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## Letter to the Editor—World War One Will Begin Five Years from Now: How Frederic Harrison Predicted the Onset of the Great War for Civilization

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The centenary of the armistice agreement of the War to End All Wars ironically arrives after a century of ceaseless conflict. At no time during this one hundred year period has there been worldwide peace. However, World War I was the first of a two-part series of world wars that effectively ended warfare among European nations. Many policymakers for the past century—Winston Churchill and Harry Truman among many others—took extraordinary measures to prevent another world war from transpiring. The formation of the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU) served to help reduce the likelihood of member nations declaring war on each other. However, these member nations continue to participate in foreign military engagements and many military and policy leaders still devise strategies to reduce and eventually end these conflicts.<sup>1</sup>

But, WWI also inspired military theorists Quincy Wright and Lewis F. Richardson to launch a new discipline aimed at scientifically predicting new wars before they begin.<sup>2</sup> This endeavor is valuable to the peace process, because the predictability of war tends to increase the opportunity for states to avoid it.<sup>3</sup> Two recent products of this discipline include the Steps-to-War model and the Risk Barometer for War thesis.<sup>4</sup> The Steps-to-War model utilizes the scientific method to identify independent variables—such as territorial disputes, alliances, and arms races—predicating the dependent variable of interstate armed conflict.<sup>5</sup> The Risk Barometer for War model is based on the Steps-to-War thesis by extrapolating five independent variables from the latter—territorial disputes between nation pairs, arms races, alliances, rivalry, and hardliner political leaders—and assigning an additive numerical value to each variable.<sup>6</sup> The model subsequently adds the values corresponding with each nation pair under examination. Therefore, as the thesis maintains, the nation pairs featuring higher corresponding scores on the Risk Barometer are more likely to engage in war. This model accurately predicted a high probability of a Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict occurring in Crimea within five years of its first publication.<sup>7</sup> Its authors released the findings in 2012—two years before the Russian Federation initiated an armed annexation of the Black Sea

peninsula in 2014. The study further suggested that a Russo-Georgian War II was “likely,”<sup>8</sup> but not *as probable* as a Crimean-related conflict.

Research that aims to refine these war-predicting tests may benefit from Frederic Harrison’s analysis, which prophesied the First World War five years before it began—decades before scientific peace-modeling emerged as a formal discipline. The past five years of modern centenary historiography commemorating WWI features very little of Harrison’s March 18, 1909 letter to the editor of *The Times*—a British newspaper covering contemporary national panic arising from the pre-war Anglo-German naval arms race.

This study seeks to help fill this information gap by examining the content and context of this letter, how it predicted the Great War for Civilization,

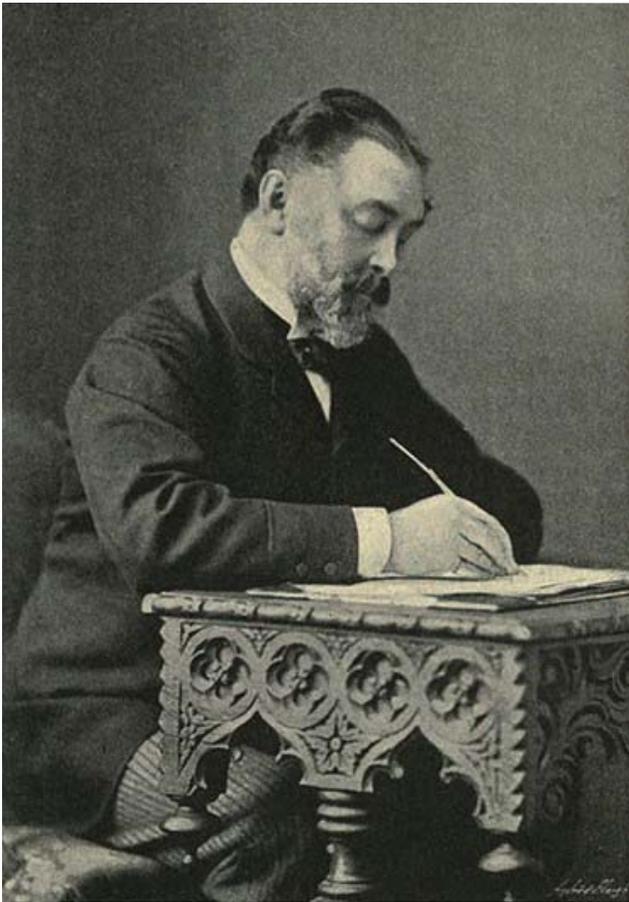


Figure 1. Frederic Harrison. Photo by William Downey and Daniel Downey, ca. 1872-95.

and how these circumstances parallel contemporary geopolitics. There is much that WWI may have to inform modern scientific peace-modeling methods, and Harrison may have possessed much insight on how to forecast war.

### **The Harrisonian Model**

On St. Patrick's Day—five years before the outbreak of WWI—German leaders scrambled in response to the frantic display of “foul and disgusting language”<sup>9</sup> issuing forth from the United Kingdom Parliament. The Irish Nationalist Party Member, John Dillon, denounced such rhetoric as “the first mutterings of a storm between two great nations”<sup>10</sup>—the British and German Empires. Britain's Parliament was distressing over a national naval estimate, which predicted that the German Navy would outgrow Britain's within a two-year timeframe. Publicity of this estimate contributed to fears growing in the UK that another nation would challenge the empire's long-standing status as the world's “mistress of the ocean.”<sup>11</sup>

This March 17, 1909 display of Parliamentary paranoia provoked Harrison, a forty-year-long pacifist, to declare his need to “modify the anti-militarist policy which [he had] consistently maintained”<sup>12</sup> for most of his adult life and philosophical career. Not to be confused with Sir Frederic Harrison—business mogul of the same era, bearing the same name and spelling—the Positivist public figure wrote an alarmist letter to the editor of *The Times*, which published it the next day.<sup>13</sup> His article featured a model that accurately predicted some of the causal circumstances of the Great War that would transpire half a decade later.

His paradigm consisted of three broad categories of antecedent variables of an unprecedented, European-wide conflagration. These were *German ambition*, *German naval expansion*, and an *Anglo-German power conflict*. All three variables existed interdependently of each other so that removal of one could theoretically have reduced or eliminated the likelihood of the impending Great War.

### **German Ambition**

Harrison's letter also featured a profound disclaimer warning all readers to preclude him from charges of any “anti-German”<sup>14</sup> motivations for his “alarmist”<sup>15</sup> paradigm. He emphatically declared that his findings were irrelevant to race, nationalism, or prejudice. Rather, he praised Germany as a cherished

destination of his to which he had frequently traveled for his entire adult life—a period of nearly sixty years:

I have nothing but admiration for the high qualities of the German intellect and character. . . . I have good German friends; and two of my sons in their professional careers have been trained in Germany and have made Germany their home. I have known Berlin 50 years ago in its early provincial state, as well as recently in its triumphal state; and I do honour to the grand patriotism and the administrative genius which have given the empire its proud position in the world.<sup>16</sup>

However, in his lifetime, the Positivist had also witnessed Germany transform from a confederacy to an empire at the conclusion of an aggressive military campaign masterminded by Otto von Bismarck—“The aspirations of the German people . . . , given the general situation and the history of the new German Empire . . . is an obvious result of the European situation and of the history of Germany since the rise of Bismarck in 1864.”<sup>17</sup> This precipitous emergence of a civilization in European international relations signified to Harrison that German ambition would function as an antecedent variable of future European warfare—“There is no doubt about the domineering ambition of German diplomacy, for this is the key that explains the course of history in Europe for the last twenty years.”<sup>18</sup>



Figure 2. Otto von Bismarck, ca. 1870s -80s.

Many historians classify this period as the *Second Reich*—the time from Bismarck’s declaration of his king, Wilhelm I, as *emperor* of a new *German Empire* to the government’s collapse at the end of WWI forty-seven years later.<sup>19</sup> The *First Reich* was the Holy Roman Empire, a multi-ethnic, central-European political system that lasted for several centuries.<sup>20</sup> The Nazis intended for their

*Third Reich* to continue in this vein of historical heritage and promised a “Thousand-Year Reich”<sup>21</sup> starting in 1933.

Though *reich* in this context can mean empire, the term can also mean *realm*.<sup>22</sup> Before the German Empire there was no *Germany* in the sense of a nation, kingdom, or other form of unified political construct. The Ancient Romans knew of a *Germania* located in North-Central Europe, but Tacitus described this land as a vast king-less realm populated with predominately, if not exclusively, German-speaking tribes.<sup>23</sup> *German*, then, denoted a distinct European language, race, and culture but not a unified national identity. This *German Realm* concept may have been the context in which German-speakers used *reich* before the advent of German imperialism—before the language required a term for *empire*.

Harrison recognized a “Pan-Germanic movement” that “Radical and Labour politicians do not study” but “all who study the German Press . . . must recognize as real.”<sup>24</sup> He deduced that this would mean “the eventual amalgamation . . . of the entire German-speaking people of Central Europe.”<sup>25</sup> Combining this ethno-linguistic variable with German imperial ambitions, Harrison predicted, “Within a few years Europe will be face to face with a hundred millions of Germans trained to war and practically under one military headship. . . . a single war lord . . . Then Europe will see a power which she has not known since Napoleon and Louis XIV.”<sup>26</sup>

Compellingly, at least one other modern nation has invoked similar justification for militaristic aggression based on ethno-linguistic homogeneity as Second Reich Germany once practiced.<sup>27</sup> The Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin has used military force in two sovereign states within the past decade to ostensibly protect the target nations’ citizens of Russian descent from perceived threats.<sup>28</sup> This “Russian World” paradigm, like the early twentieth-century *German Realm* model, maintains that Russians everywhere, within and outside of the Federation’s borders, belong to the same national identity and heritage.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, Moscow repeatedly justifies its participation in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, the armed annexation of Crimean Ukraine in 2014, and the subsequent Russian-backed Ukrainian Civil War prevailing to the present.<sup>30</sup>

Elsewhere, since the fall of the Ottoman Empire after WWI, many Islamic leaders, such as the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, have sought a new caliphate system based on an ethno-religious context of the entire Middle East and Northern Africa.<sup>31</sup> Though terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, have sought these ends, nonviolent movements presently exist. The *Turkish-Islamic Union* (TIU), for example, presumes itself as “heir to the Ottoman

legacy” and seeks dominion of no less than half of the Eastern Hemisphere—including Crimea—to form an all-tolerant neo-Ottoman utopia.<sup>32</sup> This movement presently does not condone violence to achieve these ends, but like the *German Realm* model before the Third Reich, TIU has potential to mutate into a genocidal holocaust if helmed by different leadership of a later generation.

### **German Naval Expansion**

The tangible expression of 1909 German ambition, an important variable to a Positivist such as Harrison, was “the massive publicity surrounding the launching of each new battleship.”<sup>33</sup> In addition to German ambition and a “domineering attitude of the German Government,” he pontificated, “The sole ground for serious anxiety as to our national defences arises from what we see as we watch the feverish expansion of the German navy.”<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, for two decades Britain had been exercising a “two-power standard”—a doctrine to maintain an equal number of warships to that of the world’s next two largest naval powers combined, which by 1909 were the German and US navies.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, Germany had adopted a “two-thirds” standard mandating that the German fleet keep an equal number of warships to no fewer than two-thirds of Britain’s fleet.<sup>36</sup> As Parliament reconsidered the sustainability of this naval arms race, Harrison concluded the outcome in the negative:

The continuous strain of maintaining a two-Power standard against nations far more populous and increasing more rapidly must in the long run break down. It seems that it has already broken down. Even if we could go on building more ships than Germany and America put together, could we be certain of manning them? . . . Can we rest at ease if a few years hence we were to find our home fleet no longer the strongest, even in the seas which wash our own shores?<sup>37</sup>

### **Anglo-German Power Conflict**

Finally, Harrison described the mounting tensions between the British and German empires as “an antagonism like that between Athens and Sparta, Rome and Carthage, Spain and Britain.”<sup>38</sup> Even though his contemporaries insisted that “Germany had just as much right to say that her preparations were in the nature of self-defence as [Britain] had,” he argued, “To talk of friendly relations with Germany and the domestic virtues of the Fatherland is childish.”<sup>39</sup> He,

instead, appealed to a transcendent principle, an “ultimate evolution of national destinies, . . . one which seems to be independent of persons, even of the will of peoples.”<sup>40</sup>

Harrison’s model featuring arms races and power conflicts closely resembles the Steps-to-War thesis published nearly one hundred years later. Paul D. Senese and John A. Vasquez, who designed the latter, present the same variables as causal actions, which often contribute to interstate war. These variables also helped Ryan Maness and Brandon Valeriano design the Risk Barometer for War model that predicted the Ukraine Crisis two years before its onset.

## Conclusion

In the decades leading up to WWI, Harrison took advantage of open source publications that came from foreign and domestic resources, hailing from both the public and private sectors. He harnessed this information and utilized qualitative reasoning to identify a trend of international-relations behavior that many of his contemporaries failed to identify. Though his model lacked a repeatable framework that would have allowed future researchers to analyze other nation pairs, his approach closely reflects modern scientific peace modeling methodologies that include such mechanisms. The Steps-to-War theory and its close descendent—the Risk Barometer for War model—exhibit the importance of arms races and power conflicts as prewar variables in international relations.

Further research that can either validate or falsify some features of this study include a re-evaluation of the etymology of *reich*. Specifically, a content analysis of German documents written before the Second Reich may reveal a more accurate narrative of when German-speakers began to use *reich* to mean *empire*. While etymological studies may not directly apply to every peace modeling exercise, they may help historians understand how nineteenth and twentieth-century German imperialism transitioned from ethnocentric nation-building to xenophobic genocide.

Further research that may complement the central phenomenon of this study may include a comparative analysis of the rise of ethnocentric German military aggression with other modern movements besides those explored here. The Russian World thesis and the Turkish-Islamic Union paradigm served only as two examples of the same phenomenon that Harrison observed in his lifetime. Similar movements may proliferate today in other parts of the world that peace advocates should monitor, considering the war-predicting precedent that Harrison established.

## Notes

1. See Robert S. McNamara and James G. Blight, *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing, and Catastrophe in the 21st Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003) and the SAGE publication journal *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/cmpb>.

2. Paul D. Senese and John A. Vasquez, *The Steps to War: An Empirical Study* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 7.

3. *Ibid.*, 1.

4. See Senese and Vasquez, and Ryan Maness and Brandon Valeriano, "Russia and the Near Abroad: Applying a Risk Barometer for War," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25, no. 2 (2012): 125-128.

5. Senese and Vasquez, 1-2.

6. Maness and Brandon, 125-128.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. Parliament, *Times* (London), March 18, 1909, under "The Alternatives," accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/33204414/>.

10. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "John Dillon," accessed August 7, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Dillon>; Parliament; quotations appear in the article and are paraphrases of Members of Parliament original speeches rather than stenographical dictations.

11. Frederic Harrison, letter to the editor, *Times* (London), March 18, 1909, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/33204474>.

12. Harrison.

13. These two gentlemen appear in the same March 18, 1909 edition of *The Times* which may provide sufficient cause for other researchers to conflate the two personalities as the same person since both individuals were prominent public figures, albeit in two very different contemporary spheres of influence.

14. Harrison.

15. Ceadel, 1673.

16. Harrison.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.* Bismarck's military campaigns were followed by twenty years of peace under his leadership as Chancellor of the German Empire. After his death, German policymakers returned to a militaristic foreign policy strategy for the subsequent twenty-year period to which Harrison refers.

19. See Charles Arnold-Baker, "German Empire or Second Reich (1871-1914)," in *The Companion to British History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2001); William F. H. Altman, *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche: The Philosopher of the Second Reich* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013); and James Retallack, *Germany's Second Reich: Portraits and Pathways* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

20. Shoah Research Center, *Third Reich*, International School for Holocaust Studies, accessed February 1, 2018. [http://www.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205877.pdf](http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205877.pdf).

21. Ibid.; William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 5.

22. Shoah Research Center.

23. See Tacitus *Germania*.

24. Harrison.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid. Even so, Harrison argued that “Napoleon’s invasions of Italy, Spain, Austria, Germany, or Russia offer no true analogy” since “the British Empire is . . . without any real parallel in modern history,” the British Isles representing the “vitals” of such “an anomalous structure,” an attack of which would mean “ruin . . . such as modern history cannot parallel.”

27. Noah S. Hutto notes that the pre-twentieth century rise of a homogenous ethno-linguistic-based German political system in Central Europe was due in large part to the efforts of two Prussian statesmen living a century apart—Frederick the Great and Otto von Bismarck—who *a priori* sought to strengthen their home state rather than establish a unitary German nation, militaristic aggression on behalf of other Germans being a byproduct of the former endeavor, “German Unification through the Blueprint of Prussian Greatness: A Study of Similarities between the Prussians, Frederick the Great, and Otto von Bismarck,” *Saber and Scroll* 3, no. 4 (September, 2014): 7.

28. Serhii Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 350-51.

29. Ibid., Igor Zevelev, The Russian World in Moscow’s Strategy, August 22, 2016, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-world-moscows-strategy>; “Putin’s Russian World,” *The Moscow Times*, May 6, 2014, accessed October 12, 2014, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/putins-russian-world-35150>; “Glory to the ‘Russian World,’” *New York Times*, October 13, 2014, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/14/opinion/glory-to-the-russian-world.html>.

30. Ibid. Most politicians, scholars, and other authorities seem to avoid using the term *civil war* as a descriptor of the war in the Donbass region of Ukraine; Julia Strasheim refers to it as no more than an “armed conflict,” “Power-Sharing, Commitment Problems, and Armed Conflict in Ukraine,” *Civil Wars* 18, no. 1 (2016): 25-44. The International Criminal Court (ICC) ruled the event as a “non-international armed conflict,” International Criminal Court, “Report on Preliminary Examination Activities 2016,” (November 14, 2016), par. 168, p. 37, accessed October 16, 2017, [https://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/otp/161114-otp-rep-PE\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/otp/161114-otp-rep-PE_ENG.pdf). Paul Roderick Gregory erroneously reports that the ICC classified the event as an “*international armed conflict*” between Russia and Ukraine, justifying his case to drop the term *civil war* from all Donbass-related dialogue, “International Criminal Court: Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine is a ‘Crime,’ Not a Civil War,” *Forbes Media LLC* (November 20, 2016), accessed October 16, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2016/11/20/international-criminal-court-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-is-a-crime-not-a-civil-war/#6f2ab81c7ddb>. However, the ICC only assigned that description to the 2014 armed annexation of Crimea and not the subsequent war in Donbass; furthermore, the ICC determined a potential “international armed conflict [Russian participation in the Donbass War]” albeit “in parallel to the non-international armed conflict [the Donbass War itself],” International Criminal Court, par. 169, p. 37. Christopher Blattman and Edward Miguel define *civil war* as any nation’s internal conflict that eventuates in “more than 1,000 battle deaths in a single year,” “Civil War,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 48, no. 1 (March 2010), 3. As of the date of this note, the warfare in the region incurred at least 10,090 deaths in the 43 months since its onset,, averaging 2,818 deaths each year, thus qualifying the conflict for *civil war* status per Blattman and Miguel, Council on Foreign Relations, “Global Conflict Tracker: Conflict in Ukraine,” accessed October 16, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#/conflict/conflict-in-ukraine>. Such is the reasoning for this author’s usage of the term *Ukrainian Civil War*.

31. Julie Spears, 2002, "Muslim Brothers, Muslim Brotherhood, al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin, Jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun, Hizb Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimoon, al-Ikhwan ("The Brothers")," *Federation of American Scientists: Intelligence Resource Program*, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/mb.htm>.

32. Harun Yahya, "The Turkish-Islamic Union is the Solution to the Problems of Crimean Turks," *Global Publications Ltd. Co.* (July 1, 2009), accessed October 23, 2017, <http://www.harunyahya.com/en/Announcements/14910/the-turkish-islamic-union-is>. This movement features a similar ethno-homogenous ideology as that of the German Realm: "We Turks are of the same race as our Muslim brothers, we share the same blood, the same faith and the same everything. It is unbelievable that we should be divided, it is astonishing and utterly illogical. . . . The family must be reunited at once," Adnan Oktar, "Mr. Adnan Oktar's Interview for TASCA (Turkish-Arab Science, Culture and Art Association)," *Harun Yahya International* (November 21, 2008), accessed October 23, 2017, <http://www.turkishislamicunion.com/transcripts.html>. Compare these remarks with Putin's claim that "Russians and Ukrainians [are] one and the same people," Serhii Plokhyy, "Are Russians and Ukrainians the Same People?" *The Daily Beast* (January 10, 2016), accessed October 23, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/are-russians-and-ukrainians-the-same-people>; It is important to note that pan-ethnic movements do not always begin with militaristic aggression but rather are peaceful in attributes. For example, Putin's Russian World thesis can be traced back to Boris Yeltsin's "compatriots abroad" rhetoric which caused no wars directly, Zevelev; and, it is difficult to imagine that German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck of the Second Reich, who concluded the final 20 years of his career in peaceful foreign relations, would endorse the Holocaust of Hitler's Third Reich Germany. There hence, while the Turkish-Islamic Union may be characterized by peaceful attributes at the time of this writing, it is not immune to the hijacking by another charismatic leader who can change the non-violent paradigm into a vehicle for international military conflict.

33. Richard J. Evans, *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815-1914* (New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 2016), 702.

34. Harrison.

35. GlobalSecurity.org, "British Naval Policy – 1890-1920," (n.d.), accessed October 18, 2018, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/uk-rm-policy2.htm>; Harrison.

36. Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I*. (London: University College London Press, 1994), 4.

37. Parliament, *Times* (London), March 18, 1909, under "Navy Estimates," accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/33204379>; Harrison. It did not yet occur to Parliament at this point that a sustainable replacement to the unsustainable two-power standard would take the form of an alliance with the next runner-up global naval power which was not the UK's enemy—the US—and thus combine their two fleets into one naval superpower.

38. Harrison.

39. Dillon made the former argument in the House of Commons the day before *The Times* published Harrison's letter, Parliament; Harrison.

40. Harrison.

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