate Cultures* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1982); Andrew Pettigrew, “On Studying Organizational Cultures,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24 (December 1979): 570–82; Edgar Schien, “Coming to a New Awareness of Organizational Culture,” *Sloan Management Review* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 3–6. For an application of this concept to security studies, see Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint During World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

beliefs about armed force—both its conduct and its relationship to the wider society. The components of the military’s culture can be divided into those values and attitudes relevant to its relationship with its external environment—both international and domestic—and those characteristics internal to the organization. For example, is war a question of courage and morale or has the steel and firepower of the modern age fundamentally altered its nature? What skills or formation does the officer corps value—does it model its behavior after the modern-day business manager or the warrior and heroic leader?

*Military culture* does not mean *military mind*; it does not refer to a general set of values and attitudes that all militaries share. All military organizations can be classified according to a basic set of components, but they do not all share the same mixture of values and attitudes. Nor is this an argument about strategic culture.<sup>37</sup> Organizational culture refers to the collectively held beliefs within a particular military organization, not to the beliefs held by civilian policy makers. Finally, organizational culture is not the primordial notion sometimes found in analyses of strategic culture; the military’s organizational culture is not equivalent to the national character. The military’s culture may reflect some aspects of the civilian society’s culture, but that is not necessarily the case. The military’s powerful assimilation processes can displace the influence of the civilian society.

Determining the culture of a military organization requires an extensive reading of archival, historical, and other public documents. Curricula at military academies, training manuals, personal histories of officers, internal communications in the armed services, and the leading military journals should all be examined. It is also important to look for who or what is considered deviant or taboo in the culture and what it is about these beliefs that conflicts with the organization’s culture.

Making sense of the interests that military organizations bring to doctrinal decisions requires understanding the cultural context within which these decisions are made. Not all militaries share the same collection of ideas about armed force, and these beliefs shape how the organization responds to changes in its external environment.

Focusing exclusively on either domestic politics or the military’s organizational culture provides neither a necessary nor a sufficient explanation of choices between offensive and defensive doctrines. Military doctrine is

37. For example, see Alastair I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

the product of two things. First, domestic politics sets constraints—for example, the length of conscription or the type of army—but these constraints do not in themselves determine doctrine. Second, the military's organizational culture must work within these constraints. The organizational culture is the intervening variable between domestic constraints and military doctrine.

In cases where there is only one political military subculture—that is, when there is consensus across the political spectrum on the role of armed force—the organizational culture dominates doctrinal developments. In Britain, the civilian consensus on the role of the military in society meant that the army's and the air force's cultures took on primary significance in explaining their doctrinal orientation in the 1920s and 1930s. Domestic politics still establishes constraints, but these are less direct than in conflictual polities. Civilian decisions are also more likely to reflect the external environment.

In other cases, decisions made by domestic political actors severely limit the organization's perception of its available options. For example, in France during the interwar period, the civilian decision to reduce the length of conscription to one year dramatically constrained what the French army thought was possible. Another military organization might have reacted differently to the reduction in the length of conscription, but given the French army's organizational culture, the high command felt that it had no choice but to adopt a defensive doctrine. In short, a civilian decision when coupled with the distinctive culture of the French army yielded a particular type of doctrine. Both civilian decisions and the military's organizational culture are important, and their interaction must be taken into account. Political decisions set constraints, but rarely do they determine outcomes. Likewise, the organizational culture alone does not explain the change in doctrine. There must be some change in the external environment of the organization—primarily as a result of domestic politics—to which the organizational culture reacts.

## The Cultural Roots of French Doctrine

As ill-suited to the external threat as the French army's doctrine may have been, it corresponded well to domestic political battles and the French army's organizational culture. Since the mid-nineteenth century the Left and Right had fought over the organizational form of the army. While the

Right demanded a professional army that, in its view, could ensure domestic order and stability, the Left feared that a professional army would do the bidding of the reactionary segments of society. To the Left, only militia or reserve forces could guarantee the survival of the French Republic.

In 1928 the Left and Republican forces reduced the term of conscription to one year. The army resisted this decision, but once it had been made, the high command had no choice but to design a doctrine within that constraint. The leeway that the French army had cannot, however, be determined objectively; not all military organizations would respond similarly to the need to work with short-term conscripts. Despite evidence to the contrary, French officers could imagine only a professional army executing an offensive doctrine: in their view, only years of service could endow a soldier with the necessary skills for offensive warfare.

In sum, when deciding on the organizational structure of the army, French policy makers responded to domestic, not international, factors. The reduction in the term of conscription to one year addressed the Left's fear of domestic threats, not its concern about German capabilities. The army reacted to this decision within the constraints of its organizational culture. Instead of demonstrating a preference for offensive doctrines, the French army chose a defensive doctrine.

### *Competing Political Military Subcultures*

Much has been written on the instability of the Third Republic, a dreary picture of one cabinet after another giving way to some equally powerless coalition. Yet it was not the fragility of the French government that established the framework for French doctrine; instead, it was the competition between contending political forces with conflicting political military subcultures. Within months of the signing of the armistice, the old political struggle over the organizational form of the army reemerged.

Since the French Revolution, and especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the organizational structure of the army had become one of the primary arenas of conflict between two major factions in French politics. While the Right sought a professional army comprising long-service soldiers, the Left advocated a national army founded on short-term conscripts in the form of either a militia or a force highly dependent on reserves.

In the Left's view, it was imperative that the army not be a separate

caste, isolated from society and imbued with military values.<sup>38</sup> If the army could retain the conscript for several years, it would be able to elicit passive obedience and to use this force for domestic repression. It was only by eliminating the professional army that the threat to French democracy would diminish.

The Left believed that the army must reflect society and society's values in order to be able to defend the entire country (rather than only a particular class). For the Left, the less time spent in the barracks, the better; the conscript needed to be under the colors just long enough to learn the requisite military skills. Everything must be done to avoid the development of a corporate spirit potentially at odds with the republic. In early 1934 Léon Blum, the leader of the Socialist Party, expressed his fear of long-serving soldiers:

History teaches very clearly that collective feelings develop in professional armies. They are the army of a corps, while waiting to become the army of a leader. Isolated from the surrounding life, compressed and focused on itself by training, customs, and discipline, the army establishes within the nation an enclosed enclave. . . . Public duty is replaced by hierarchical obedience. National solidarity is replaced by professional solidarity.<sup>39</sup>

Whether the military was a militia force or a mixed army heavily dependent on the mobilization of reserves, the leftist ideal required a short term of service that would, in the Left's view, harness the repressive designs of the reactionary part of French society.<sup>40</sup> During parliamentary debates in the early 1920s over the length of conscription, a radical socialist declared, "It is necessary that France have the army of its policies; but I don't want France to carry out the policies of her army."<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, the French Right demanded the retention of a professional army. Just like the Left, the Right felt that the number of years that the soldier served in the ranks determined whether or not the army could be relied upon to maintain the status quo. In a domestic crisis, only soldiers

38. Classic texts that embody the political military subculture of French Left include Jean Jaurès, *L'armée nouvelle* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1977); and J. Monteilhet, *Les Institutions militaires de la France* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1932).

39. Léon Blum, "A bas l'armée de métier!" *Le Populaire*, December 1, 1934.

40. On the Left's view of reserves, see Adrien Roux, *Gardons le service de deux ans* (Paris: Librarie Positiviste, 1912), pp. 6-7; and General Percin, *La Guerre et la nation armée* (Paris: Ligue des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen), pp. 7-13.

41. Quoted in Edouard Bonnefous, *Histoire politique de la Troisième République*, vol. 3, *L'après-guerre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), p. 311.

toughened by many years of strict discipline could be depended upon to guarantee social stability and the preservation of law and order. Creating citizen-soldiers would only, in the Right's view, strengthen the revolutionary forces in society. In the nineteenth century Louis Adolphe Thiers declared that he did not want "obligatory military service which will enflame passions and put a rifle on the shoulder of all the socialists; I want a professional army, solid, disciplined, and capable of eliciting respect at home and abroad."<sup>42</sup>

Whereas the Left sought to avoid a deep divide between the army and society by minimizing the length of conscription, the Right wanted to keep the conscript under arms for at least two years. The Right agreed that a shorter military service was sufficient to train soldiers, but more time was needed to create the necessary *obéissance passive*.<sup>43</sup> Before Parliament, Horace de Choiseul explained this process: "A soldier that has served for one year has learned without doubt to use his weapons, but he has not learned to obey; his character has not been subjugated, his will has not been broken; he has not yet become what makes an army strong: passive obedience."<sup>44</sup> For the Right, a long term of service would allow the officer corps to instill an esprit de corps in the troops and thus detach the allegiance of the men from the society at large and forge a collective identity that would unquestionably follow the orders of the commanders.

Remembering the workers' revolt in 1848 and hardened by their experience during the Commune, the Right felt that one of the army's chief tasks was to preserve peace at home. As the Germans were approaching Paris in 1940, General Weygand revealingly declared, "Ah! If only I could be sure the Germans would leave me the necessary forces to maintain order!"<sup>45</sup>

In short, although French policy makers were acutely aware of their position in the international system, it was their perception of domestic rather than international threats that shaped the pivotal decision about the French army's organizational structure. A collection of center and left-

42. Quoted in J. Monteilhet, "L'avènement de la nation armée," *Revue des études Napoléoniennes* (September-October 1918): 51.

43. General Jules L. Lewal, *Contre le service de deux ans* (Paris: Librairie Militaire de Baudoin, 1895), pp. 46, 51-52, 77; Richard D. Challener, *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, 1866-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 85-87; Claude Croubois, *L'Officier français des origines à nos jours* (St-Jean-d'Angely: Editions Bordessoules, 1987), p. 304; and Monteilhet, *Institutions militaires*, pp. 166, 169.

44. Quoted in Monteilhet, *Institutions militaires*, p. 166.

45. Quoted in Crozier, *De Gaulle*, p. 97.

wing parties captured Parliament in 1924 and within three years adopted a series of legislation that established the organizational structure of the army that France took to war in 1939. The Left's agenda had finally triumphed: the length of conscription was reduced to one year. The reason for the Left's rejection of the longer service had nothing to do with Germany, Britain, or the Eastern allies. As Léon Blum warned, a longer term of service would "be a danger for republican liberties, that is to say for domestic peace."<sup>46</sup>

These choices reflected interests, but we can understand these interests only by understanding the meanings that actors attributed to the choices. We often cannot understand what an actor will view as in its interest without first understanding the cultural connotations of a particular policy. We cannot assume that all left-wing parties, like the French in the 1920s, fear a professional army or that all right-wing parties do not want a conscript army. The types of armies that the British and French Left imagined to be in their interests were opposite. For the French Left, conscription expressed community spirit, equality, and most important, insurance against the growth of a praetorian guard. For the British Left, conscription attacked individual liberty and was a tool of continental imperialism.

There is nothing inherent in a conscript or militia army that makes it a force for the Left. The very social forces that opposed reliance on a conscript army in France (the Right) mobilized in support of this system in both England and the United States.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, while the French Left liked militia forces, the American Left feared them, and with good reason. Although militias in the United States had been in decline since the 1820s, they underwent a dramatic revival in the late 1870s, especially after the great railroad strike of 1877. Strikebreaking became the militia's main function, and states with large working-class populations took the lead in the militia's revival.<sup>48</sup> In fact, in 1892 Samuel Gompers declared that "membership in a labor organization and a militia at one and the same time is inconsistent and incompatible."<sup>49</sup>

In the early part of this century, the American Left bitterly attacked pro-

46. Emphasis added. Léon Blum, "A bas l'armée de métier!" *Le populaire*, December 1, 1934.

47. John Whiteclay Chambers, "Conscripting for Colossus: The Progressive Era and the Origins of the Modern Military Draft in the United States in World War I," in Peter Karsten, ed., *The Military in America: From the Colonial Era to the Present*, pp. 277–81 (New York: Free Press, 1980).

48. Barton C. Hacker, "The United States Army as a National Police Force: The Federal Policing of Labor Disputes, 1877–1898," *Military Affairs* 33, no. 2 (April 1969): 259.

49. Stephen Skrowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 105.

posals for national service and instead advocated the creation of a well-equipped and volunteer professional force. What the U.S. Left supported, the French Left opposed (and the French Right supported). Similar social-economic positions do not necessarily mean similar policy positions across national boundaries. To make sense of these choices, we must understand the meanings attached to policies, that is, we must examine the relevant cultures.

### *The Army's Culture and the Meaning of Conscription*

The French army objected to the shorter length of service, but once it had been adopted, the army was obliged to design a doctrine around that decision. It is because the French army had a choice that the importance of the army's culture becomes clear. A shorter length of service did not require the adoption of a defensive doctrine. It was a conceptual barrier that stood in the way of the adoption or, more accurately, that prevented a continuation of an offensive orientation after 1928.

An offensive doctrine was objectively possible. The French army did not suffer from a lack of financial support; the requisite material for armored warfare could have been acquired. Nor was it unaware of offensive alternatives. The French army was well versed on doctrinal developments in Germany, as well as having its own advocates of mechanized warfare. De Gaulle's campaign in the 1930s is the most renowned but not the only attempt by a French officer to persuade the French army of the potential of massed armor. Nor did French civilians demand a defensive doctrine or actively participate in the formation of army doctrine. Even construction of the Maginot Line left open offensive possibilities. As discussed above, the fortifications were initially conceived to support offensive operations. The French army had the money, ideas, and freedom to adopt an offensive doctrine, but it instead chose a defensive doctrine. Its organizational culture would not allow otherwise.

It was conceptually impossible for the French army to conceive of the execution of an offensive doctrine with short-term conscripts. To the French officer, one-year conscripts were good for only one thing—a defensive doctrine. In the army's view "young troops" could only be engaged "methodically"; they could not handle sophisticated technology or new methods of warfare, and they could not exhibit the élan necessary for offensive actions. To most French officers, a one-year term of conscription reduced the army to marginal value. In discussing the annual intake of conscripts, General Debeney explained that these "men are far from hav-

ing the solidity of professional soldiers since they have only done six to eleven months of service. . . . In effect, this mass of reservists will only be good for the second echelon."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, General Weygand commented on the technical capabilities of short-term conscripts: "The professional army is able to use certain material. . . . A militia, to the contrary, will be incapable of manipulating modern material."<sup>51</sup>

Although Pétain is frequently blamed for infusing the French army with a defensive spirit, he was explicit in arguing that it was the presence of the *nation armée* that made it inconceivable to initiate a war against Germany with a strategic offensive. Pétain stated that "the professional army is above all an offensive instrument."<sup>52</sup> With only short-term conscripts, General Henri Mordacq explained, "it was absolutely impossible to give our contingents an instruction responding to the demands of modern warfare."<sup>53</sup> The vice president of the Superior Council of War and inspector general of the army, General Weygand, agreed about the marginal value of the French conscript army:

The character and the possibilities of the French army were profoundly modified the day that France adopted military service of less than two years. . . . Because of its organizational structure, today's army [1932] is much weaker and less prepared to fight than the army in 1914. . . . This army has been reduced to the lowest level possible to permit France's security.<sup>54</sup>

In sum, short-term conscripts, who represented only quantity, could not be entrusted with offensive operations.

This rejection of the value of short-term conscripts or reserves was not shared by all armies or based on the experiences of the French army. The French officers had plenty of opportunities to see that short-term conscripts could be used effectively in offensive operations. France's defeat in 1870 by a quantitatively superior army based on universal military service should have alerted French military leaders to a potential source of power that they had previously dismissed. Yet, before World War I, while Joffre

50. General Eugène Debenev, "Armée nationale ou armée de métier?" *Revue politique et parlementaire* (May 10, 1933): 214.

51. Ministère des affaires étrangères, *Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1964), p. 568.

52. Philippe Pétain, preface to General Chauvineau, *Une invasion est-elle encore possible?* (Paris: Editions Berger-Levrault, 1940), pp. vii-xii.

53. General Henri Mordacq, *La défense nationale en danger* (Paris: Les éditions de France, 1938), p. 2.

54. SHAT, 1 N 42, file 2, Etat-major Maxime Weygand, CSG, "Rapport sur l'état de l'armée," May 1932.

was declaring that "under no circumstances will we absorb the reserve formations in the active units," the German army was stating that "reserve troops will be employed in the same way as the active troops."<sup>55</sup> In addition, during the initial battles of World War I, the German army had successfully used reserve formations in offensive operations. Since it was Napoleon who first took advantage of this new form of military organization, this persistence of the link between professional armies and offensive operations in the organizational culture of the French army is all the more surprising. By Napoleon's mastery of the war of masses, the French army had conquered all of Europe.

General de Gaulle's advocacy of an offensive doctrine in the 1930s may raise questions about this argument. Here we have a French officer, assimilated into the culture of the French army yet calling for the adoption of an offensive doctrine *subsequent* to the reduction in the length of conscription. This seems to suggest that the reduction in the length of conscription was not as important as I claim. Yet a closer look at de Gaulle's campaign illustrates both the strength of the French army's culture and the importance of domestic politics.

In *Vers l'armée de métier*, de Gaulle called for the creation of a professional army and the adoption of an offensive doctrine. Intending it as an addition to and not a substitute for the mass conscript army, de Gaulle advocated the establishment of seven armored divisions composed of 100,000 soldiers serving a six-year tour of duty. De Gaulle envisioned that these highly mobile divisions would be capable of immediate action into enemy territory and would return the offensive to the battlefield.<sup>56</sup>

De Gaulle was convinced that the defense and ultimate *grandeur* of France depended on the adoption of a new offensive doctrine, yet he endorsed these offensive operations only if they were coupled to a force of professionals serving *six years* of military service. As a product of the organizational culture of the French army, de Gaulle could not imagine entrusting young, unseasoned troops with the tasks involved in mechanized warfare. Only professional soldiers possessed the skill and training to implement lightning attacks by armored units. De Gaulle stuck with this proposal even though he was well aware of the political hurdles to the creation of a professional force of long-serving soldiers.

55. Jean Feller, *Le dossier de l'armée française: la guerre de "cinquante ans, 1914-1962"* (Paris: Librairie Academique Perrin, 1966), p. 65.

56. Charles DeGaulle, *Vers l'armée de métier* (Paris: Editions Berger-Levrault, 1944).

The reception that de Gaulle's ideas received in the French army further reveals the linking of a professional army with an offensive doctrine in the organizational culture of the French army. The high command was not persuaded. One of the primary reasons for its rejection of de Gaulle's ideas was that the creation of the specialized corps would, in the command's view, cut the army in two.<sup>57</sup> The officer corps could not imagine that the conscript army could implement this new offensive warfare. To adopt this doctrine would, in their minds, inevitably mean draining many of the army's professionals from the conscript army, and the latter, stripped of its professional officers, would have little if any combat value. The French officer corps could only accept the whole package of de Gaulle's ideas; separating the offensive doctrine from the professional army was inconceivable. These concepts were to be implemented either by a professional army or not at all.

De Gaulle's campaign also reveals the impact of domestic politics and especially the political military subculture of the French Left. The Left was not, to say the least, pleased with de Gaulle's proposals for a professional army. The fear of the domestic ramifications—and not whether these ideas were most suited to repel a German attack—emerges time and again in the leftist press and in parliamentary debate. For example, an article in *L'Esprit* states explicitly the reason for his opposition to de Gaulle's ideas: "This leader, having collected in his hand all the armed force of the country, multiplied indefinitely by the technological possibilities, having in hand hired killers, each of which possesses all the aptitudes of murder and all the extraordinary instruments to kill—when will this leader then march on Paris?"<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Edouard Daladier, the leader of the Radical Socialist Party, worried that a professional army might be "more dangerous than one might believe for the security of our nation."<sup>59</sup> Not surprisingly, de Gaulle's ideas received a different reception from the Right and the extreme Right.<sup>60</sup>

Even though the international environment had become dramatically

57. For example, see General Eugène Debenev, "Encore l'armée de métier," *Revue des deux mondes* (July 15, 1935): 285–90.

58. Jacques Lefrancq and Leo Moulin, "Dialogue sur l'armée de la classe 15 à la classe 25," *Esprit* 32 (May 1935).

59. Quoted in Pierre Hoff, *Les programmes d'armement de 1919 à 1938* (Vincennes: Service historique de l'armée de terre, 1982), p. 157.

60. Ladislav Mysyrowicz, *Anatomie d'une défaite* (Lausanne: Editions de l'âge d'homme, 1973), pp. 237–38; Alois Schumacher, *La politique de sécurité française face à l'Allemagne: Les controverses de l'opinion française entre 1932 et 1935* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1978), p. 213.

more threatening, the domestic political divide persisted. Domestic considerations again determined the army's organizational structure. Once this constraint was set, the French army could imagine only one possibility. De Gaulle and the French army were incapable of decoupling offensive concepts from a professional army, yet the insistence on a professional force doomed de Gaulle's efforts because such a force was politically impossible. The French were trapped: the Left would not accept a professional army, and the army could not envision an offensive doctrine without one.

### *Culture's Sources*

This essay does not directly address the origins of military culture.<sup>61</sup> However, before arguing that cultural factors have relative autonomy, it is important to address two potential sources of cultural factors.

First, one must show that the cultural beliefs are sincere. For example, how can we know that the French army really believed that short-term conscripts and a defensive doctrine were inseparable? Could this belief have been instrumental and so all consequence and not cause? Some of the best evidence comes from the French army's estimate of the German army before World War I. The French army's belief that conscript forces could not undertake offensive actions prevented its leaders from believing—despite intelligence reports—that the Germans would attack with the forces that they did. Because they could not imagine short-term conscripts leading offensive operations, the French army dismissed intelligence reports showing that the Germans would use "young troops" in the front lines. This misreading of the situation caused the French army to underestimate the strength of the German offensive by twenty corps, that is, by at least 680,000 soldiers!<sup>62</sup> Whatever the outcome of the future battle, the French army's belief in the relative incompetence of short-term conscripts was not in its interest; it is not in the military's interest to underestimate the strength of opposing forces.

One can make a similar argument about de Gaulle. He was convinced that defending France depended on the adoption of an offensive doctrine. He also knew that the creation of a professional force was politically impossible. Yet he continued to advocate the coupling of an offensive doc-

61. For an extended discussion of the origins of military cultures, see Kier, *Imagining War*.

62. On the size of the German corps, see Girard Lindsay McEntree, *Military History of the World War* (New York: Scribner's, 1937), p. 33; Philip Neame, *German Strategy in the Great War* (London: Arnold, 1923), appendixes 1 and 2, pp. 123–27.

trine with a professional army. If de Gaulle's estimation of the value of short-term conscripts had been insincere, he would have dropped it in order to pursue what he felt was in France's national interest—an offensive doctrine.

The second thing that one must demonstrate about the origins of the culture is that it is not simply a reflection of structural conditions. We must see that individuals or groups sharing the same situational constraints reach different conclusions. We already saw the various ways in which the Left evaluates conscription. We also saw that the German and French armies have different evaluations of the value of reserve or conscript forces. The contrasting positions of the French and British delegations at the Versailles negotiations is another example. Both countries shared the same objective interest for the same context: reducing the military threat posed by Germany. France proposed that Germany rely solely on a conscript army. A French officer wrote that it "would be better to let Germany have a relatively numerous army, without seriously trained officers than a smaller army of well-trying, proven officers that Germany will have and which I fear she will know how to make use of."<sup>63</sup> Britain reached the opposite conclusion. David Lloyd George worried that with a conscript army "Germany will train 200,000 men each year, or two million in ten years. Why make a gift to them of a system which in fifteen to twenty years will give Germany millions of trained soldiers?"<sup>64</sup> He insisted that only the imposition of a professional army would harness German military power.<sup>65</sup> Both countries sought to contain Germany's offensive potential, but they proposed opposite prescriptions.

This essay is not a call for the wholesale adoption of cultural analyses. Structural and functional analyses are valuable tools in understanding international politics. Indeed, the normative and political rationale for pursuing this question stems from a structural constraint. It is only because offensive military postures are structural impediments to cooperative relations among states that the question of the determinants of

63. Quoted in Pierre Miquel, *La paix de Versailles et l'opinion publique française* (Paris: Flammarion, 1972), p. 258. Also see Ministère des affaires étrangères, *Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1969), p. 569.

64. Quoted in Miquel, *Paix de Versailles*, p. 256.

65. Bertrand de Jouvenel, "Le service militaire obligatoire. . . Est-il une institution de gauche?" *La Voix*, February 9, 1930, p. 8; and Pertinax (pseud. André Géraud), "Le désarmement radical de l'Allemagne est décidé," *Echo de Paris*, March 11, 1919.

choices between offensive and defensive doctrines is important.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, functional and structural analyses cannot adequately explain choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines. We must understand the civilians' political military subculture and the military's organizational culture in order to explain choices between offensive and defensive doctrines.

While structural and functional accounts of the origins of military doctrine are parsimonious and generalizable, they also appear to be wrong. In contrast, this alternative account better explains why militaries end up with the doctrines they do. With the formation of new states and the reorganization of their military forces in the post-Cold War world, we want to encourage these states to adopt defensive doctrines. Neither looking to the international system nor relying on civilian oversight is likely to have much of a payoff. Instead, to intervene effectively in doctrinal developments, we need to understand the politics of military policy and the constraints of the military's culture.

66. For discussions and debate about the destabilizing effects of offensive military doctrines, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167-214; Van Evera, "The Causes of War"; and numerous articles in Steven E. Miller and Sean Lynn-Jones, eds., *Military Strategy and the Origins of the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

## New Directions in World Politics

*John Gerard Ruggie, General Editor*

- John Gerard Ruggie, editor, *The Antinomies of Interdependence: National Welfare and the International Division of Labor* 1983
- David B. Yoffie, *Power and Protectionism: Strategies of the Newly Industrializing Countries* 1983
- Paul Taylor, *The Limits of European Integration* 1983
- William H. Becker and Samuel F. Wells, Jr., editors, *Economics and World Power: An Assessment of American Diplomacy Since 1789* 1983
- John Ravenhill, *Collective Clientelism: The Lome Conventions and North-South Relations* 1985
- Robert Pollard, *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War* 1985
- William McNeil, *American Money and the Weimar Republic* 1986
- Robert O. Keohane, editor, *Neorealism and Its Critics* 1986
- J. Ann Tickner, *Self-Reliance Versus Power Politics: The American and Indian Experiences in Building Nation States* 1987
- Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History* 1987
- Jeffrey Harrod, *Power, Production, and the Unprotected Worker* 1987
- David R. Mares, *Penetrating International Markets: Theoretical Considerations and Mexican Agriculture* 1987
- John A. C. Conybeare, *Trade Wars: The Theory and Practice of International Commercial Rivalry* 1987
- Kenneth A. Rodman, *Sanctity Versus Sovereignty: U.S. Policy Toward the Nationalization of Natural Resource Investments in the Third World* 1988
- Constance G. Anthony, *Mechanization and Maize: Agriculture and the Politics of Technology Transfer in East Africa* 1988
- Jock A. Finlayson and Mark W. Zacher, *Managing International Markets: Developing Countries and the Commodity Trade Regime* 1988
- Peter M. Haas, *Saving the Mediterranean: The Politics of International Environmental Cooperation* 1990
- Stephen C. Neff, *Friends But No Allies: Economic Liberalism and the Law of Nations* 1990
- Emanuel Adler and Beverly Crawford, *Progress in Postwar International Relations* 1991
- J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* 1992
- John Gerard Ruggie, editor, *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* 1993
- Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* 1993
- Ronnie D. Lipschutz and Ken Conca, editors, *The State and Social Power in Global Environmental Politics* 1993
- David A. Baldwin, editor, *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* 1993
- Karen Litfin, *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation* 1994
- Ronnie D. Lipschutz, editor, *On Security* 1995

## The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics

*Edited by*

Peter J. Katzenstein



Columbia University Press  
New York