

France and the Nazi Menace

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Intelligence and Policy Making
1933–1939

PETER JACKSON

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*For Sandra, Mary-Jane, Erika and Taylor,
who lived through it all*

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Contents

ABBREVIATIONS	xi
INTRODUCTION	I
1. THE INTELLIGENCE MACHINE AND THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS	11
2. FRENCH INTELLIGENCE AND THE NAZI <i>MACHTERGREIFUNG</i> , 1933	45
3. INTELLIGENCE AND THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST <i>GLEICHSCHALTUNG</i> , 1933-1936	82
4. INITIAL RESPONSES TO NAZI REARMAMENT: INTELLIGENCE AND POLICY, 1934-1935	109
5. THE RHINELAND	161
6. INTELLIGENCE AND THE REARMAMENT PROGRAMMES OF 1936	178
7. PARALYSIS	207
8. MUNICH	247
9. A CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE	298
10. GIRDING FOR WAR	337
11. DECISION FOR WAR	379
CONCLUSION	388

APPENDICES	397
A. Organization of French Military and Air Intelligence Collection and Distribution, June 1936–April 1938	399
B. Organization of French Military and Air Intelligence Collection and Distribution, April 1938–September 1939	400
C. German Air Strength, 1936–1939	401
D. Monthly German Aircraft Production, 1936–1939	401
E. Deuxième Bureau Estimates of German Army Expansion, 1936–1939	401
F. German Army Expansion, 1936–1939	402
G. The Franco-German Military Balance in September 1939	402
BIBLIOGRAPHY	403
INDEX	435

Abbreviations

AAN	Archives de l'Assemblée Nationale
AN	Archives Nationales
ARR	Archives Récupérées de la Russie, Fonds Privés, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre
AS	Archives du Sénat
BCR	Bombardement, combat et renseignement (aircraft type)
<i>BdR</i>	<i>Bulletin de Renseignements</i>
CPDN	Comité Permanent de la Défense Nationale
CSA	Conseil Supérieur de l'Air
CSDN	Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale
CSG	Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre
CSM	Conseil Supérieur de la Marine
DAPC	Département des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales: Foreign Ministry
<i>DBFP</i>	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy</i> , 2nd and 3rd series, ed. R. Butler, W. N. Medlicott, and E. L. Woodward (HMSO, 1946-).
<i>DDF</i>	<i>Documents Diplomatiques Français</i> , 1st series (1932-5) and 2nd series (1936-9), ed. P. Renouvin, J.-B. Duroselle, and M. Baumont (Imprimerie Nationale, 1963-).
<i>DGFP</i>	<i>Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945</i> , Series C (1933-7) and Series D (1938-41) (HMSO, 1954-66).
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>EMAA</i>	État-Major de l'Armée de l'Air—air force staff
<i>FHS</i>	<i>French Historical Studies</i>
FNSP	Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques
<i>GSWW</i>	Wilhelm Deist, Manfred Messerschmidt, Heins-Erich Volkmann, and Wolfram Wette, <i>Germany and the Second World War</i> , i. <i>The Build-up of German Aggression</i> (Oxford, 1990).
HCM	Haut Comité Militaire
<i>Hj</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>IHR</i>	<i>International History Review</i>
<i>INS</i>	<i>Intelligence and National Security</i>
<i>JCH</i>	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
<i>JO</i>	<i>Journal Officiel de la République française</i>

<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Strategic Studies</i>
<i>Les Événements</i>	<i>Rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée d'enquêter sur les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945: Documents et Témoignages recueillis par la commission d'enquête parlementaire</i> (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951–2).
MAE	Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères
MF	Ministère de l'Économie et des Finances
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
<i>RH</i>	<i>Rapport hebdomadaire</i>
<i>RHA</i>	<i>Revue Historique des Armées</i>
<i>RHDGM</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale</i>
<i>RHMC</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine</i>
<i>RI</i>	<i>Relations Internationales</i>
SAE	Section des Armées Étrangères—army Deuxième Bureau
SAE-AIR	Section des Armées de l'Air Étrangères—air force Deuxième Bureau
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (German Secret Police)
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière
SGDN	Secrétariat Général du Conseil Supérieure de la Défense Nationale
SHAA	Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air
SHAT	Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre
SIS	British Secret Intelligence Service
SR	Service de Renseignements
SS	Schutzstaffeln

Introduction

THIS is a study of perceptions and policy making. More precisely, it is a study of the role of intelligence in France's response to the problem of Nazi Germany from early 1933 through to the outbreak of the Second World War. The swift collapse of the Third Republic in June of 1940 has cast a long shadow over the history of twentieth-century France. The experience of defeat, occupation, and Vichy-sponsored collaboration has been central to the evolution of French political culture since 1945. Attempts to understand and explain the nature of this collapse have generated an intense scholarly debate among historians of the inter-war period. By focusing on the relationship between intelligence and policy making, this study seeks to provide a new perspective on French national policy and the origins of the Second World War.

There are two general schools of interpretation in the historiography of French strategy and diplomacy before the Second World War. The first school interprets French policy within a theoretical framework of *décadence*. According to historians such as Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Anthony Adamthwaite, François Bédarida, and others, France's political and military leadership surrendered to drift and indecision during the period before the 1930s.¹ More circumscribed in their criticism, but still of the view that French policy lacked clear direction, are Maurice Vaïsse, Ladislas Mysyrowicz, Henry Dutailly, and Robert Doughty.² This interpretation is in keeping with the

¹ J.-B. Duroselle, *La Décadence* (Paris, 1979) and *L'Abîme* (Paris, 1982); A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War* (London, 1977); *id.*, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914–1918* (London, 1995); F. Bédarida, 'La "Gouvernante anglaise"', in René Rémond and Janine Bourdin (eds.), *Edouard Daladier, chef du gouvernement* (Paris, 1977), 228–42. See also, among many others, P. C. F. Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil–Military Relations in Modern France* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); N. Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: The Dilemmas of French Impotence, 1918–1940* (Cambridge, 1992). This interpretation has been adopted by most by Anglo-Saxons writing general histories of strategy and diplomacy in Europe during the inter-war period. See e.g. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1963); Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1989); Sidney Aster, *1939: The Making of the Second World War* (London, 1972); and Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power: The Path to Ruin* (Princeton, 1984).

² M. Vaïsse (with Jean Doise), *Diplomatie et outil militaire, 1871–1991*, 2nd edn. (Paris, 1991);

traditional Gaullist view that, by 1940, the Third Republic was in the final stages of a long decline.

An opposing school of thought stresses the limitations which political, economic, and strategic considerations placed on France's civilian and military decision makers. Robert Frank, Robert Young, Elisabeth du Réau, Martin Alexander, and Pierre Grosser are among those who reject the concept of *décadence* and argue that France's leadership was pursuing foreign and defence policies which were reasonable in the light of existing political, economic, and strategic realities.³ For these historians, the challenges facing civilian and military policy makers were immense and the ultimate failure to preserve French security does not constitute evidence of corruption or moral decay.

The role of intelligence in the evolution of France's foreign and defence policies has not been integrated into this debate. During the 1930s the intelligence departments (the *Deuxième Bureaux*) of the French army, navy, and air force general staffs were the only official organs responsible for gathering secret intelligence on foreign states. Throughout this period, these services provided military and civilian decision makers with a mountain of information on the political, economic, and military situation inside Nazi Germany. Yet, despite the rising interest the study of intelligence and decision making has generated among political scientists and historians over the past few decades, the role of intelligence in French policy before the Second World War has not been the subject of a thorough academic study.

Since the first scholarly studies of the relationship between intelligence and policy appeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s, study of the role of intelligence in the decision making process has grown into a sub-discipline of both international relations and international

H. Dutailly, *Les Problèmes de l'armée de terre française, 1935-1939* (Paris, 1980); L. Mysyrowicz, *Autopsie d'une défaite: Origines de l'effondrement militaire française de 1940* (Lausanne, 1973); and R. Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster: The Development of French Army Doctrine, 1919-1939* (Hamden, Conn., 1985).

³ R. Young, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1923-1940* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978) and *France and the Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1996); R. Frank[enstein], *Le Prix du réarmement français, 1935-1939* (Paris, 1982) and *La Hantise du déclin: La France, 1920-1960: Finances, défense et identité nationale* (Paris, 1994); E. du Réau, *Édouard Daladier, 1884-1970* (Paris, 1993); and M. Alexander, *The Republic in Danger: General Maurice Gamelin and the Politics of French Defence, 1935-1940* (Cambridge, 1993). See also E. Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler: France and the Limits of Military Planning* (Lawrence, Kan., 1996). For summaries of some of the recent literature, see P. Jackson, 'Recent Journeys along the Road back to France, 1940', *HJ* 39: 2 (1996), 497-510; Young, *France and the Origins*, 19-42; and Pierre Grosser; *Pourquoi la Seconde Guerre mondiale?* (Paris, 1999).

history.⁴ There are now detailed historical monographs on the relationship between intelligence and policy in the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and Russia, as well as several very useful and informative collections of essays on intelligence assessment before the two world wars. In particular, historians of British intelligence such as F. H. Hinsley, Christopher Andrew, and Wesley Wark have transformed historical understanding of British policy during the 1930s.⁵

Yet, despite the advances made by historians of British intelligence, the archives of the French intelligence services for this same period have remained largely untapped. The chief reason for this is that the French academic community has proved reluctant to embrace the subject of intelligence studies as an academic sub-discipline.⁶ As a result, the existing literature on the activity of French intelligence before the Second World War consists of a substantial body of memoir material from veterans of the army and air Deuxième Bureaux, several surveys of French intelligence based primarily on these memoirs, and a number of important historical articles.

The most important memoir accounts of French intelligence before the Second World War are those of General Maurice Gauché (former chief of military intelligence), General Louis Rivet (former head of secret intelligence), General Henri Navarre (in charge of the

⁴ The political science literature is too vast to list. An excellent overview of the intelligence process in Great Britain and the United States is M. Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge, 1996). Two recent works of international history that stress the role of perceptions in the crises leading up to the outbreak of the First World War are D. Herrmann, *The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War* (Princeton, 1996) and D. Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe 1904–1914* (Oxford, 1996).

⁵ F. H. Hinsley et al., *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, 4 vols. (London, 1979–88); C. Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1985); W. Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (Ithaca, 1985). The literature on intelligence and policy in the USA, in particular, is vast and growing constantly. In addition to C. Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (London, 1995), see the informative review article by J. Ferris, 'Coming in from the Cold War: The Historiography of American Intelligence', *Diplomatic History*, 19: 1 (1995), 87–115. Russian intelligence has produced a similarly immense literature. The best starting point for the USSR are C. Andrew and O. Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London, 1990) and C. Andrew and V. Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London, 1999).

⁶ This is one of the central themes of both Admiral (R) P. Lacoste, 'Introduction', and O. Forcade, 'Renseignement et histoire militaire: État des lieux', in Lacoste (ed.), *Le Renseignement à la française* (Paris, 1998), 1–6 and 49–78. There is no official history of the French intelligence services and the only existing monograph based on extensive archival research is Georges Castellán's seminal work *Le Réarmement clandestin du Reich, 1930–1935: Vu par le 2^e Bureau de l'État-major de l'armée française* (Paris, 1954). As its title suggests, however, the focus of this study is German rearmament rather than French policy.

German section of secret intelligence during this period), Colonel Gustave Bertrand (chief of army signals intelligence), Colonel Paul Paillole (who worked in counter-intelligence), and General Paul Stehlin (assistant air attaché in Berlin from 1933 to 1939).⁷ These memoirs, not surprisingly, paint a generally glowing picture of the performance of French intelligence before the war and claim that decision makers were always provided with accurate, comprehensive, and up-to-date analyses of the situation in Germany.⁸

Significantly, with the important exception of Gauché, these *mémoristes* are uniformly critical of France's civilian and military leadership before the war. They allege that policy makers did not comprehend the importance of intelligence, mistrusted the efforts of the secret service, and therefore ignored the accurate assessments of German intentions and capabilities produced by the intelligence community. General Rivet, chief of the army Service de Renseignements (secret intelligence service) from 1936 to 1943, censured France's leadership for its neglect of the intelligence services. In the aftermath of the defeat of 1940 he charged that:

The prejudice of civilian chiefs against the SR [secret intelligence service] always existed and often manifested itself. Our military chiefs rarely took a position against this mentality, and sometimes even shared it. Having systematically ignored the goals, the methods, the objectivity, and the conscientiousness of the officers of this service, the key organs of national defence underestimated the value of intelligence—when they were not suspicious of it—and failed to accept the interpretations of the SR and the Deuxième Bureau before it was too late.⁹

⁷ M. Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau au travail 1935–1940* (Paris, 1953); L. Rivet, 'Le Camp allemand dans la fièvre des alertes (1939–1940)', *Revue de Défense Nationale*, 9 (1949), 33–48; *id.*, 'Etions-nous renseigné en mai 1940?' *Revue de Défense Nationale*, 1ère partie: 10 (1950), 636–48, 2ème partie: 11 (1950), 24–39. A transcript of General Rivet's memoirs can be consulted without derogation in France, Archives Nationales (cited hereafter as AN), 72 AJ 82. Other memoir accounts are G. Bertrand, *Énigma, ou la plus grande énigme de la guerre* (Paris, 1975); H. Navarre, *Le Service de renseignements, 1871–1944* (Paris, 1958); *id.*, *Le Temps de vérités* (Paris, 1979); P. Paillole, *Services spéciaux, 1935–1945* (Paris, 1975); *id.*, *Notre espion chez Hitler* (Paris, 1985); *id.*, *L'Homme des Services Secrets* (Paris, 1995); and P. Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire* (Paris, 1964).

⁸ To a lesser extent, the same is true of the private papers of Colonel Paul Paillole, portions of which are available for consultation at the Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre (referred to hereafter as SHAT), Section Fonds Privés, série 1K 545, in Vincennes.

⁹ SHAT, Fonds Paillole, 1K 545, Carton 1, dr. 3, 'Note du Général Louis Rivet: Rapports du SR avec le ministre', 1941. This document is a testimonial prepared for the trial of various civilian and military leaders of the Third Republic (including former Premier and minister of defence Édouard Daladier), at Riom in 1941.

This contention, that decision makers ignored intelligence and remained blind to developments inside Germany, is echoed repeatedly in the memoir literature and has helped to shape popular understanding of French policy before the Second World War.¹⁰

There are serious problems with the use of these *post hoc* accounts as historical evidence however. As Olivier Forcade has observed, they are, for the most part, at the same time memoirs and critical analyses of French national policy in the 1930s. Written in response to charges that the Deuxième Bureau failed in its duty to inform the French government and high command, they consistently shift blame for the failure of 1940 elsewhere. Significantly, there is a palpable antipathy for the Third Republic in the memoirs of Navarre, Paillole, and Stehlin which calls into question their status as objective testimonials.¹¹ Simply put, the memoir literature is in general highly polemical and must be treated with great caution.

The collection of popular histories of French intelligence are equally problematic. Written for the most part by journalists or amateur historians, these tend to rely almost exclusively on the testimonials of intelligence veterans and to lean more towards the sensational ‘cloak and dagger’ aspects of the topic, making little attempt to weigh the importance of intelligence in the decision making process and often failing to do more than repeat the claims made in the memoir accounts that good intelligence was ignored by corrupt politicians.¹²

There has also been some scholarly interest in the history of French intelligence since the late 1980s.¹³ Many of the articles that

¹⁰ Rivet, ‘Etions-nous renseigné?’; Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 47–9; Paillole, *Services spéciaux*, 2–4, 33, 57–8; and Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l’histoire*, 86, 89, 148–51. Only Gauché refrains from attacking the government and the high command.

¹¹ Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 73; Paillole, *Services spéciaux*, 11, 187, 223; *Notre espion*, 117. See also Forcade, ‘État des lieux’, 50–2.

¹² The important exception to this trend is the recent general study by Douglas Porch, *The French Secret Services: Their History from the Dreyfus Affair to the Gulf War* (Oxford, 1995). Several of the more sensational, and less reliable studies are: P. J. Stead, *Second Bureau* (based entirely on Gauché’s memoirs) (London, 1959); M. Garder, *La Guerre secrète des services spéciaux français (1935–1945)* (Paris, 1967); R. Faligot and R. Kauffer, *Histoire mondiale du renseignement* (Paris, 1993); and P. Krop, *Les Secrets de l’espionnage français: De 1870 à nos jours* (Paris, 1993). For guides to this literature, see Forcade, ‘États des lieux’, and the useful bibliography of French intelligence compiled by M. Cornick and P. Morris, *The French Secret Services* (Oxford, 1993).

¹³ E. du Réau, ‘Le Renseignement et l’élaboration de la décision diplomatique et militaire: Le Cas de la France 1933–1940’, *RI* 78 (1994), 241–60; S. Ross, ‘French Net Assessment’, in Murray and Millet (eds.), *Calculations*, 137–74; P. Buffotot, ‘Le Réarmement aérien allemand et l’approche de la guerre vu par le 2e bureau air français, 1936–1939’, in K. Hildebrand and K. F. Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich* (Munich, 1981), 250–91; *id.*,

have been written are highly critical of the state of French intelligence before the war. Philippe Masson, D. C. Watt, Elisabeth du Réau, and Anthony Adamthwaite paint a truly dismal picture of the state of intelligence in France.¹⁴ Their interpretations echo the post-war complaints of former Premier and minister of war and national defence, Édouard Daladier, who criticized the intelligence services for their 'blindness' and for consistently distorting the true state of German military power.¹⁵ Patrice Buffotot and Robert Young, conversely, are both more inclined to accept the argument that intelligence was either disregarded or misunderstood by decision makers.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Steven Ross and Martin Alexander both argue that the intelligence services were neither incompetent nor ignored. Alexander contends instead that intelligence played an important role in strategic policy making. Ross concludes that French *décideurs* were provided with good intelligence but lacked the will to use this information to good effect.¹⁷

Most of these conclusions are echoed in the literature on intelligence issues that has appeared in France in the late 1990s. Influenced by recent scholarship that has emphasized the importance of culture in the formulation of foreign and military policy, a consistent theme in this

¹⁴ 'La Perception du réarmement allemande par les organismes de renseignement français de 1936 à 1939', *RHA* 3 (1979), 173–84; R. Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany 1938–1939', in E. May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies* (Princeton, 1984), 271–309; *id.*, 'French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933–1939', *HJ* 28 (1985), 143–68; A. Adamthwaite, 'French Military Intelligence and the Coming of War, 1935–1939', in C. M. Andrew and J. Noakes (eds.), *Intelligence and International Relations* (Exeter, 1987), 191–208; D. Porch, 'French Spies and Counter-Spies', *INS* 2 (1987), 191–5; *id.*, 'French Military Intelligence and the Fall of France, 1930–1940', *INS* 4 (1989), 28–58; Martin Alexander, 'Did the 2e Bureau Work? The Role of Intelligence in French Defence Policy and Strategy, 1919–1939', *INS* 6 (1991), 293–333. For a broader temporal perspective on the subjects of code-breaking and military attachés under the French Third Republic, see, respectively, C. Andrew, 'Déchiffrement et diplomatie: Le Cabinet noir du Quai d'Orsay sous la Troisième République', *RI* 5 (1976), 37–64 and M. Vaisse, 'L'Évolution de la fonction d'attaché militaire en France au XX^e siècle', *RI* 32 (1982), 507–24.

¹⁵ P. Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française de 1914 à nos jours* (Paris, 1999), 158–62; Watt, *Too Serious a Business*, 92. See also Adamthwaite, 'French Military Intelligence', 201–3 and du Réau, 'Le Renseignement et l'élaboration de la décision', 249–54.

¹⁶ France, Archives Nationales, Paris (hereafter AN), Archives Daladier, 496 AP 8, dr. 2, 'Munich'.

¹⁷ Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 307; Buffotot, 'Le Réarmement aérien allemande' and Claude Paillat, *Dossiers secrets de la France Contemporaine*, iv. *Le Désastre de 1940: La Répétition générale* (Paris, 1984), 36–45.

¹⁸ Alexander, 'Did the 2e Bureau Work?' and Ross, 'French Net Assessment'.

literature stresses the ‘relative absence’ of intelligence in French decision making culture.¹⁸ The argument is that French civilian and military elites have never made effective use of intelligence when formulating foreign, economic, and defence policy. Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, for example, asserts that intelligence has no place in French strategic doctrine.¹⁹ Raoul Girardet agrees that intelligence is ‘practically absent’ in French military thought and concludes that this is a product of a long tradition that disdains study of the adversary.²⁰ Girardet, Douglas Porch, and John Keiger argue that one of the central flaws in the policy making process in France is that intelligence, especially secret intelligence, has been the traditional preserve of military officials. According to these scholars, the long history of strained civil–military relations in France has also poisoned the relationship between intelligence analyst and civilian policy maker.²¹

Because no comprehensive study has been undertaken, our understanding of the role of intelligence in the French response to the Nazi menace remains both ill-defined and fragmentary. How information was collected and analysed and the ways in which intelligence shaped policy are questions which remain largely unanswered. This book will address these questions. In doing so it will remain for the most part at the level of strategic assessment and policy making. Issues such as the work of counter-intelligence, the identity of individual sources, and the precise information obtained from these sources, will not receive the attention they deserve. Happily, however, there is hope that the gradual return of the French secret service archive from

¹⁸ Quote from Pierre Lacoste (former head of the French secret service) in his introduction to *Le Renseignement à la française*, 3. For an interesting study of the importance of culture in the formulation of military doctrine during the inter-war period, see E. Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton, 1997).

¹⁹ ‘Le Renseignement dans la culture stratégique française’, *Stratégique*, 73: 1 (1999), 141–59 and C. Harbulot, R. Kauffer, and J. Pichot-Duclos, ‘La République et le renseignement’, *Revue de Défense Nationale*, 52: 2 (1996), 64–88.

²⁰ R. Girardet, ‘Culture militaire et renseignement’, in Lacoste (ed.), *Le Renseignement à la française*, 235.

²¹ See the essays by Girardet and Keiger in Lacoste (ed.), *Le Renseignement à la française* and esp. D. Porch, ‘French Intelligence Culture: A Historical and Political Perspective’, *LNS* 10 (1995), 486–511. Porch’s essay has touched off a debate in France that can be consulted in both *Le Renseignement à la française* and another volume edited by Pierre Lacoste entitled *Approches françaises du renseignement. Y a-t-il une ‘culture nationale’?* (Paris, 1997). The subject of intelligence is notably absent from the excellent collaborative study *Les Militaires en République, 1870–1962: Les Officiers, le pouvoir et la vie publique en France*, ed. O. Forcade, É. Duhamel, and P. Vial (Paris, 1999).

Russia will permit historians to tackle these more detailed questions in the not too distant future.²²

The existing theoretical literature on intelligence and policy making has identified a number of problems inherent in the intelligence process. Scholars have underlined the way pre-existing ideas and expectations shape both the collection and interpretation of intelligence.²³ They have also stressed the damaging effects of ethnocentrism and of 'mirror-imaging' (the tendency to project one's own logic onto others) on the process of intelligence assessment.²⁴ In a classic study of intelligence failure at Pearl Harbor, Roberta Wohlstetter stressed the difficulty in discerning important and reliable intelligence amid the inevitable plethora of background 'noise'.²⁵ Specialists have also identified a marked proclivity among service intelligence agencies to formulate 'worst case' estimates of the intentions and especially the capabilities of potential enemies.²⁶ Another common theme stresses the contradictions inherent in the relationship between the intelligence 'producer' and the decision making 'consumer'. These are linked to the inevitable tendency of intelligence assessments to become 'politicized' in the policy making process. Michael Handel has cautioned that, in the intelligence process, 'facts do not speak for themselves'. Ever present

²² The story of the mass of documents pertaining to the secret services that were confiscated by the Germans in 1942 and then captured by the Russians in 1944 is by now well known. For a full account, see SHAT, Fonds Paillole, 1K 545, Carton 26, 'Le Sort des Archives'. A small portion of these documents are now available for consultation at the Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre under the rubric 'supplément de la série N'. A larger portion is now being catalogued and will be available to historians by the year 2000. I am grateful to Mlle Claire Sibille, Conservateur at the Service Historique, for permission to consult this collection. On the archives of the Sûreté National, see S. Coeuré, F. Monnier, and G. Naud, 'Le Retour de Russie des archives française: Le Cas du fonds de la Sûreté', *Vingtième Siècle*, 45: 1 (1995), 133–9.

²³ The literature on these issues is immense. See, among others, R. Betts, 'Analysis, War and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures are Inevitable', *World Politics*, 31: 1 (1978), 61–89; R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, 1976); and M. Handel, 'Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise', *JSS* 7: 3 (1984), 230–81.

²⁴ In addition to the scholars cited above, see R. Jervis, 'Perceiving and Coping with Threat', in R. Jervis, N. Lebow, and J. Stein (eds.), *Psychology and Deterrence* (London, 1985), 18–26 and 'Strategic Intelligence and Effective Policy', in W. Wark, D. Stafford, and A. Farson (eds.), *Security and Intelligence in a Changing World* (London, 1991), 165–81; K. Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (London, 1979); and M. Herman, *Intelligence Power*, 221–8.

²⁵ R. Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford, Calif., 1962).

²⁶ On service intelligence agencies and 'worst case' thinking, see C. Andrew, 'The Nature of Military Intelligence', in K. Neilson and B. McKercher (eds.), *Go Spy the Land: Military Intelligence in History* (London, 1992), 9–23 and M. Herman, 'Intelligence and the Assessment of Military Capabilities: Reasonable Sufficiency or the Worst Case?', *INS* 4 (1989), 765–99. An excellent historical case study on the impact of 'worst case' thinking is Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*.

factors such as ideological bias, bureaucratic political agendas, and the imperatives of domestic politics constantly influence the way intelligence is interpreted and used. In the same way, assessments can also be distorted to suit the political requirements or doctrinal tastes of decision makers.²⁷ There is ample evidence of these phenomena in the history of French intelligence before the Second World War.

When it came to analysing German intentions, the performance of military intelligence was impressive. The army, navy, and air force Deuxième Bureaux produced fundamentally accurate assessments of the long-term objectives of Hitler's foreign policy and perceived that the Nazi economic and social policy was aimed at preparing the German nation for war. The intelligence services also produced remarkably detailed and accurate appreciations of the German order of battle which were updated with unfailing regularity. Significantly, throughout this period no decision maker ever complained of being caught at unawares by any development in the international situation or by information on the German army received from other sources.²⁸

Appreciations of German capabilities were less reliable. Two distinct phases to the assessment of German military power emerge in this study. During the first phase, from 1933 through to the autumn of 1938, both army and air intelligence badly overestimated German economic and military power. The most serious errors were made in evaluations of the productive capacities of Germany's armaments and aircraft industries. These misperceptions led to inflated appreciations of both the size and combat effectiveness of the German army and air force. Assessments during this period displayed a marked tendency to dwell on the strengths of Germany's military and strategic situation and to play down weaknesses in the German war machine. During the second phase, from the autumn of 1938 to the outbreak of war, a more balanced and accurate view prevailed. Appreciations tended to place greater emphasis on the vulnerability of the German economy and perceived qualitative deficiencies in the German army and air force.

²⁷ See Handel's seminal essay 'The Politics of Intelligence', in *id.*, *War, Strategy and Intelligence* (London, 1989), 197. See also R. Betts, 'Policymakers and Intelligence Analysts: Love, Hate or Indifference?', *INS* 3 (1988), 184-9. For good case studies of politicization in American estimates of the Soviet nuclear threat: L. Freedman, *US Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat* (London, 1986) and J. Prados, *The Soviet Estimate: US Intelligence Analysis of Soviet Strategic Forces* (Princeton, 1986).

²⁸ Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 293.

The two phases in assessment corresponded to two distinct stages in the evolution of French strategic policy from appeasement to war. From 1936 through to the Munich Agreement of September 1938, French policy beat a steady retreat before the recrudescence of German military power. The assessments of the intelligence services during this period reinforced the conviction of both civilian and military leaders that France could not challenge German expansion. From the winter of 1938/9 to the declaration of war, France adopted a policy of firmness. The improved picture of the Franco-German military balance provided by military intelligence at this stage played a critical role in reinforcing this policy by providing decision makers with the confidence that France and her allies could defeat Germany in a long war.

Girding for war is a psychological as well as a material process. Focusing on official perceptions, this study traces the gradual development of a more confident and resolute mood among both analysts and policy makers. The interrelationship between this evolving self-perception and intelligence on the Nazi threat forms the core of this study and the key to understanding the course of French policy from appeasement to war.

The Intelligence Machine and the Decision Making Process

GRIM LESSONS learned at Sedan, on the Marne, and at Verdun left little doubt as to the chief threat to the security of France. Thus the activity of the intelligence community in inter-war France was dominated by research on Germany. The most important characteristic of this community is that it was dominated by the military. The intelligence services were located within the army, naval, and air force general staffs and were staffed by officers from these services. Before reaching civilian decision makers, intelligence passed through an extensive military bureaucracy. This meant that intelligence officers enjoyed ready access to senior military leaders but lacked a forum in which their views could be disseminated to a wider civil–military audience. It also meant that, although intelligence reports drew on a wide range of sources and considered a broad range of topics, their influence on national policy was conditioned by frequently tense civil–military relations that were a central characteristic of French political culture during the 1930s.

I

Since the debut of the early modern period, espionage, secret writing, and code-breaking have played a role in the course of European diplomacy. The rise of permanent foreign intelligence services among the Great Powers, however, was a product of increased demand for military information during the late nineteenth century.¹ The issue of the

¹ For a good introduction to the evolution of modern intelligence services, see M. Herman, *Intelligence Power*, 9–18. For the French case, see J. R. Pernot, ‘Aux origines du renseignement français’, in Lacoste (ed.), *Le Renseignement à la française*, 102–25 and esp. Porch, *French Secret Services*, 3–38.

Franco-Prussian war of 1870/1 played a crucial role in the evolution of French intelligence. On the eve of the war with Prussia, the task of providing information on foreign armies was performed by the ridiculously inadequate Section Statistique du D^épot de la Guerre—a legacy of the reign of Louis XIV that was staffed by three junior army officers. This situation changed completely after the crushing setbacks of 1870–1. In the complete overhaul of the structure of the French army after the debacle, a permanent intelligence section was established within a newly constituted army general staff.² By the mid-1880s this Deuxième Bureau included a statistics department, the Section des Statistiques et Réconnaissances Militaires, responsible for counter-espionage, and a subsection responsible for foreign intelligence, the Service de Renseignements (SR) which operated a growing agent network in Germany.³

This nascent intelligence community was nearly destroyed during the late 1890s by its role in the Dreyfus affair. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the Dreyfus case for the history of French intelligence. It was the Section des Statistiques that had forged the documents which led to the wrongful conviction of Captain Dreyfus for espionage in 1894. In the aftermath of the affair, the entire French counter-espionage apparatus was disbanded. The skeleton staff of officers left to carry on the work of the Deuxième Bureau faced both the stigma of incompetence and drastic cuts in funding. Thus, in contrast to the foreign ministry's illustrious and successful code-breaking (the Cabinet Noir), on the eve of the First World War, the army Deuxième Bureau was a demoralized backwater within the French general staff.⁴ But the immediate effects on the organization of the intelligence community were by no means the only consequences of the affair. The bitter legacy of the Dreyfus case for French politics was even more important. The *affaire* undermined both the credibility and the authority of the army and reinforced the anti-militarism of the French left. It

² See A. Mitchell, *Victors and Vanquished: The German Influence on Army and Church in France after 1870* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984).

³ Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 11–15; Miller, *Shanghai*, 20–43; and Porch, *French Secret Services*, 34–8. On the Cabinet Noir, which had functioned more or less continuously since the time of Cardinal Richelieu, see Andrew, 'Déchiffrement et diplomatie', 37–8. For a brief history of French signals intelligence, see A. Cathiew, 'La Cryptologie française', in Lacoste (ed.), *La renseignement à la française*, 280–303.

⁴ See, among the dozens of useful histories of the Dreyfus affair: V. Duclert, *L'Affaire Dreyfus* (Paris, 1994); P. Birnbaum (ed.), *La France de l'affaire Dreyfus* (Paris, 1994); J. D. Bredin, *L'Affaire* (Paris, 1983).

opened a deep rift between the government and the army, creating an atmosphere of profound mistrust that would condition civilian attitudes towards intelligence for decades to come.⁵

The course of the Great War reversed the fortunes of the intelligence community. Secret intelligence, in particular, scored a number of brilliant successes between 1914 and 1918. In addition to the success of the extensive human intelligence network the SR established during the war, military cryptanalysis played a crucial role in the successful campaigns of 1918.⁶ By 1918 the army SR had once again established firm control over secret intelligence gathering and had regained an important role in counter-espionage. This was in contrast to the situation in Britain where the Foreign Office assumed control of the search for secret information. Although French ambassadors possessed *fonds secrets* which were frequently used to reward informants, only the army, navy, and (after 1933) the air force Deuxième Bureaux were officially charged with gathering and analysing secret information on foreign states.

II

Military control over secret intelligence gathering was thus firmly entrenched by 1933. After Hitler's accession to power, intelligence gathering revolved more than ever around obtaining information on the intentions and capabilities of France's nemesis across the Rhine. The largest and most important of the three service intelligence departments was the army Deuxième Bureau. The Deuxième Bureau was divided into an information gathering branch, the Section des Recherches, and a branch responsible for analysis, the Section des Armées Etrangères (SAE). Intelligence collection was organized primarily around the expressed needs of the high command and the Troisième (operations) Bureau of the general staff, but the Sections des Recherches also responded to frequent requests for particular types of information from both the war ministry and the general secretariat of

⁵ Excellent studies of civil-military relations during this period are Girardet, *La Société militaire*; P.-M. de la Gorce, *La République et son armée* (Paris, 1963); Bankwitz, *Weygand*, 208–289; and J. Nobécourt, *Histoire politique de l'armée*, i (Paris, 1967). For analyses of the impact of Dreyfus case on the intelligence community, Forcade, 'État des lieux', 51–64 and Porch, *French Secret Services*, 27–38.

⁶ On French intelligence during the First World War, see Porch, *French Secret Services*, 78–114 and D. Kahn, *The Codebreakers* (London, 1967), 298–319.

the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale. In the French system the agenda for intelligence gathering was set from above.

The 'producer/consumer' relationship between the Deuxième Bureaux and civilian and military decision makers created a problem common to the intelligence process in all states. 'Producers' tend to provide 'consumers' with the kind of information which the latter expect to receive.⁷ This phenomenon is particularly relevant to the French case given the homogeneity of the army general staff in particular. While it is certainly possible to exaggerate the homogeneity of the army officer corps, general staff officers tended to come from similar backgrounds, to have received very similar intellectual development, to occupy the same relatively isolated position in French society and to hold similar conservative political views.⁸ All senior staff officers, moreover, had passed through the École Supérieure de Guerre. The social composition of the general staff created an ideal environment for the effects of what psychologist Irving Janis has called 'groupthink'—an unrecognized and often unconscious tendency towards consensus within relatively homogeneous groups.⁹ As we shall see, commonly held assumptions about the German national character, in particular about 'teutonic efficiency', were accepted without question by Deuxième Bureau officers responsible for the synthesis and analysis of intelligence on the Nazi threat. This led to serious miscalculations about the progress of German rearmament and the state of German military power.

France's senior intelligence officer in 1933 was Deuxième Bureau chief Colonel Marie-Louis Koeltz. A graduate of St Cyr and the École Supérieure de Guerre, Koeltz had served with the Deuxième Bureau of the Grand Quartier Général for the final two years of the Great War. He was then posted to the Deuxième Bureau of the peacetime general staff from 1919 to 1922 and again from 1926, when he was head of the German section. He was appointed deputy chief and chief of the Deuxième Bureau in 1930 and 1932, respectively. Koeltz spoke

⁷ On this question see, among many others, A. S. Hulnick, 'The Intelligence Producer-Policy Consumer Linkage: A Theoretical Approach', *INS* 1 (1986), 212–33; M. Herman, *Intelligence Power*, esp. 283–321; A. Kovacs, 'Using Intelligence', *INS* 12 (1997), 145–64; and Handel, 'Politics of Intelligence'.

⁸ On the social composition of the officer corps in France, see Girardet, *La Société militaire*; de la Gorce, *La République et son armée*; and Nobécourt, *Histoire politique de l'armée*, i. See also the excellent collection of essays in E. Duhamel, O. Forcade, and P. Vial (eds.), *Officiers en République 1870–1962: Les Militaires, le pouvoir et la vie publique en France* (Paris, 1999).

⁹ I. L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, 2nd edn. (pbk) (London, 1982), 2–13 and 174–7.

German and English fluently and was considered one of the army's brightest officers. General staff evaluations praised his 'superior intelligence', his 'vast culture', and his 'rare capacity for work'. Army chief of staff General Maurice Gamelin lauded his 'powerful intellect' and rated Koeltz 'an officer of first rank to be pushed to the highest echelons of the [army] hierarchy'.¹⁰ The widespread view that military intelligence was a backwater for second-rate officers certainly does not hold true in the case of Koeltz or, for that matter, his successor, Colonel Maurice Gauché.

The most prolific source of information on Nazi Germany were the reports of the service attachés posted to Berlin. The role of the service attaché was threefold: to serve as technical counsel to the diplomatic legation, to represent the French army abroad, and, most importantly from the perspective of the general staff, to gather information on the political, economic, and military situation inside the state to which he was posted.¹¹ This last function was performed in constant liaison with the Section des Recherches in Paris, which directed the activity of the attaché through daily requests for information of all kinds, from the equipment of individual units to the price of butter in Berlin. Recent scholarship has rightly attributed an important role to these 'agents of international relations' in the evolution of French strategic policy. Service attaché reports were the single most important source of information on strategic affairs in foreign states.¹² They were circulated as a matter of routine to the foreign ministry, to the *cabinet militaire* at the ministries of war, air, and the marine (where they were often read by ministers personally) and to offices of the service general staffs.

From August 1932 to November 1938 the French military attaché in Berlin was General Gaston Renondeau. Renondeau was a graduate of the École Polytechnique and a gifted linguist who spoke English, Japanese, and German fluently. He had spent most of his career representing the French army abroad. Before the First World War he had

¹⁰ France, Ministère de la Défense, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes, (cited hereafter as SHAT), Jx 415, 5^{ème} série, 'Dossier du Personnel: Général Marie-Louis Koeltz'.

¹¹ SHAT, 7N 666, 'Instruction sur le service des attachés militaires à étranger', Nov. 1903.

¹² Cited in J.-B. Duroselle, *Tout empire périt* (Paris, 1984), 283–7. See also A. Beauvais, *Attachés militaires, attachés navals et attachés de l'air* (Paris, 1937), 59–67; M. Vaisse, 'L'Évolution de la fonction d'attaché militaire en France au XX^e siècle', *RI* 32 (1982), 507–24; M. Alexander, 'Perspectives on Intra-Alliance Intelligence', *INS* 13 (1998), 4–7; and Carré, 'Les Attachés militaires', 9–25.

spent four years with the Japanese army. During the war he had been attached to the French military mission in London and had then served in Russia. In 1920 he was named military attaché to the French embassy in Tokyo, where he remained until 1929 when he rejoined the general staff. Renondeau thus arrived in Berlin with a wealth of experience in the role of the 'soldier statesman'. Defence minister Joseph Paul-Boncour stressed the 'highest distinction' with which Renondeau had fulfilled his prior functions 'both as a representative of the French army and as a technical adviser to our embassy in Tokyo'.¹³ General Gamelin noted that Renondeau had 'performed brilliantly' in his role as attaché in Tokyo and was 'beyond any doubt the best choice for our Berlin posting'.¹⁴

Renondeau did not disappoint. While in Berlin he successfully cultivated an excellent relationship with his hosts and was considered among the best informed of the foreign military officials stationed in Berlin. The voluminous reports he forwarded to Paris were well-informed and judicious. Renondeau was unequivocal in his assessment of the long-term objectives of Nazi foreign policy. He warned his superiors consistently that Hitler desired to wage a war of conquest in order to impose German hegemony on Europe. Despite the differences in their views, Renondeau forged an excellent professional relationship with the ambassador in Berlin, the veteran diplomat André François-Poncet, who expressed his 'very keen regret' at the departure of his 'excellent collaborator' whose 'tireless devotion is matched only by the respect which he commands both with the German military and with his foreign colleagues'.¹⁵

Gathering intelligence in Berlin was no easy task. Renondeau, and his assistants, Commandants Emily-Marie-André Réa and Jean de Cacqueray-Valménier, were strictly forbidden from gathering clandestine intelligence on Germany.¹⁶ The team of attachés therefore gleaned information exclusively from 'open' sources. Theirs was no easy task given the extreme security measures in place for the protection of secrets. Surveys of the press and various professional and scholarly

¹³ SHAT, 7N 2702, Paul-Boncour [war ministry] to the foreign ministry.

¹⁴ SHAT, 7N 2702, Gamelin to Paul-Boncour, 26 June 1932.

¹⁵ SHAT, 7N 2702, François-Poncet to Paris, 21 May 1938.

¹⁶ SHAT, 7N 2605-1, 'Instruction pour les attachés militaires et les chefs de mission', 18 Jan. 1934; ARR, 152, 1429, 'Officiers de renseignements adjoints aux attachés militaires', Daladier to all military attachés, 27 Mar. 1933. See also a note of 14 May 1934 in which Gamelin censured Renondeau for 'engaging in activity which might compromise the post and the embassy' also in 7N 2605-1.

publications were the chief source of information for Renondeau and his colleagues. The Berlin 'post' covered the press in Berlin and the region of Brandenburg while French secret intelligence was responsible for the rest of Germany. Both surveyed the various national papers.¹⁷ Another key source were the frequent situation reports forwarded to Berlin by the network of French Consulates in Germany. By the summer of 1938 there was a covert SR operative in every consulate. French attachés also gained valuable information from their relations with other attachés in Berlin. Renondeau's reports cite information gained from the Czech, Yugoslav, Swiss, Swedish, Polish, Belgian, British, Italian, and American attachés in Berlin. Official links with the German military through Renondeau's chief contact on the German general staff, General Joachim von Stülpnagel, became progressively strained as tension mounted between Berlin and Paris. After 1936 Renondeau was no longer invited to important military manoeuvres and was forced increasingly to depend on his foreign colleagues for technical information about the German army.¹⁸

The other major source of information for the service Deuxième Bureaux was the Service de Renseignements. The SR was responsible for secret intelligence. Located in the shadow of the Hôtel des Invalides at *2bis* avenue de Tourville, it was an independent organ, staffed chiefly by officers from the army general staff. The SR was charged with providing raw intelligence to the general staffs of the three services. Its principal activities were espionage, cryptanalysis, aerial photography, and wire-tapping.¹⁹ There was no air force SR. Secret intelligence work on the Luftwaffe was conducted by air force officers attached to the SR.²⁰

There were two distinct differences between this system and the system in place in Great Britain at the same time. First, unlike the British system, where secret intelligence was not a central component of the strategic assessments prepared by the service intelligence departments,²¹ information from clandestine sources was central to the

¹⁷ This division of labour is discussed in a note by Renondeau to Paris in SHAT, 7N 2597, 3 June 1936.

¹⁸ The reports of the team of military attachés in Berlin during the period of this study are in SHAT, Cartons 7N 2597–2602. See also Carré, 'Les Attachés militaires', 25–7 and Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 272–3.

¹⁹ Rivet, 'Etions-nous renseignés?', 646; Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 36–44.

²⁰ SHAT, 7N 2501, 'Rôle et fonctions du Deuxième Bureau en temps de paix', 15 Aug. 1929. It was thought that an air force SR was unnecessary and would lead only to duplication of effort. France, Ministère de la Défense, Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air, Vincennes (cited hereafter as SHAA), Carton 2B 98, 'Les Renseignements', July 1936.

²¹ Andrew, *Secret Service*, 484–5 and Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 20.

overviews produced by the general staffs of the army, navy, and air force. Second, in the French system, secret intelligence was fed into the policy making process primarily through the Deuxième Bureau and the general staff. Although the SR often forwarded secret intelligence to the Department of Political and Commercial Affairs (DAPC) at the Quai d'Orsay, there was no system in place to ensure a regular exchange of information between the two departments.²²

The head of French secret intelligence in 1933 was Lt. Colonel Henri Roux. Roux was a veteran intelligence officer who had served with both the Deuxième Bureau after the armistice and with the French army of the Rhine for most of the 1920s before being reassigned as chief of the SR in 1930. Like Koeltz, he spoke fluent German and was one of the foremost experts on the situation in Germany within the French army.²³

The vast majority of clandestine intelligence gathering on Germany was conducted by a network of SR stations along the Franco-German frontier and in French diplomatic missions in most European states. There were three central SR posts conducting research on Germany during the 1930s. These were the Bureau d'Étude Nord-Est at Lille (referred to as BÈNE and moved to Lille in 1935), the Bureau Régional d'Études Metz (BRÉM) at Metz, the Service des Communications Militaires (SCM) at Belfort. The Section d'Études Militaires (SÉM) at Marseilles gathered intelligence on Italy and Germany. In 1937 another post, the Bureau d'Études Pyrénéennes (BÉP), was established at Bayonne to follow the Spanish Civil War. Smaller stations in Riga, Copenhagen, The Hague, Rome, Prague, Warsaw, Bucharest, Belgrade, and Budapest were run by SR officers in the guise of assistant military or air attachés.²⁴

After 1930, the SR operative in Berlin was Maurice Dejean, a former commercial agent who was recruited by the secret service for his knowledge of Germany and Germans. Dejean, who doubled as the

²² ARR, 1114, dr. 1388, 'Note pour les sections', 1 May 1932 and 'Note pour les sections', 24 Apr. 1933. The first two tomes of General Rivet's diary (cited hereafter as *Camets Rivet*) also reveal that there were frequent contacts between the SR and the foreign ministry. I am most grateful to Sébastien Laurent of the Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre for the chance to consult this invaluable source.

²³ SHAT, Jx 237, 5ème série, État des Services de Henri Charles Roux.

²⁴ SHAT, 7N 2485-3, 'Organisation et fonctionnement des services spéciaux', Oct. 1933; 7N 2486-1, 'List des postes SR en temps de paix', Oct. 1929 and ARR, 152, dr. 1428, 'Officiers de renseignements adjoints aux attachés militaires', 27 Mar. 1933. See also Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 53 and Paillole, *Services spéciaux*, 107-8. Before 1938 the Marseilles station was referred to as the Section d'Études Régionales (SÉR).

embassy press attaché, forged a good working relationship with ambassador François-Poncet and kept the latter well-informed on the secret service activity conducted from within the Berlin embassy.²⁵ Among Dejean's modest network of informants was Hans-Thilo Schmidt, the SR's most important agent of the inter-war period. Dejean was also in regular contact with SR Centrale in Paris. The diary of SR chief Colonel Louis Rivet contains references to eleven different personal interviews with Dejean between June 1936 and July 1939.²⁶ Until 1938, however, secret intelligence gathering inside Germany was limited to Dejean. It was only at this point that the Quai d'Orsay agreed to the stationing of SR officers in French consulates. By early 1939 there were SR *antennes* established in French consulates in Dresden, Leipzig, Munich, Nuremberg, and Sarrebrück. Posing as consular officials, the chief function of these officers was to report on military preparations in the region to which they were posted. While they sometimes aided in the recruitment of informants, they did not manage agent networks. This was the task of SR posts in France and in the states surrounding Germany.²⁷

Most secret intelligence collection was done by the big SR posts in Lille, Metz, Belfort, and Marseilles. Each of these was responsible for operations within a given geographical area. The station at Lille, for example, was responsible for northern Germany, Belgium, and Holland, the one at Metz for Luxembourg and the Franco-German border along the Palatinate. The Rhineland and Switzerland were the responsibility of the Belfort post. In addition, each station was responsible for surveying a portion of the German press and all were part of the SR signals intelligence network surrounding Germany.²⁸

The SR stations were in effect large information processing centres. Much of their work consisted in managing the flow of intelligence from

²⁵ SHAT, ARR, 647, dr. 14254, 'Note au sujet de Maurice Dejean', Jan. 1942. See also MAÉ, Section d'Histoire Orale, Maurice Dejean Interview and André François-Poncet, *Souvenirs d'une ambassade à Berlin* (Paris, 1946), 5–6.

²⁶ *Carnets Rivet*, i, 6 Nov. 1936 and 23 Apr. 1938.

²⁷ See the dossier 'Réunion des chefs de poste (janvier, 1937)', in SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236 and ARR, dr. 1428, dossier entitled 'Postes externes', various dates. See also SHAT, 7N 2501, 'Rôle et fonctions du Deuxième Bureau en temps de paix', 15 Aug. 1929; Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 43–4.

²⁸ SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'Réunion des chefs de poste (janvier, 1937)', and SHAT, 7N 2501, 'Rôle et fonctions du Deuxième Bureau en temps de paix', 15 Aug. 1929. For published explanations of the French system of managing agents, see Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 53–5; Paillolle, *Services spéciaux*, 19–44, 115–17, and *Notre espion chez Hitler*, 17–33.

the press, from agents, and from German signals traffic. They were also charged with counter-espionage, however, and worked in close cooperation with the local police and with officers of the *Sûreté Nationale* to keep track of the activities of hundreds of foreign (especially German) and French nationals. In early 1937 each station was staffed by fifteen to twenty SR officers, roughly half of whom would be charged with counter-espionage work. Each station ran its own network of agents and informants, each had its own budget. A rapid survey of the yearly reports prepared by the stations in early 1937 reveals the extent of their role in the intelligence effort against Germany.

The monthly budget for the Belfort post for 1936 was just under 100,000 francs. These funds were used to finance a network that included unidentified sources inside the Austrian foreign ministry and the *Wehrmacht*.²⁹ Until the advent of the Franco-Italian military agreements of 1935, the post at Marseilles had gathered intelligence on Italy. That summer it had been partially dismantled and its efforts reoriented towards Germany. By January 1937 the post had managed to 'establish numerous contacts and recruit several agents' but the quality of the intelligence provided by this network was considered 'at best mediocre'. Significantly, however, the outbreak of war in Spain had prompted the Marseilles post to begin preparing for a resumption of intelligence work against Italy.³⁰ The station at Lille recruited sixty new agents in 1936. More than thirty of these were retained in its network of more than one hundred agents in Belgium, Holland, northern Germany, and Denmark. Within this *reseau*, four sources (the identities of whom are not mentioned) were considered 'very well-placed' and capable of providing 'intelligence of the highest value'.³¹ The Metz station provided the most detailed account of its activities. It maintained a network of nineteen regular agents, five double agents, recruited thirty-four new 'sources' (twelve of which were retained), and kept six additional agents 'asleep' but available when necessary. Thus, despite losing nine of its paid informants to arrest by the Gestapo, the Metz post conducted 450 interviews with its agents and forwarded 1,722 individual reports to SR Centrale in 1936.³²

²⁹ SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'Activité du poste [SCM] au cours de l'année 1936', 13 Jan. 1936.

³⁰ SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'Rapport sur l'activité du poste en 1936', 13 Jan. 1936.

³¹ SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'Rapport sur l'activité du B.E.N.E. en 1936', 6 Jan. 1936.

³² SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'Activité du Poste [BRÉM] au cours de l'année 1936', 8 Jan. 1936.

Each individual piece of information that arrived at the posts was forwarded both to the SR Centrale and to the offices of the Deuxième Bureau in Paris. During periods of tension a given post might forward reports several times per day. During this period SR Centrale comprised an average of sixteen to eighteen military and thirty civilian personnel. Its offices on the avenue de Tourville were divided into two principal departments. The first, the Section de Recherche, was composed of three geographical and two specialist sections.³³ The second major section, the Section de Centralisation des Renseignements, was responsible for counter-espionage in liaison with the Renseignement Généraux section of the Sûreté Nationale at the ministry of the interior. Common to both the research and counter-espionage departments of the SR were the sections responsible for 'research by technical means'. The most important of these was the Section du Chiffre, or Section D, under Commandant (later General) Gustave Bertrand, responsible for signals intelligence. Bertrand was in charge of an SR *réseau d'écoute* that ringed Germany with thirteen major listening posts. These posts were staffed by army and air force signals intelligence specialists who used direction finding and traffic analysis to track the growth and deployment of the Wehrmacht.³⁴

The performance of French signals intelligence during the pre-war decade remains shrouded in mystery. It is safe to assume that traffic analysis from the *réseau d'écoute* was an important source for compiling detailed orders of battle for the Reichswehr and especially the Luftwaffe. In 1936 the SR also placed telephone taps on the German, Italian, British, and Soviet embassies. It is unclear, however, how long this was kept up or what information was acquired as a result.³⁵ What is clear is that French code-breakers were unable to read high-grade German diplomatic or military ciphers. Before, during, and after the First World War the Cabinet Noir had been very successful in breaking into German diplomatic and military traffic.³⁶ During the late 1920s and through the 1930s, however, German diplomats communicated important messages using either unbreakable one-time pads or by

³³ Personnel figure from, *Carnets Rivet*, i, 31 July 1936. Henri Navarre gives the higher average figure of 55 military staff at AR Centrale: *Service de renseignements*, 39–41.

³⁴ SHAT, 7N 2492–3, 'Le Réseau d'écoute', Note from Colonel Roux (Chief of the SR) to General Gamelin, 28 Oct. 1935.

³⁵ *Carnets Rivet*, i, 27 July, 4, 20 Aug., 4, 17 Sept. 1936. This tap was placed at the express request of the foreign ministry.

³⁶ Andrew, 'Déchiffrement et diplomatie', 59–60; Kahn, *Codebreakers*, 298–319; and Porch, *French Secret Services*, 104–11.

enciphering and then re-ciphering communications in the Floradora code, which French cryptanalysts were unable to read consistently.³⁷ The German army, navy, air force, and secret police (Sicherheitsdienst or SD) used the highly complex electro-mechanical Enigma enciphering machine. The Enigma machine enciphered messages using wired code-wheels set in precise positions and an electrical plugboard. Even if one possessed an Enigma machine, in order to read these messages one needed to know the advance settings (the keys) of the code-wheels. The design of the machine permitted 10.5 trillion possible settings. The German military therefore judged the machine impregnable.³⁸

The Enigma system proved impossible for French or British cryptologists to solve before the Second World War. French espionage, however, played a crucial role in the successful attack on the Enigma machine which resulted ultimately in the Ultra intercepts which played such an important role in the Second World War.³⁹ In November of 1931 the SR obtained an instruction manual and directions for the setting of keys for the Enigma machine from agent Hans-Thilo Schmidt, a German working in the cipher branch of the German army. These documents were passed along to Section D and to Colonel Étienne Bazéries, a legendary figure in the annals of French code-breaking. But French cryptanalysis at this stage remained oriented towards linguistics and Section D lacked the necessary mathematicians to tackle this complex problem. Bertrand was advised that the manual and key settings provided by Schmidt could not be used to break the Enigma machine. Bertrand then cast his net wider and in December copies of the documents provided by Schmidt were sent to the Government Code and Cipher School in Britain through the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) station chief in Paris Commander Wilfred (Biffy)

³⁷ There is no evidence whatsoever in the archives consulted for this study that French signals intelligence was able to read encrypted German diplomatic traffic during the 1930s. On the problem of the 'Floradora' code, see P. W. Filby, 'Floradora and a Unique Break into One-Time Pad Ciphers', *INS* 10 (1995), 408–22 and Andrew, *Secret Service*, 499.

³⁸ On the Enigma machine, see D. Kahn, *Seizing the Enigma: The Race to Break the German U-Boat Codes* (London, 1992), 31–44.

³⁹ The following paragraph is taken from SHAT, 1K 545, Fonds Paillole, Carton 11, drs. 17–19 and Carton 12, dr. 2, sdr, 2; G. Bloch, 'Enigma' avant 'Ultra' (1930–1940) (Paris, 1988), chs. A–F; Kahn, *Seizing the Enigma*, 31–67; 'The Polish, French and British Contributions to the Breaking of the Enigma: A Revised Account', in F. H. Hinsley, et al., *British Intelligence and the Second World War*, iv/2 (London, 1988), 945–59; Bertrand, *Énigma*, 11–78; and J. Stengers, 'Enigma, the French, the Poles and the British, 1931–1940', in C. Andrew and D. Dilks (eds.), *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1984), 126–37.

Dunderdale. The British, after an apparently very cursory examination of the documents, rendered the same judgement as French cryptanalysts. The material obtained from Schmidt was also communicated by Bertrand personally to the signals intelligence section of the Polish general staff, the *Biuro Szyfrów* under the direction of a Major Gwido Langer. The Poles exercised more patience working with the documents than their French and British counterparts. Bertrand therefore communicated further information obtained from Schmidt, including regular deliveries of the all-important wheel-settings, during the next seven years. In all Schmidt provided the SR with the settings keys for thirty-eight of the eighty-one months between 1932 and 1938. Meanwhile in Warsaw, a brilliant young mathematician named Marian Rejewski was able to use this information to solve the problem of the wiring of the code-wheels.⁴⁰ A separate section within the *Biuro Szyfrów* was established (Group BS-4) to work on the Enigma cipher. Eventually a replica of the Enigma machine was reconstructed by this group along with a 'cryptographic Bombe' which was able to scan tens of thousands of possible key settings. Using these machines the Poles were able to decrypt Enigma traffic from 1933 to late 1938. They did not reveal this secret to Bertrand and French intelligence, however, until 1939.

Human and signals intelligence formed the vast bulk of the raw information forwarded to the *Deuxième Bureau* for analysis. The SR did not normally filter the information which it received from these sources before sending it on. Occasionally, reports would include 'observations' on the intelligence being forwarded but for the most part it produced raw intelligence. Individual reports always provided an evaluation of the source. A doubtful informant might receive the appellation 'très douteuse', while a more dependable one would be described as 'généralement bien renseigné'. More valuable sources were 'bien placée et sérieuse' or simply labelled a 'très bonne source'.⁴¹ The most important sources had their own instantly recognizable code-names. The most prized French agent, Hans-Thilo Schmidt, was designated source HE, Asché, and sometimes Source Z. After the Enigma machine was broken during the phoney war the decrypts from this source were also code-named Source Z.

⁴⁰ SHAT, tK 545, Fonds Paillole, Carton 11, dr. 19, Letter from Rejewski to the widow of General Bertrand, 8 Aug. 1976.

⁴¹ See the instructions in SHAT, ARR, 1114, dr. 1389, 'Note pour les sections et les postes', 14 Feb. 1934 and ARR, 152, dr. 1428, 'Note', 6 Oct. 1937.

The information emanating from these sources, when combined with the material supplied by Section D, constituted at least 80 per cent of the intelligence which the SR supplied to the Deuxième Bureau. The remainder was secret information from human intelligence. The SR utilized three types of agents. The vast majority of its informants were classed as *occasionels*—usually army reservists, industrialists, or businessmen travelling in Germany who were instructed to make whatever observations possible and then interviewed by SR representatives upon their return. Less numerous but equally important were the *honorable correspondents*, usually businessmen, industrialists, journalists, or students staying in Germany for some length of time. Most of these were patriotic French citizens who were willing to provide information on their activities to the SR, but who were unpaid. Some of the honourable correspondents agreed to perform espionage of a minor character, such as asking specific questions of particular individuals. The vast majority, however, were merely interviewed upon their return from Germany. The *occasionels* and the *honorable correspondents* were most useful in providing economic and political intelligence through their observations of the situation inside Germany. The SR was particularly assiduous in its efforts to interview every French citizen with commercial or industrial ties in the Reich.⁴² The third type were paid agents. According to the head of the SR's German desk in 1937, there were over 1,500 agents who received instruction and remuneration inside Germany before the Second World War. Most of these were Germans betraying their country either for ideological or for financial (most often both) reasons.⁴³

The three jewels in the French human intelligence crown were Hans-Thilo Schmidt; an unidentified agent referred to simply as 'L', and, after spring 1938, Colonel Lahousen Elder von Vivremont. Schmidt was the brother of General Rudolph Schmidt, a rising star within the army general staff and eventual commander of the 1st Panzer Division. He had been in the pay of the SR since early 1931. By 1936 his brother's influence had secured for Schmidt a posting to the Forschungsamt, the signals intelligence organ created by Air minister Göring. Through nineteen clandestine meetings with Schmidt

⁴² The *Camets Rivet* reveal that the SR chief met with members of the French business community virtually every week. These citizens not only volunteered information, they often acted as unofficial recruiters for the SR, suggesting further sources of information and agreeing to act as intermediaries between the intelligence service and their own employees.

⁴³ Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 53.

between 1931 and 1939 the SR received information on the constitution of German armoured divisions, the progress made by German code-breakers in breaking French diplomatic traffic and advance warnings for several of Hitler's coups. By far his most important contribution, however, was the successful attack on the Enigma cipher machine.⁴⁴ The identity of 'L' remains a mystery. General Renondeau referred to this source as 'the communist informant designated by the letter "L" in my previous correspondence'. Whatever the case, this source provided several thick dossiers of photographed documents from the German ministry of defence between 1933 and late 1934.⁴⁵ Colonel Vivremont (code-named MAD), a former deputy chief of Austrian secret intelligence who was fundamentally anti-Nazi, passed material along to the SR through a French ex-patriot named Madeleine Bihou-Richet. Vivremont proved to be an outstanding source on political, military, and economic questions whose reports carried great weight in Paris.⁴⁶

The principles guiding the activity of France's system of agents inside Germany had changed little since the First World War. In keeping with the premium placed on military activity the vast majority of these paid informants devoted their efforts primarily towards observing the movement of military units. The SR appears to have been instinctively mistrustful of agent reports and ascribed little importance to information provided by agents on German intentions. This type of intelligence was difficult to cross-check with other sources and rarely considered significant. The exception to this general policy was the information obtained from Colonel Vivremont. Most agents, however, were counted upon only for their observations on the deployment of

⁴⁴ Documentary evidence of Schmidt's role in the French intelligence effort against Germany is scarce. There is material pertaining to Schmidt and his career in SHAT, Fonds Paillolle, 1K 545, Carton 12, drs. 1 and 2. For a rich but somewhat unreliable account, see Paillolle's *Notre espion et L'Homme des Services Secrets*, 96–123. See also Krop, *Secrets de l'espionnage français*, 395–402; and Porch, *French Secret Services*, 156–8. Schmidt was eventually betrayed to the Abwehr by Rudolph Lemoine (the SR's most important liaison and recruitment agent of the 1930s) and was shot in July 1943. See the report prepared by Lt. Colonel Bertrand in the Fonds Paillolle, 1K 545, Carton 12, dr. 1, dated 27 Nov. 1945.

⁴⁵ SHAT, 7N 2593, 'Documents photographiés', 30 Apr. 1934. 'L' may also be a reference to Lemoine (who was usually code-named 'REX'). On Lemoine, see SHAT, Fonds Paillolle, 1K 545, Carton 12, dr. 1, 'Affaire Lemoine'. For further references to 'L', see SHAT 7N 2591, 'Conversations avec l'Ambassadeur de la France', 9 Feb. 1933 and Renondeau to Paris, 20 Mar. 1933.

⁴⁶ Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 58. There are several references to 'Madelaine' in secret intelligence chief Colonel Louis Rivet's diary: *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 6 Jan. and 6 Mar. 1939.

either military units or air force squadrons. They were instructed to be as precise as possible in their observations, to specify the source of their information, and to supply facts and refrain from any analysis whatsoever.⁴⁷ To facilitate the gathering of this type of information the SR distributed photographs or detailed descriptions of various types of military equipment, regimental uniforms, and unit insignias to many paid informants.⁴⁸

The great strength of the French intelligence system was its systematic exploitation of open source information. The international press was a crucial source for both foreign intelligence and counter-espionage. The SR was able to extract a great deal of information from the German press each week. In the local and provincial press, in particular, the Nazi desire to cultivate a traditional military ethos took precedence over the intense concern with security. Although the movements of army and air force units within Germany were suppressed in the national press, they were almost always reported in local newspapers. By going through dozens of newspapers and reviews in every European language, sections of the SR, either in Paris or in the various posts in France and abroad, could follow up leads, search for both general and specific information and get an idea of the climate of opinion in foreign states. SR press surveys were supplemented by the detailed press summaries forwarded by military attachés. Thus on 25 April 1935 the Section Allemande of the Deuxième Bureau received a translation of an article written in the Soviet journal *Krassnaya Zvezda* (Moscow) on German espionage, a summary of an article from the *Manchester Guardian* about the German secret police, and an essay about Nazi labour policy written in the Czechoslovak journal *Narodni Politika* and translated by the French military mission in Prague. The major problem with this system of press exploitation was the length of time it took for the bureaucracy to process information. The article from Moscow, for example, was written on 18 June but only reached the Section Allemande on 16 July.⁴⁹ Telephone directories were another precious tool for the SR in monitoring deployment of the German army and

⁴⁷ SHAT, 7N 2685, 'Organisation du service de renseignements: Recrutement et instruction des agents', 2 Sept. 1920.

⁴⁸ SHAT, 7N 2601, 'Recherche du renseignement', 13 Apr. 1938; 7N 2685, 'Organisation du service de renseignements', 5 Sept. 1920. See also Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 50.

⁴⁹ The article from the Moscow paper is in SHAT, ARR, 1106, dr. 722, 'Article sur l'espionnage allemand', 16 July 1935; the extract from the *Manchester Guardian* is in ARR, 1120, dr. 904, 'La Police secrète du régime hitlérienne', 16 July 1935; the essay from the *Narodni Politika* is in ARR, 1088, 'Service du travail en l'Allemagne', 16 July 1935.

air force. Military installations were listed under Wehrmacht—a surprising security failure which was exploited extensively by the SR.⁵⁰ In sum, and especially in the light of the relatively meagre resources at their disposal, France's intelligence gathering organs processed an impressive mass of information each week.

III

All incoming intelligence from both open and clandestine sources was channelled to the offices of the Deuxième Bureau on the rue de l'Université across from the Hôtel des Invalides. The SAE was responsible for collating and analysing all military intelligence and producing assessments. Its organization illustrates the extent to which intelligence gathering was geared towards Germany. The SAE was divided into four geographical sections. In 1938 there were more analysts attached to the Section Allemande than to all other geographic sections combined.⁵¹ There was no economic intelligence section within the Deuxième Bureau and France did not develop an equivalent to the British Industrial Intelligence Centre during the inter-war period. Plans had been drawn up for the creation of such a section in 1919 but had been abandoned during the 1920s. Responsibility for monitoring the German economy, therefore, fell to the Section Allemande and to the general secretariat of the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale (SGDN).

The SAE produced daily *comptes-rendus*, weekly *rapports hebdomadaires*, and tri-annual *bulletins des renseignements*. The weekly intelligence briefs prepared by the SAE were distributed to the high command, the ministry of war, the foreign ministry, the air ministry, and the ministry of the marine. These briefs provided the entire French defence establishment with detailed updates on the situation in Germany. The more substantial *bulletins de renseignements* were circulated to the ministry of war, the service ministries, and to the general staff. These documents were syntheses of the information the Deuxième Bureau had received during the preceding three months. They usually ran to sixty or seventy pages

⁵⁰ SHAT, 7N 2598, 'Activité du Berlin post', 2 Dec. 1936 and Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 50–55.

⁵¹ SHAT, 7N 2501, 'Rôle et fonctions du Deuxième Bureau en temps de paix', 15 Aug. 1929; Carré, 'Les Attachés militaires', 157–8.

and are invaluable for the insight they provide into French perceptions of the European balance of power during this period.⁵²

There was substantial information sharing within the defence and foreign policy establishment during the 1930s. In addition to attaché reports and secret intelligence from the SR, SAE assessments were drawn from the reports prepared by France's financial and commercial attachés stationed in Berlin as well as information obtained in daily intelligence exchanges with the air and naval Deuxième Bureaux.⁵³ Cooperation with foreign intelligence services was another useful means of gathering information. There were regular meetings with Polish and Czechoslovak intelligence through the 1930s. The relationship with the Czech general staff was particularly close. The SR operated a Poste Mixte in Prague with the full cooperation of chief of Czechoslovak intelligence, Colonel František Moravec.⁵⁴ In fact, by agreeing to pay 50 per cent of its operating costs, the SR gained access to the extensive network of agents the Czechs had established in Germany, in particular the Czechoslovaks' prize spy, the well-placed but at times over-excitable Major Paul Thümmel of the Abwehr (German secret intelligence).⁵⁵ Conversely, with the exception of steady exchanges of information about Bolshevik subversion, intelligence sharing between France and Britain appears to have been rather one-sided. French intelligence forwarded assessments of German military power to London consistently throughout the 1930s. Indeed, according to Sir Harry Hinsley, the common practice of the British Military Intelligence Directorate was to defer to French assessments in questions concerning the German army.⁵⁶ Up to the spring of 1939,

⁵² The same is true of the practices of the Air Deuxième Bureau, which produced *bulletins de renseignements* every three months rather than monthly: SHAA, 2B 98, no. 224, July 1936, 'Les Renseignements'.

⁵³ SHAA, Section d'Histoire Orale, interview with Général Charles Lauzin, Interviews nos. 63 and 111 (première band), 22 Feb. 1977.

⁵⁴ The Czechoslovaks ran an extensive agent network primarily in eastern Germany. The pride of this network was Paul Thümmel (A-54), a senior Abwehr officer who supplied the Czechoslovak, then later the British, with political and military information of varying quality from 1936 through 1941. See F. Moravec, *Master of Spies* (London, 1975), 77–87 and C. Amort and I. M. Jedlica, *The Canaris File* (London, 1970), 23.

⁵⁵ SHAT, 7N 2682–1, 'Annexe aux statuts du M.', 1 May 1936 and 7N 2522, Report on Czechoslovak intelligence by Colonel H. Kühnmunch (chief of the Belfort SR station), 13 Apr. 1938. After 1936 the Prague post was referred to as a 'poste de liaison'. See the sub-dossier on the Prague station in ARR, 152, dr. 1432. On exchanges with the Poles, see the documentation in ARR, 152, dr. 1430.

⁵⁶ Hinsley *et al.*, *British Intelligence*, i. 54. See also Castellan, *Le Réarmement clandestin*, 174–6; and Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 37–8.

however, the archives of the army and air Deuxième Bureaux are devoid of substantial information from British intelligence. In Britain, the sharing of information with France was subject to strict regulations from a ministerial committee responsible for determining permissible levels of intelligence sharing.⁵⁷

Finally, the Deuxième Bureau exchanged information with the Quai d'Orsay on a daily basis. From 1936 to the outbreak of war Captain Paul de Villelume met with a representative from the European department of the Department of Political and Commercial Affairs (DAPC) at the foreign ministry every afternoon.⁵⁸ A steady flow of raw intelligence was also forwarded by the SR to the DAPC each week. In addition, Colonel Rivet's diary reveals that there were frequent consultations between foreign ministry and SR officials on a wide range of issues from signals security to counter-espionage.⁵⁹ Information obtained from the Quai d'Orsay always constituted an important portion of the weekly *rapports hebdomadaires* prepared by the SAE.⁶⁰ The arrangement was just as important to the foreign ministry, which did not possess its own secret intelligence service and usually forbade its representatives from engaging in espionage while posted abroad. In fact, the volume of information moving between the Quai d'Orsay and the Deuxième Bureau often strained the inadequate telephone network used by the general staff. As a result, Deuxième Bureau officers had often to go by foot from the offices of the general staff on the Boulevard Saint Germain to the Quai d'Orsay when delivering urgent messages.⁶¹

Despite this constant exchange of information, there was considerable tension between the foreign ministry and the intelligence community. Much of the tension arose from the Quai d'Orsay's reluctance to arrest and prosecute foreign nationals for espionage during the early and mid-1930s. Another bone of contention was the role of SR officers in diplomatic missions. The foreign ministry often sought to limit the activity of intelligence operatives in embassies and ministries, insisting, for example, that SR officers abstain from gathering intelligence on the state in which they were posted. The Quai also resisted pressure

⁵⁷ Hinsley *et al.*, *British Intelligence*, i. 39, 488.

⁵⁸ SHAT, 7N 2522-2, 'Note pour les sections', undated.

⁵⁹ SHAT, ARR, 1114, dr. 1388, 'Note pour les sections', 1 May 1932, for instructions on forwarding intelligence to the DAPC. See also the first two tomes of the *Carnets Rivet*, i and ii.

⁶⁰ These bulletins are in SHAT, 7N 2512-2515.

⁶¹ Du Réau, 'L'Information du décideur', 528-9.

from the SR to establish operatives in various French Consulates in Germany right up until late 1938.⁶² Paradoxically, although the foreign ministry was reluctant to engage in espionage, ambassadors and ministers posted abroad played an important role in human intelligence gathering. The *fonds secrets* were forwarded directly from the war (later defence) ministry to the diplomatic missions to which SR operatives were attached. But these funds were placed under the theoretical control of the chief of the mission.⁶³ In the case of the Berlin embassy, François-Poncet was supportive of Maurice Dejean's activities and cooperated closely with the SR in the search for secret intelligence.⁶⁴

François-Poncet appears to have been an exception however. Most SR officers expressed frustration at the foreign ministry's attitude towards cooperating with the SR in gathering information. The SR complained that the foreign ministry did not understand the threat that foreign espionage presented to French security. It also lamented, with some justification, that the Quai d'Orsay underestimated the importance of secret intelligence to policy making.⁶⁵ The foreign ministry itself did not undertake to establish its own secret intelligence service until the very eve of war. By this time there were military intelligence operatives in every French consulate in Germany and these officials played a key role in tracking the deployment of the Wehrmacht and in monitoring the general situation in the region to which they were posted for the Deuxième Bureau.⁶⁶

There was also a serious breakdown in coordination between the SR and the foreign ministry in the domain of signals intelligence. Inadequate progress in this area had been made since the confused period prior to the First World War and the activity of the cryptanalytic

⁶² For SR frustration on these issues, see esp. SHAT, ARR, dr. 236, 'Réunion des chefs de poste (janvier 1937)', 4 Feb. 1937; 'L'Activité du poste [BRÉM] au cours de l'année 1936', 8 Jan. 1936; and Rivet's testimonial in the Fonds Paillolle, 1K 545, Carton 1, dr. 3, 'Rapports du SR avec le ministre', 1941. See also the memoirs of Navarre and Paillolle cited above.

⁶³ SHAT, ARR, 152, dr. 1429, 'Note au sujet du fonctionnement du SR créée par l'EMA et attaché aux missions ou aux attachés militaires', 4 May 1920.

⁶⁴ SHAT, ARR, 647, dr. 14254, Jan. 1942; MAÉ, Section d'Histoire Orale, Maurice Dejean Interview and André François-Poncet, *Souvenirs d'une ambassade à Berlin* (Paris, 1946), 5–6.

⁶⁵ These complaints surface repeatedly in the documentation. See esp. Rivet's testimonial in the Fonds Paillolle, 1K 545, Carton 1, dr. 3, 'Rapports du SR avec le ministre', 1941 as well as Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 47 and Paillolle, *Notre espion chez Hitler*, 47, 83.

⁶⁶ SHAT, 7N 2601, 'Recherche du renseignement', 13 Apr. 1938. This system was established after Apr. 1938, with operatives disguised as members of consular staffs.

section of the foreign ministry, the Cabinet Noir, was not coordinated with that of Colonel Bertrand's *service d'écoute*.⁶⁷ During this period the SR forwarded a steady stream of intercepted and translated diplomatic traffic to the Quai d'Orsay. Every morning a collection of intercepted diplomatic telegrams from both the Cabinet Noir and Écoutes Guerre, known as the *papiers verts*, would be distributed to the relevant sections within the Quai d'Orsay.⁶⁸ The relationship was not reciprocal however. SR chief Rivet complained that the SR received nothing in return. He urged that a 'mechanism of liaison between all organs charged with signals intelligence' be created and attached to the Premier's office.⁶⁹ But this proposal, which would have created an inter-ministerial organ similar to the Government Codes and Ciphers School in Britain, was never implemented and French signals intelligence remained fractured through to the outbreak of war.

The foreign ministry's apparent disinterest in coordinating signals intelligence with the SR reflected the prevailing attitude of France's diplomats towards military intelligence. Officials at the Quai d'Orsay tended to be ambivalent about Deuxième Bureau assessments. Estimates of the size of Germany's armed forces and the pace of German rearmament, that is German capabilities, were accepted almost without question by diplomats. Yet these same officials tended to view political intelligence assessments with disdain, regarding this as the domain of diplomats rather than soldiers.⁷⁰ As a result, the foreign ministry and the general staff held two very different interpretations of Nazi foreign policy for most of the 1930s. The attitude of foreign ministry officials was unfortunate. Although the interpretation advanced by military analysts was more pessimistic, it was also more accurate.

Using this system of information gathering, synthesis, and analysis, the army Deuxième Bureau was able to construct remarkably accurate

⁶⁷ On this question, see Andrew, 'Déchiffrement et diplomatie'; *id.*, 'Codebreakers and Foreign Offices: The French, British and American Experiences', in Andrew and Dilks (eds.), *The Missing Dimension*, 37; and *id.*, 'France and the German Menace', in May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies*, 129–31.

⁶⁸ E. de Crouy-Chanel, *Alexis Léger: L'Autre Visage de Saint-John Perse* (Paris, 1989), 180–1 and an interview with Jean Daridan, a junior official within the DAPC during the late 1930s, 13 Sept. 1993.

⁶⁹ SHAT, 7N 2492–3, 'Le Réseau d'écoute', Rivet to Gamelin, 28 Oct. 1936. On the *papiers verts*, see de Crouy-Chanel, *Alexis Léger*, 179–80.

⁷⁰ Interview with Jean Daridan, 13 Sept. 1993. There are indications that this attitude persists within the Quai d'Orsay. See the reflections of the eminent former diplomat and ambassador Guy Georgy, 'La Diplomatie française et le renseignement', in Lacoste (ed.), *La Renseignement à la française*, 509–16.

breakdowns of the German order of battle which listed the location of every infantry and armoured division and which could be presented to decision makers virtually upon demand.⁷¹ The problem with the French system was that it could not look deeper into the German military machine to measure the combat effectiveness of the units it had identified with such precision. It was effective in identifying regular divisions but was less useful in evaluating the combat readiness of these formations because it made no distinction between skeletal divisions and those which had been fully constituted. Nor did it measure with any precision the extent to which these units were outfitted with modern equipment.

IV

Although the SR and the Deuxième Bureau of the army general staff were the largest intelligence agencies in France before the Second World War, the air force and navy possessed active intelligence departments of their own. The air force Deuxième Bureau was much smaller than its army counterpart. In 1936 it comprised sixteen officers as compared to the thirty-six officers of the army Deuxième Bureau.⁷² The organization of air intelligence mirrored that of the army in most respects. Most air intelligence officers were veterans of the army who had done *stages* with the army Deuxième Bureau. The chief of the air force Deuxième Bureau from 1933 to 1938 was Lt. Colonel René Duvernoy. A former cavalry officer, Duvernoy had transferred to the fledgling air corps in the summer of 1915. He was attached to the French military mission to Poland after the war. After passing through the École Supérieure de Guerre, Duvernoy spent four years with the Section Allemande of the army Deuxième Bureau before being named France's first air intelligence chief in October of 1933.⁷³

Through to the middle of 1937, the air force Deuxième Bureau profited from the reports of an exceedingly able air attaché in Berlin, Léon

⁷¹ These breakdowns were included in every *bulletin de renseignement* (BdR) which dealt with Germany. See e.g. 7N 2629-3, *BdR*, May-June 1933.

⁷² For a breakdown of the Air Force Deuxième Bureau, see SHAA, 1B 4, 'Instruction fixant l'organisation et le fonctionnement en temps de paix de l'État-Major de l'Armée de l'Air', 8 July 1936. For military intelligence, see SHAT, 7N 2484-1, 'Contrôles nominatifs du Deuxième Bureau', 1936.

⁷³ SHAA, 1P 27544 2/4, 'État des services de Colonel René Duvernoy'.

Poincaré. Because, up until March 1935, there was no official German air force, Poincaré was a civilian appointment from the air ministry. He arrived in Berlin in 1933 and over time developed an extensive network of sources that provided detailed knowledge on the growth of German air power. Poincaré was so knowledgeable, in fact, that his associates at the Reich air ministry were given to joking that he knew more about the state of German air power than they themselves.⁷⁴ Given his experience and ability to produce perceptive reports, Poincaré was not replaced when the existence of the Luftwaffe was officially proclaimed in 1935. He remained in Berlin until June 1937. In 1935 a young officer from the air force *Deuxième Bureau* Captain Paul Stehlin was appointed to assist Poincaré. Stehlin was an Alsatian who, like Poincaré, developed good relations with the German air ministry and quite extraordinary access to the personal entourage of Nazi air minister Hermann Göring. His relations with General Karl Bodenschatz, one of Göring's chief deputies, became a conduit through which select information was periodically channelled to Paris. This permitted Göring to establish lines of communication with Paris that were independent of the German foreign ministry and could be disavowed if necessary. This conduit was used to communicate advance warning of aggression against Czechoslovakia and Poland. At times this information proved potentially valuable, as were the warnings which Stehlin received in late April of 1939 of the possibility of Nazi–Soviet rapprochement. Often, however, it was intended to deceive, as was the case during the Munich Crisis.⁷⁵ The team of air attachés in Berlin played a crucial role in charting the growth of the German air force from its embryonic stages as a clandestine arm of the Reichswehr to its emergence as the most powerful air force in the world by 1938.

In addition to attaché reports, the air force *Deuxième Bureau* received a steady flow of intelligence from the SR. The air ministry did not possess a human intelligence organization of its own. Instead a *Section Aéronautique* within the SR staffed by two officers of the air force *Deuxième Bureau* was responsible for the synthesis of secret information on the German air force provided by the espionage network of the SR. Nor did the air force possess its own *service d'écoute*. Instead, air force officers were part of the SR *réseau d'écoute* ringing Germany.⁷⁶ Preparing

⁷⁴ Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 59–65.

⁷⁵ See below, pp. 257–8.

⁷⁶ SHAA, 2B 98, 'Renseigner', July 1936. See also Jean Bézin, *SR Air* (Paris, 1979) and Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 39–40. The *Section Aéronautique* was established under the direction of Colonel Georges Ronin.

assessments was the responsibility of the *Section des Aéronautiques Etrangères* (SAE-AIR). Research on Germany dominated the activity of air intelligence during this period. An entire subsection of the SAE-AIR, the *Section Allemande*, was devoted to research on the *Luftwaffe*. This section, headed by Major Sebastien Loriot for most of this period, prepared regular *études*, *notices*, and *mémentos* on the German air force. This material was synthesized with that produced by the various other geographical sections in the lengthy *bulletins de renseignements* which air intelligence prepared tri-annually.⁷⁷ Air intelligence officers briefed members of the high command at weekly meetings and forwarded reports to the air minister's *cabinet militaire*. Relations between military and air intelligence were intimate. An officer from the army Deuxième Bureau was charged with daily liaison between the SAE and the SAE-AIR.⁷⁸ This system functioned satisfactorily. The *bulletins de renseignements* produced by the army Deuxième Bureau always included a section on German air power. Similarly, a breakdown of the size and strength of the German army was a fixture in air intelligence bulletins.

The effectiveness of air intelligence assessments was limited, however, by their narrow focus. The approach of the air force Deuxième Bureau was less sophisticated than that of the army Deuxième Bureau. The vast majority of air intelligence appreciations dealt with technical issues such as the *Luftwaffe* order of battle or the productive capabilities of the German aircraft industry. They rarely speculated on the more difficult question of intentions. In addition, in contrast to its army counterpart, the SAE-AIR rarely analysed the political or economic situation inside Germany and its ramifications on the future course of German foreign policy. Nor did it formulate the grand strategic overviews which Gauché and his staff produced for the army general staff.

Naval intelligence was much better established than air intelligence. The Deuxième Bureau of the Marine general staff was divided into three key sections. The first, the *Section Protocole*, was charged with relations with foreign navies, including the appointment of naval attachés and liaison with attachés from other states posted to France. The second, the *Section Recherche de Renseignements*, was responsible for orchestrating intelligence collection according to the mandates set by the rest of the naval staff and in cooperation with the army and air force

⁷⁷ SHAA, 1B 4, 'Instruction fixant l'organisation et le fonctionnement en temps de paix de l'État-Major de l'Armée de l'Air', 8 July 1936.

⁷⁸ SHAT, 7N 2697, 'Note pour le commandement', 8 July 1936. See also Gauché, *Deuxième Bureau au travail*, 130.

Deuxième Bureaux and the Sûreté Nationale. *The Section Exploitation* was responsible for the synthesis and analysis of incoming intelligence from all sources.⁷⁹

There was also a small naval secret service (*Section R*) attached to the Deuxième Bureau. While precise figures are unavailable, it is clear that the naval SR was under-funded in comparison to its army counterpart. Secret intelligence on foreign navies was collected by a network of eleven *postes*, including six *services de recherches* and five *services de surveillance*.⁸⁰ The larger *services de recherches* were staffed by naval SR officers and were responsible for surveying the local press and recruiting agents. The *services de surveillance* were staffed either by naval attachés or by SR officers but did not run agents. There were two stations responsible primarily for research on Germany, one at the army SR *poste* in Metz and another at Dunkerque. But the German navy was not an overriding priority. Italy was far and away the chief target of the naval SR in 1933 and the most important naval intelligence *poste* was the *service de recherches* in Toulon (SR 1) that targeted the Italian navy. Indeed, the funding of the Toulon station was three times greater than that for the Metz and Dunkerque stations. Nor was the Metz station considered to be an effective post during the early 1930s. A report on the activity of the naval SR prepared in March 1932 expressed disappointment in the work of the two officers attached to the Metz station, lamenting that they had managed to produce 'only a few interesting documents in the past two years'.⁸¹ The resources devoted to intelligence work on the German navy must have increased along with the rate of German naval rearmament during the 1930s. Unfortunately, a lack of documentation on the activity of the Marine SR after 1933 makes it impossible to measure this increase with any precision.

Information from these sources was used by the *Section Exploitation* to prepare daily *comptes-rendus*, frequent *bulletins d'études*, and

⁷⁹ This description is based on France, Ministère de la Défense, Service Historique de la Marine, Vincennes (cited hereafter as SHM), SHM, 1BB2 1, 'Attributions des bureaux, sections et services de l'État-Major Général', 20 Mar. 1937. See also M. Duval, 'Le Renseignement naval français, 1938-1945' (memoir account by a veteran), in Lacoste (ed.), *Le renseignement à la française*, 172-5.

⁸⁰ SHM, 1BB2 95-1, 'Situation des services secrets: Examen de leur rendement', 18 Mar. 1932. According to Marcel Duval, many agents working against Germany were recruited from the left-leaning merchant marine wing of the International Transport Federation. See 'Le Renseignement naval français', 174. Duval also claims that there was a signals intelligence unit within the naval SR, but no record has survived of its existence in the French naval archives.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* See also SHM, 1BB2 95-1, 'Rendement des SR de la Marine', 12 Jan. 1933.

monthly *bulletins de renseignements* that were circulated to the intelligence departments of the other two services and to the Quai d'Orsay.⁸² The quality of these assessments varied. They focused for the most part on technical concerns such as the amount of ship tonnage existing or under construction in various states. Within the naval staff, responsibility for drafting strategic overviews lay not with the Deuxième Bureau but instead with the Section d'Études des Armements Navals. This section, which would be expanded and renamed the Section d'Études Générales in 1937, had been established in 1931 by incoming naval chief of staff Admiral Georges Durand-Viel. Its mandate was to integrate all questions of naval policy and foreign affairs in planning documents for the use of the chief of staff and minister of the marine. The head of the Section d'Études was Vice-Admiral Jean Decoux, Durand-Viel's most trusted adviser and also secretary of the Conseil Supérieur de la Marine.⁸³ The many studies produced by this key section permit the historian to trace the evolution of French naval policy throughout the Nazi period.

A final important information gathering organ was the Secrétariat Générale of the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale (SGDN) headed by army General Louis Jamet. From its headquarters on the Boulevard St Germain, the SGDN was responsible for planning France's industrial and economic transition from peace to war. It was comprised of both civilian and military personnel and was tied directly to the Premier's office. The SGDN was at the epicentre of the French defence establishment. It stood at the intersection of the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale (CSDN), the army high command, the war ministry, and the Premier's office. Its memorandums and directives were an expression of French grand strategy and the French way in warfare as articulated at the highest level of the civil–military defence structure. One section within the SGDN was charged with collecting data on the economic activity of foreign powers. The focus of this Troisième Section was unquestionably Germany and SGDN officials worked in close cooperation with the Deuxième Bureau in constructing a general picture of the economic situation inside Germany. This research laid the groundwork for French plans for economic warfare against Germany. In May of 1939 the SGDN collaborated with the

⁸² SHM, 1BB2 1, 'Attributions des bureaux, sections et services de l'État-Major Général', 20 Mar. 1937.

⁸³ On the role of the Section d'Études, see W. G. Perrett, 'French Naval Policy and Foreign Affairs 1930–39', Ph.D. diss. (Stanford, Calif., 1977), 83–4.

Quai d'Orsay in designing the French ministry for economic warfare, the Ministère de Blocus.⁸⁴

V

The central criticism of intelligence veterans in the memoirs of this period is that intelligence chiefs lacked access to civilian decision makers. In a testimonial prepared after the defeat of 1940, SR chief Rivet denounced 'the bureaucratic barriers erected by poor organization or simply by suspicion' that separated policy makers from the intelligence services. He also deplored the fact that he had only five face to face meetings with minister of national defence Édouard Daladier (who also served as Premier after April 1938) between June 1936 and September 1939.⁸⁵ Similarly, Henri Navarre lamented that there were 'practically no direct links between the SR and the government'. The result, according to this view, was that intelligence was not integrated into the decision making process and this criticism has been widely endorsed by historians of French intelligence.⁸⁶ Viewed in context, however, this charge appears overstated. For much of this period, Rivet attended fortnightly intelligence conferences that were usually chaired by the Premier, Léon Blum. Moreover, Rivet's diary reveals that he was in frequent contact with the heads of Daladier's military cabinet, Generals Victor Bourret and Jules Decamp, and the Premier's civilian chief of staff, Roger Génébrier. It is also clear from this source that Daladier communicated regular requests for information via the high command.⁸⁷ Finally, it is important to remember that heads of state rarely saw secret service chiefs personally during the inter-war period. The concept of the daily intelligence brief evolved out of the experiences of the Second World War and the Cold War.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ On the SGDN, see Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 27–9 and Kielsing, *Arming against Hitler*, 12–40.

⁸⁵ SHAT, Fonds Paillolle, 1K 545, Carton 1, dr. 3, 'Rapports du SR avec le ministre', 1941.

⁸⁶ Navarre cited from *Le Temps des vérités*, 45. See also Paillolle, *Services spéciaux*, esp. 67–73 and Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, esp. 54–7. Historians who have accepted their claims include Porch, *French Secret Services*, 134–73 and Adamthwaite, 'French Intelligence', 202–3.

⁸⁷ There are references to twenty-four separate meetings between Rivet and the chiefs of Daladier's military cabinet and seventeen meetings with the heads of the Premier's civilian cabinet in the *Carnets Rivet* from June 1936 to Mar. 1939.

⁸⁸ On this question, see also Alexander, 'Did the 2e Bureau work?', 310–15.

The archival record reveals that high-level decision makers had regular access to intelligence. Attaché reports, for example, were addressed directly to ministers and are often marked ‘seen by the minister’. Deuxième Bureau assessments, conversely, usually passed through a formidable bureaucratic chain before reaching civilian policy makers. A typical synthesis from the analytical sections of the Deuxième Bureaux would first cross the desk of the chief or deputy chief of the Bureau, if deemed important it would be forwarded to a deputy chief of staff who would then decide if it merited the attention of the chief of staff. Exceptionally interesting reports were sent to the *cabinet militaire* of the relevant service ministry. The military cabinets were also responsible for digesting the weekly and monthly studies produced by the Deuxième Bureaux and the SGDN as well as information from the foreign ministry. Finally, it was the *cabinets militaires* that normally decided what information was to be passed on to the minister in question.⁸⁹ Hence, although face to face meetings between ministers and intelligence chiefs were rare, the latter had access to intelligence.

Rivet was justified, however, in criticizing these ‘intermediary echelons’ which, he claimed, ‘sterilized intelligence when they did not stifle it’.⁹⁰ In the French system the impact of estimates depended largely on the attitude of individual ministers and their subordinates towards intelligence. It was at the ministerial level that decisions were again taken as to what information should be distributed to other members of the government. Each of these stages constituted a ‘filter’ where information could be, and often was, distorted to suit the bureaucratic and political agendas of those responsible for the dissemination of intelligence.⁹¹ This system was particularly vulnerable to politicization because the initial and intermediary stages of the information chain outlined above were dominated by military officials whose native instincts led them to amplify the dimensions of all threats to national security.⁹²

⁸⁹ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 38, dr. 3, Norest Riom testimony, 13 May 1941; Decamp Riom testimony, 10 Oct. 1940. See also A. Adamthwaite, ‘The French Government Machine in the Approach to the Second World War’, in H. Shamir (ed.), *France and Germany in an Age of Crisis, 1900–1960*, (Leiden, 1990), 203–13.

⁹⁰ SHAT, Fonds Paillolle, 1K 545, Carton 1, dr. 3, ‘Rapports du SR avec le ministre’, 1941.

⁹¹ The concept of intelligence ‘filters’ is from Carré, ‘Les Attachés militaires’, 24–5. Richard Betts refers to different levels of bureaucracy as ‘potential bottlenecks’ in *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defence Planning* (Stanford, Calif., 1982), 92.

⁹² For a developing debate over the role of the military in the ‘intelligence culture’, see Lacoste (ed.), *Le Renseignement à la française*.

A major flaw in the French system, therefore, was the lack of an inter-ministerial committee to coordinate the collection and analysis of intelligence. There were no official mechanisms for inter-ministerial liaison whatsoever until February 1937, when the Popular Front government implemented a system of inter-departmental information sharing conferences. These conferences took place weekly either in the offices of Premier Léon Blum at the Hôtel Matignon or at the ministry of the interior on the Place Beauvau. Present were the heads of the three service Deuxième Bureaux, the SR, a representative from the DAPC of the foreign ministry, and officials from the ministries of the interior and finance.⁹³ When this system fell into abeyance in late 1937, it was not replaced until after the annexation of Austria in March of 1938, when the foreign ministry became convinced of the need to convene weekly intelligence sharing sessions at the Quai d'Orsay. Significantly, however, these weekly meetings between the intelligence services and the other ministries were forums for the exchange of information rather than the discussion of interpretative issues or policy alternatives.⁹⁴

The lack of a permanent committee charged with synthesizing the views of the different intelligence agencies was a serious handicap. It meant that France's intelligence services lacked a wider forum in which to articulate their interpretations of the situation inside Germany. Once again, however, this shortcoming should be interpreted within the context of the evolution of intelligence bureaucracies worldwide. During the 1930s no Great Power had established an effective inter-ministerial organ to coordinate the analysis of intelligence. The need for a centralized organ of assessment and the importance of 'all-source analysis' would instead be driven home by the experience of the Second World War. Even the British Joint Intelligence Community (JIC) did not begin to function effectively until it was reformed on the very eve of war.⁹⁵

After passing through the general staff, the high command, and the military cabinets at the service ministries, intelligence reached the Premier and other ministers either during meetings of the cabinet or before and during sessions of the Haut Comité Militaire (HCM). The

⁹³ All records of these meetings have apparently been lost but there are references to them in the first two volumes of the *Carnets Rivet*. See also Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau au travail*, 106 and Alexander, 'Did the 2e Bureau Work?', 310–31.

⁹⁴ This is clear from the minutes of these meetings held in SHAT, 7N 2525.

⁹⁵ This point is also stressed by Martin Alexander in 'Did the 2e Bureau Work?', 310–11. On the JIC during this period, see Andrew, *Secret Service*, 421, 483–4. On the importance of 'all source analysis', see esp. Herman, *Intelligence Power*, 101–13.

HCM, which was replaced by the Comité Permanent de la Défense Nationale (CPDN) in 1936, was the key civil–military defence body charged with ensuring the coordination of foreign policy and military planning. The meetings of the HCM were irregular. They were attended by the foreign minister, the ministers of the three services, the service chiefs of staff, and often the Premier.⁹⁶ It was here that questions of armament and disarmament, foreign policy and grand strategy were hammered out and then sent to the Conseil des Ministres (the cabinet) for approval. HCM meetings were loosely structured with no formalized arrangement for the communication of intelligence to committee members. Nor were representatives from either the service Deuxième Bureau or the SGDN present at its meetings. Moreover, while ministers or chiefs of staff often updated their colleagues on the situation in Germany, there was no permanent official responsible for presenting anything resembling an overview of received intelligence. Nor was there a standing inter-departmental committee responsible for preparing strategic overviews for the HCM or its successor after the fashion of the Defence Requirements Committee in Britain. This task was instead performed on an *ad hoc* basis by the SGDN. As a result, there was no systematic coordination of intelligence, rearmament, defence, and foreign policy in France during the 1930s.

The same types of problems extended to the French cabinet. Intelligence was never regularly distributed to cabinet members: as with the HCM, it was communicated directly by service ministers to their cabinet colleagues. Because the French cabinet kept no minutes it is impossible to discern the effect of information on German intentions and capabilities on decision making at this level. This is unfortunate as cabinet deliberations were decisive in matters pertaining to rearmament and financial policy, and particularly when it came to specific issues such as the Czechoslovak question in 1938 or the decision for war in September of 1939.

But the real problem with the French system was a lack of inter-ministerial coordination in the making of national policy.⁹⁷ The French

⁹⁶ *Procès-verbaux* exist for these meetings at the Service Historique de l'Armée at Vincennes. There were also occasional ad hoc meetings called in extraordinary circumstances and therefore of great interest. These meetings were not minuted however: Alexander, 'Did the 2e Bureau Work?', 305–6.

⁹⁷ For studies of the French cabinet system under the Third Republic, see D. Thompson, *Democracy in France since 1870* (New York, 1950), 75–115; W. R. Sharp, *The Government of the French Republic* (New York, 1938), 146–53; and F. L. Schuman, *War and Diplomacy in the French Republic* (Chicago, 1931), 378–400.

cabinet was not an effective policy making organ. With membership ranging from fifteen to thirty ministers during this period, it was not a useful forum for the discussion of policy. The ascendancy of parliament in the French political tradition was an added impediment to the effective functioning of the cabinet. If the government was to survive, it was essential for the Conseil des Ministres to project the appearance of unity. This was all the more difficult as no Premier could command a solid parliamentary majority for his Party and was thus forced to compromise in the formulation of policy. Equally important, there were no permanent organs with representatives from various ministries to prepare position papers, provide information, and frame policy proposals in the tradition of the British committee system. Nor was there a permanent secretariat responsible for administrative support. Political tradition ruled out even the recording of official minutes during cabinet meetings.

All of this made it extremely difficult for military intelligence to convey its interpretation of the international situation to higher civilian officials. The absence of any mechanism to ensure sustained interaction between diplomatic and military officials was an important factor in the divergent interpretations of the Nazi menace between the foreign ministry, on the one hand, and the army and air force Deuxième Bureaux, on the other, which characterized much of the period under consideration.

VI

The French system of intelligence gathering and analysis had its strengths. Foremost among these was the systematic exploitation of open source information, which was almost certainly superior to that of any other intelligence service during this period. Another strength was the extensive information sharing between different ministries and the army and air force Deuxième Bureaux and the SGDN, on the one hand, and the ministries of foreign affairs, commerce, and finance on the other. This system ensured that intelligence analysts within the SAE or the SAE-AIR had access to a wide range of information when formulating their assessments. It also assured that the assessments produced by these organs would receive wide circulation within the French defence establishment. Finally, the French system benefited

from its unquestioned emphasis on Germany. While the activity of the intelligence community was by no means directed exclusively towards Germany, the importance of other states was usually tied directly to their relationship to the German threat. The notable exception to this rule was the activity of naval intelligence.

There were important defects in this system however. Military domination of the intelligence machine placed crucial limitations on the collection and analysis of intelligence. Even more importantly, it conditioned the reception that intelligence received from civilian decision makers. In terms of collection, the chief preoccupation of French intelligence, as with virtually all military intelligence agencies of this period, was to establish the 'order of battle' of foreign armed forces. This overriding concern placed a premium on what David Kahn has defined as 'physical intelligence'.⁹⁸ Factors such as the movement of army units, the deployment of Luftwaffe squadrons or the construction of new armaments factories were considered the most important and reliable indicators of German intentions and capabilities. Immense resources were therefore devoted to the search for these incontrovertible facts. The result was that the army, air force, and naval Deuxième Bureaux were very proficient at reproducing the Wehrmacht order of battle and the number of munitions or aircraft factories either existing or under construction. They were less effective, however, in the equally important realm of inference. For example, while army and air force intelligence could produce a breakdown of virtually every major armaments and aircraft factory in Germany, analysts were unable to determine the level at which these plants were operating. Where no 'hard facts' were available, and it was impossible to reach secure conclusions, analyses were distorted by entrenched preconceptions and generalizations. This was the case with estimations of the rate of armaments, aircraft, and naval production throughout the decade.

Analysis of incoming material was also compromised by the failure of the intelligence community to make use of civilian expertise. There were no civilian economists or scientists working for the army or air force Deuxième Bureaux. While both the SGDN and the army Deuxième Bureau received regular reports on the political and economic situation in Germany from both the Institut des Études Européennes at

⁹⁸ D. Kahn, *Hitler's Spies* (London, 1975), 43–4. On the military preoccupation with orders of battle, see Andrew, 'Nature of Military Intelligence'.

Strasbourg and the Société d'Études et d'Informations Économiques in Paris, there were no civilian experts on these issues attached to either the Deuxième Bureau or the SR. Analysts with different intellectual backgrounds and specialized training could have provided a more comprehensive perspective on available intelligence. This would likely have improved the quality of analyses of the complex relationship between industrial activity and the pace of rearmament. It was here, as we shall see, that critical mistakes were made. The use of such specialists, however, contradicted the exclusive traditions of the French military and was never seriously considered during the inter-war period. It should be remembered, however, that similar mistakes were made in Britain, where SIS and the Government Code and Ciphers School did not begin to recruit 'professor types' until wartime conditions fostered an impressive renaissance within the British intelligence community.⁹⁹

The monopoly which the army and air force Deuxième Bureaux and the SGDN possessed over the analysis of secret intelligence was another major flaw in the French system. There was no inter-departmental committee established to coordinate the gathering and especially the analysis of information. Nor was there a permanent body responsible for synthesizing available information from all sources for the government. The British had begun developing such an institution with the creation of the Joint Intelligence Committee. The impetus for the creation of a similar organ in France should have come from the offices of either the Premier or the war minister. But no such committee was created or even proposed. An inter-departmental approach would certainly have improved the quality of assessment, since analysts with different training and background tend to draw different conclusions from the same evidence. Instead, information, especially secret information, was analysed exclusively by military officials and the perspective through which France's intelligence community viewed the German threat remained needlessly narrow.

The result was that the Deuxième Bureau operated as a self-contained community deprived of the external stimulus which would have challenged the assumptions upon which analysis was based. This could only have strengthened the influence which preconceived notions regarding the nature of modern warfare and unspoken assumptions about the German national character exercised over assessment of

⁹⁹ Hinsley *et al.*, *British Intelligence* and Andrew, *Secret Service*, 619–78.

the Nazi threat. These preconceptions limited the scope and the objectivity of the Deuxième Bureau and were the crucial failure of French intelligence before the Second World War. They marked the fine but crucially important line between the genuine pursuit of understanding and the search merely for confirmation.

French Intelligence and the Nazi *Machtergreifung*, 1933

EVER SINCE the catastrophe of May 1940, the consensus view of historians and political commentators alike has been that France's civilian and military leadership misunderstood the Nazi regime from the very beginning.¹ Yet a careful scrutiny of the archival record reveals that French soldiers and statesmen were better informed about the nature of the Nazi menace in 1933 than has hitherto been assumed. French intelligence warned that the situation inside Germany had changed fundamentally after Hitler's rise to power. Intelligence appreciations consistently predicted that the new regime was intent on a policy of massive rearmament and territorial expansion. Yet this intelligence had little effect on the course of French foreign and defence policy. France was an inward-looking society, committed to the politics of disarmament and preoccupied with the debilitating effects of the

¹ M. Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, pbk. edn. (New York, 1968), in particular the chapter 'A Frenchman Examines his Conscience'; Duroselle, *La Déca-dence*, 57–63. See also R. W. Mühle, *Frankreich und Hitler, 1933–1935* (Paderborn, 1995), 41–96. Other studies which conclude that France's leadership failed to understand the nature of the Nazi threat include: F. Taubert, *Französische Linke und Hitlerdeutschland: Deutschlandbilder und Strategieentwürfe, 1933–1939* (Berne, 1991), 29–64; Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 356–60, 440–8; P. Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926–1936* (Princeton, 1988), 259–63; Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery*, 187–8; A. Grosser, *Hitler, la presse et la naissance d'une dictature* (Paris, 1959), 127–222; A. Kimmel, *Der Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus im Spiegel der französischen Presse, 1930–1933* (Bonn, 1969); J.-M. d'Hoop, 'Frankreichs Reaction auf Hitlers Aussenpolitik, 1933–1939', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 15: 4 (1964), 211–23; H. Hörling, 'L'Opinion française face à l'avènement d'Hitler au pouvoir', *Francia* (1975), ii. 584–641; A. Prost, 'Les Anciens Combattants français et l'Allemagne, 1933–1938', and J. Droz, 'Le Parti socialiste français devant la montée du nazisme', both in *La France et l'Allemagne, 1932–1936* (Paris, 1980), 131–48 and 173–89, respectively. See also J. Bariéty, 'Les Partisans français de l'entente franco-allemande et la "prise du pouvoir" par Hitler, Avril 1932–Avril 1934', in J. Bariéty, J. M. Valentin, and A. Guth (eds.), *La France et l'Allemagne entre les deux guerres mondiales* (Nancy, 1987), 21–9 and Geneviève Bureau, 'Les Premières Réactions françaises à l'avènement d'Hitler, janvier–mars 1933', *Mémoire de maîtrise* (Paris I, 1973).

Great Depression. These factors shaped the French response to Hitler in 1933.

I

When Hitler came to power in January 1933 he had already outlined a clear direction for German foreign policy. The overriding aim of Nazi policy was expansion eastward into Russia.² This objective was inspired, in part, by the traditional pan-German ideology of expansion and colonization in the east, which had experienced something of an explosion during the First World War. Hitler had married this ideology to a crude social Darwinism and a virulent racism which made his views on foreign policy far more radical than the most extreme conservative revisionists in Weimar Germany. *Lebensraum* in European Russia would provide Germany with the arable land and raw materials to ensure both domination of the continent and world power status. Before assuming power, Hitler continually pointed to France as the chief threat to the successful realization of this *Ostpolitik*. French power constituted 'a question of life and death for Germany' and would have to be destroyed in order to 'make it possible for our people finally to expand in another quarter'.³ It is possible that Hitler was willing to envisage coexistence if France accepted German domination of Europe.⁴ But if France refused to surrender its status as a European power, another European war was inevitable.

The key to the implementation of Hitler's foreign policy programme lay in the transformation of German society. The first objective of the

² The following paragraph is taken from E. Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung: Entwurf einer Herrschaft* (Tübingen, 1969), 13–25, 79–89, and 137–59; K. Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich*, trans. A. Fothergill (London, 1973), 8–23; Manfred Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy and Preparations for War', in W. Deist, M. Messerschmidt, H. E. Volkmann, and W. Wette, *Germany and the Second World War* (cited hereafter *GSWW*), i. *The Build-up of German Aggression*, trans. P. S. Falla, D. S. McMurry, and E. Osers (Oxford, 1990), 543–7 and G. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe* (Chicago, 1970), 1–24.

³ Cited from A. Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Book*, ed. Telford Taylor (New York, 1962), 129 and *id.*, *Mein Kampf* (London, 1939), 549.

⁴ F. Knipping, 'Frankreich in Hitlers Aussenpolitik', in M. Funke (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte: Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf, 1976), 612–27 and K. Hildebrand, 'La Politique française de Hitler', in *La France et l'Allemagne, 1932–1936* (Paris, 1980), 339–71. For a broader overview of the place of France in the Nazi order, see E. Jäckel, *Frankreich in Hitlers Europa. Die deutsche Frankreichpolitik in Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1966), 13–54 in particular.

Nazi regime was to establish complete control of the machinery of state. Once this control was established the next step was to implement a policy of 'coordination' (*Gleichschaltung*) which would reorganize German society around the principles of National Socialism. The objective was the creation of a militarized 'National Community' that would march in harmony behind the leadership of Führer and Party. The overriding aim was material and psychological rearmament in preparation for the coming war. Three days after becoming Chancellor, Hitler outlined this programme to a gathering of the German high command. He concluded with the judgement that 'the most dangerous time will be during the reconstruction of the army. It will show whether or not France has any true *statesmen*. If so, she will not leave us time but will attack us.'⁵

II

How did French intelligence evaluate this threat? French intelligence had followed German military activity obsessively in the decade-and-a-half following the armistice of 1918. In 1930, for example, there were more analysts attached to Colonel Edmond Laurent's Section Allemande of the army Deuxième Bureau than to all other geographic sections combined.⁶ The limited but systematic violations committed by the German Reichswehr during this period were detailed with exhausting thoroughness by French members of the Allied control commission and the Deuxième Bureau.⁷ The army Deuxième Bureau was so efficient, in fact, that French historian Georges Castellan was able to write a 550-page history of German rearmament from 1930 to 1935 based primarily on French army intelligence records. During the months preceding the international disarmament conference in

⁵ J. Noakes and G. Pridham (eds.), *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, iii. *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, Document no. 472, 3 Feb. 1933. See also K.-J. Müller, *Das Heer und Hitler: Armee und nationalsozialistisches Regime 1933-1940* (Stuttgart, 1969), 54-62 and Bennet, *German Rearmament and the West*, 307-45.

⁶ SHAT, 7N 2501, 'Rôle et fonctions du Deuxième Bureau en temps de paix', 15 Aug. 1929; 7N 2484-2, 'Répartition du travail dans la Section Allemande', no date but certainly 1935; and Carré, 'Les Attachés militaires', 157-8. Seven officers worked under section head Major Henri Roux in 1929. On army intelligence in the aftermath of the Great War, see Ferner, *Das Deuxième Bureau*.

⁷ A summary of these transgressions is given in a note from war minister Daladier to Premier and foreign minister Paul-Boncour in *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1932-1939* (Paris, 1963-), (cited hereafter as *DDF*), 1ère série, tome ii, no. 215, 19 Jan. 1933.

Geneva, military intelligence bombarded the offices of Premier and foreign minister André Tardieu with virtually thousands of reports detailing the military character of German police and frontier security forces (Grenzschutz), ties between the Reichswehr and the huge German para-military organizations, cooperation between the German army and the Soviet Red Army, as well as myriad other violations of Article 169 of the Treaty of Versailles.⁸

Two particular aspects of the situation in Germany were the focus of intense scrutiny by the Deuxième Bureau. One was the perceived militarization of the German police. The other was the activity of various para-military associations such as the ultra-nationalist Stahlhelm and the National Socialist Sturmabteilung (SA). French observers were convinced that these associations constituted reserve cadres for the 100,000 strong professional army permitted by Versailles. Consequently, the status of Germany's various police services and para-military clubs became something of an obsession for French analysts. The result was a series of wildly distorted appreciations of the military situation in Europe. In 1921, for example, army intelligence estimated that, in addition to the regular forces of the Reichswehr, Germany could field an army of 2.4 million 'volunteers' who would 'without any doubt respond immediately to a decree of mobilization'.⁹ The result was that French strategy during the 1920s was based on a ridiculously inflated image of German military strength. Mobilization Plan A (in effect between 1924 and 1926) estimated that France would require a force of 80 divisions to save a Polish army of 50 divisions from a German invasion.¹⁰ At this time, however, the German army comprised 7 divisions, barely 100,000 men, and possessed no field artillery, no armour or

⁸ For a sampling of this material, see France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (hereafter MAÉ), Série PA-AP, Papiers Tardieu, vols. 499–523 and SHAT, Cartons 7N 2647–2651. See also Ferner, *Das Deuxième Bureau* and Castellan, *Le Réarmement clandestin du Reich*.

⁹ SHAT, 7N 2611–2, 'Evolution militaire de l'Allemagne depuis l'armistice', 37-page report prepared by the Deuxième Bureau. By the end of the decade intelligence assessments were still badly inflated. See 7N 2620, 'Note sur les possibilités actuelles de mobilisation de l'Allemagne', 15 Jan. 1930, which reckoned that Germany could field an army of 4 million men 4 to 6 weeks after mobilization was declared. See also a large collection of reports on the German army assembled for the CSG in 1932: Série supplémentaire, 1N 19, dr. 1. The conviction that police units and para-military clubs were really only militias in disguise was based, in part, on the effectiveness of the para-military Freikorps in crushing the leftist uprisings of Jan. 1919.

¹⁰ On Plan A, see F.-A. Paoli, *L'Armée française de 1919–1939: La Phase de fermeté* (Vincennes, 1969–77), 166 and M. Jacobsen, R. Levine, and W. Schwabe, *Contingency Plans for War in Western Europe, 1920–1940* (Berkeley, 1985), 15–23.

heavy equipment to speak of, and no air force. In 1926, in fact, the German high command estimated that the Reichswehr possessed enough ammunition to fight France and Poland together for approximately one-hour and was capable of no more than a 'heroic gesture' to a French invasion.¹¹ Air intelligence reports were similarly overblown. In 1932, with an eye to the proceedings of the disarmament conference underway in Geneva, the air force Deuxième Bureau produced a series of alarmist reports which warned that Germany's fleet of passenger, cargo, and mail-carrying aircraft could be immediately converted into a fleet of bombers capable of dropping 170 tonnes of explosives on Paris per day.¹² These inflated estimates of German bombing potential are summarized in a note prepared for the Haut Comité Militaire (HCM) in July. Air intelligence was correct that the Germans had begun storing aircraft for conversion into bombers but it greatly exaggerated the swiftness with which these planes could be transformed into combat-worthy machines.¹³

There were two central assumptions underpinning this obsession with German potential and the resulting tendency to exaggerate existing levels of rearmament. The first was a pervasive certainty that Germany was determined to rebuild its military power to support another bid for European hegemony. In 1922 the Chief of French military intelligence prepared a strategic overview which emphasized that:

Humiliated by its defeat, Germany is obsessed with thoughts of revenge. . . . One single danger dominates all others at the moment and that is the German danger. Without [the German menace] no other serious threat can exist and it is toward meeting this threat (and to destroying it) that all of our policies must be aimed.¹⁴

Variations on this theme appear again and again in the strategic overviews prepared by the intelligence services during the pre-Hitler period. The conviction that Germany was obsessed with *revanche* was

¹¹ Wilhelm Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', in *GSWW*, i/3, 377-8.

¹² SHAA, 1B 11, 'Les Capacités de bombardement aérien de l'Allemagne', Apr. 1932; 'Note sur l'orientation militaire de l'aviation allemande', 21 Oct. 1932; SHAA, 2B 56, 'L'Allemagne et le désarmement aérien', *BdR*, Jan. 1932; 'Les Armements secrets du Reich en matière aéronautique', *BdR*, Feb. 1932; 'Subventions occultes du Reich à l'Aéronautique', *BdR*, Sept. 1932.

¹³ SHAA, 1B 11, 'Note relative à l'estimation des possibilités maxima et minima des aviations allemandes et italiennes', 15 July 1932. See E. Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe: The Reich Air Ministry and the German Aircraft Industry: 1919-1939* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1976), 31-4.

¹⁴ SHAT, 7N 2520, 'Rapport du Colonel Fournier sur les nécessités d'une coalition contre l'Allemagne', 5 July 1922.

based on a series of firmly entrenched stereotypes about the aggressive and militarist core of the German national character. The head of the Section Allemande during this period described the German *mentalité* as ‘perpetually disturbed’ and ‘silently tormented’ by an ‘ill-defined aspiration to dominate’. This characterization was married to a psychological portrait of the typical German as a ‘barbarian who worships force’ which was common currency in France after 1870 and especially after 1914–18.¹⁵ While observers of international politics in the 1990s are somewhat more sensitive to the dangers of basing assessment on crude stereotypes of national characteristics, this caricature of the ‘Germanic spirit’ served as an automatic frame of reference for French military analysts during the inter-war period and appears repeatedly in intelligence assessments of the situation inside Germany.¹⁶ An appreciation of January 1930, for example, observed that ‘the most important source of German military potential is the unanimity of [public] opinion in its desire for war’ and that ‘in the soul of even the most peaceable German there remains the same warrior spirit which animated the imperial Army of 1914’.¹⁷ The prominence of treaty revision in Weimar political culture only reinforced this conviction.

The second decisive element shaping assessments of the German threat was an acute awareness of the Reich’s vastly superior war-making potential. Foremost among the anxieties of observers responsible for calculating the balance of strategic advantage in an age of total war was the fact that Germany’s industrial base was at least twice as large as that of France. Germany had emerged from the war with this advantage largely intact. In the mid-1930s the Reich’s share of world manufacturing output was more than twice that of France. German

¹⁵ Quotations from Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau au travail*, 29, 33. On French attitudes, see R. Schor, *L’Opinion française et les étrangers, 1919–1939* (Paris, 1985), 147–9; C. Digeon, *La Crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870–1914* (Paris, 1959); R. Rémond, ‘L’Image de l’Allemagne dans l’opinion publique française’, in K. Hildebrand and K. F. Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich, 1936–1939* (Munich, 1981), 6–7. Three useful studies of images of Germany from the 18th cent. through to the 1980s are: J. von Uthmann, *Le Diable est-il allemand? 200 ans de préjugés franco-allemands* (Paris, 1984), 135–278, for the period 1870–1939; P. Firchow, *The Death of the German Cousin: Variations on a Literary Stereotype, 1890–1920* (London, 1986); and M. Thom, ‘Tribes within Nations: The Ancient Germans and the History of Modern France’, in H. K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nations and Narration* (London, 1990), 23–4.

¹⁶ On the role of such ‘belief systems’ in intelligence assessment, see A. George, ‘The Causal Nexus between Cognitive Beliefs and Decision Making Behavior: The “Operational Code” Belief System’, in L. Falkowski (ed.), *Psychological Models in International Politics* (Boulder, Colo., 1979), 113–19.

¹⁷ SHAT, 7N 2620, ‘Plan de renseignements sur l’Allemagne’, 1 Jan. 1930.

predominance in key defence-related sectors such as steel and automobile production was especially pronounced. In 1936 Germany produced four times as much steel as France and manufactured more than five times as many automobiles. Equally significant, Germany's national income was 70 per cent larger than that of France, which meant that France needed to spend a much larger portion of its total income on defence in order to match the effort put forward across the Rhine.¹⁸ This problem would become more critical as German rearmament was pushed to unprecedented peacetime levels after 1935. Germany's industrial preponderance was a subject of profound concern for French observers throughout the inter-war period and especially after 1933. The demographic imbalance played a similar role in the process of 'net assessment'. From the French perspective, a large population was considered a central pillar of a nation's Great Power status. The practice of equating demographic with military superiority stretched back to the reign of Louis XIV. And in 1932 French observers calculated that Germany's population outnumbered that of France 62 million to 36 million.¹⁹

Anxiety concerning German industrial and demographic superiority were only enhanced by a widespread perception of French decline that was articulated by the chronic drop-off in the nation's birth-rate in the decade-and-a-half following the end of the Great War. The problem of *dénatalité* had become something of a national obsession ever since the French defeat in 1870. By the 1930s, however, it had become a material as well as a psychological element in calculations of the balance of power. From 1935 France would enter *les années creuses* (the lean years), a four-year period in which the number of available conscripts for the French army would decrease by half reflecting the dramatic drop in the national birth-rate between 1915 and 1919. The army general staff reckoned that by 1935 over 12 million males in Germany would be able to bear arms as compared to barely 6 million in France.²⁰

¹⁸ See e.g. SHAT, 2N151-3, 'Le Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935; 2N 16, CSDN meeting of 22 Nov. 1935 or AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 27 (4DA2/dr. 2), 'Rôle du secrétariat général du ministère de la défense nationale', and AP 29 (4DA4/dr. 1), 'Note sur la mobilisation industrielle', 5 Apr. 1939. On the industrial imbalance, see also H. Wehner, 'Die Rolle des faschistischen Verkehrswesens in der ersten Periode des zweiten Weltkrieges', *Bulletin des Arbeitskreises Zweiter Weltkrieg*, ii (1966), 42; P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London, 1988), 256, 426, 429.

¹⁹ For an excellent example of this 'threat perception', see the research programme established by the Deuxième Bureau for 1931 in SHAT, 7N 2620, 'Plan de renseignements sur l'Allemagne', 1 Jan. 1930.

²⁰ SHAT, 2N 223-4, 'Populations—effectifs et défense nationale', 1 Dec. 1936.

The Deuxième Bureau further predicted that the 1938 class of conscripts would number 485,000 in Germany and only 218,000 in France.²¹ Equally alarming was the realization that the number of total French births during 1935 (677,000) placed France only sixth among the nations of Europe, behind the USSR, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Great Britain, and only slightly ahead of Romania.²² One general staff report summarized the situation this way:

We are caught in demographic stagnation and soon we will be in regression. Other states are growing at our expense and soon will take our place. Economic and military ententes and arms agreements are forged without consulting us, we no longer are indispensable. One must face facts. France is no longer considered a Great Power. This is due without any doubt in large part to the decrease in its population.²³

This concern reflected the general anxiety of French intellectual and political elites that France was an 'old' nation unable to respond to the youthful dynamism that animated both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. This theme was exploited assiduously by German-sponsored propaganda in France throughout the decade.²⁴ The intelligence services tended to express this issue in general terms. A Deuxième Bureau study of 1936 warned that '[i]f energetic measures are not immediately taken to increase our birth-rate, it will be impossible for us to conserve France's Great Power status'.²⁵

It is worth emphasizing that the importance of these relative advantages had been driven home by the experience of the Great War, when it had taken the combined efforts of France, Britain, the United States, and their allies to bring Germany to its knees in 1918. When these

²¹ SHAT, 7N 2513, 'Note au sujet de la natalité et du potentiel de guerre du Reich', 24 July 1936. See also 7N 2506, *BdR*, July–Aug. 1935, 'La Situation démographique en Allemagne au début de 1935'.

²² SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Le Problème de la natalité en Allemagne, en France et en Europe', 3 Aug. 1936.

²³ SHAT, 2N 223–4, 'Population—effectifs et défense nationale', 1 Dec. 1936.

²⁴ F. Kupferman, 'Diplomatie parallèle et guerre psychologique: Le Rôle de la Ribbentrop Dienststelle dans les tentatives d'action sur l'opinion française, 1934–1939', *RI* 3 (1975), 79–83. For an excellent discussion of anxieties over the 'vieillesse' of France, see Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 198–201.

²⁵ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Le Problème de la natalité en Allemagne, en France et en Europe', 3 Aug. 1936. For further discussion of the question of *dénatalité* and the French national consciousness, see R. Tomlinson, 'The Disappearance of France: French Politics and the Birth Rate, 1896–1940', *HJ* 28: 2 (1985), 405–16; J. Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation* (Durham, NC, 1979), 135–74; and T. Zeldin, *A History of French Passions*, ii. *Intellect, Taste and Anxiety*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1994), 949–50.

factors are taken into consideration, the Deuxième Bureau's obsession with the combat-effectiveness of Nazi street brawlers seems slightly less absurd.

The interpretation of the German threat articulated by the intelligence services had little influence on French policy towards Germany during the 1920s. Intelligence reports must be placed within the context of social and political trends. During this period the German question divided left and right in France.²⁶ While it is difficult to generalize, in broad terms the politics of disarmament and treaty revision were the politics of the left. The powerful Socialist Party (SFIO) was devoted to the principle of unilateral disarmament. Its programme, articulated at the Congress of Tours in 1931, stipulated that the party would provide: 'not one man, not one franc, for the army of this bourgeois state'.²⁷ The majority of the right remained strongly nationalist and deeply suspicious of Germany. But traditional anti-Germanism was overcome by a powerful wave of pacifist sentiment which had swept over France in the late 1920s.²⁸ Both big veterans' organizations, the Union Fédérale and the Union Nationale des

²⁶ The following survey of French politics and the German question is taken from Taubert, *Französische Linke und Hitlerdeutschland*, 27–37; C. Micaud, *The French Right and Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (New York, 1942), 24–9; C. Prochasson, *Les Intellectuels, le socialisme et la guerre* (Paris, 1993), 243–6; M. Pereboom, *Democracies at the Turning Point: Britain, France and the End of the Postwar Order, 1928–1933* (New York, 1995), 184–91; Grosser, *Hitler, la presse et la naissance d'une dictature*; Kimmel, *Der Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus*, 184–221; Hörling, 'L'Opinion française face à l'avènement d'Hitler'; J. Bruhat, 'Le Parti communiste français face à l'hitlérisme', in *La France et l'Allemagne, 1932–1936* (Paris, 1980); Droz, 'Le Parti socialiste français devant la montée du nazisme', *ibid.* 177–80; and Bariéty, 'Partisans français de l'entente franco-allemande', 21–9. In the early spring the Communist Party flirted with the idea of a common front with the Socialists but, by the summer, the idea had been torpedoed by the Comintern.

²⁷ Cited in R. Gombin, *Les Socialistes et la guerre: La SFIO et la politique étrangère française entre les deux guerres mondiales* (Paris, 1970), 177 and Droz, 'Le Parti socialiste française devant la montée du nazisme', 173–89. For a useful recent study of pacifism on the French left, see Prochasson, *Les Intellectuels, le socialisme et la guerre*.

²⁸ There is a burgeoning literature on pacifism in inter-war France. Much of the latest research has been assembled in the published proceedings of a conference on European pacifism held at Reims in December 1992 and sponsored by the Association pour la Recherche sur la Paix et la Guerre. See the essays by N. Ingram, J. F. Sirinelli, F. G. Dreyfus, and M. Alexander in M. Vaisse (ed.), *Le Pacifisme en Europe: Des Années 1920 aux années 1950* (Brussels, 1993). See also N. Faucier, *Pacifisme et anti-militarisme dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris, 1983); J.-B. Duroselle, 'Les Précédents historiques: Pacifisme des années 1930 et neutralisme des années 1950', in Pierre Lellouche (ed.), *Pacifisme et dissuasion* (Paris, 1983), 241–52; and M. Vaisse, 'Le Pacifisme français dans les années trente', *RI* 53 (1988), 48–50. A superb study of 'integral' pacifism in France is N. Ingram's, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919–1939* (Oxford, 1991).

Combattants, were resolutely anti-militarist and powerful advocates of conciliation. By the early 1930s there were over 200 organized groups with pronounced pacifist leanings in France.²⁹ Significantly, the attitude of the Radical Socialist Party, which stood at the centre of the French political spectrum and was therefore decisive in the politics of this era, reflected the pacifist current in popular opinion. The most dynamic force within the Radical Party was a group of younger politicians who included Pierre Cot, Bertrand de Jouvenel, and Gaston Bergery. These *jeunes turcs*, whose chief patron was Radical Premier Edouard Daladier, were committed to disarmament and to Franco-German conciliation.³⁰ As a result, the Deuxième Bureau's thesis that Germany was obsessed with revenge was out of step with the majority of public opinion and contradicted the policy of Franco-German conciliation pursued by the foreign ministry under Aristide Briand after 1925. In fact, although most of the right remained a bastion of nationalism and hard-line anti-Germanism, during the election campaign of 1932 all major parties pledged themselves to a domestic policy of austerity and a foreign policy of disarmament and *rapprochement* with Germany.

Another factor that undermined the influence of intelligence with civilian decision makers was the military proclivity for 'worst case' assessments. To understand the reasons for this tendency, one must remember that the military establishment was under siege in the early 1930s. The army had been significantly reduced in size by the military reform legislation of 1927/8. By 1933 the prevailing atmosphere of financial austerity and the politics of disarmament combined to threaten the military with even greater reductions and, worse, the possibility of total restructuring.³¹ Perceiving a threat to their very existence, the armed services responded with intelligence reports that vastly exaggerated the military threat from Germany and Italy. But this tactic failed. As we shall see, the tendency to formulate inflated assessments of the German threat compromised the reliability of intelligence reports in the eyes of civilian officials.

²⁹ On the veterans' groups, see Prost, 'Les Anciens Combattants', 131–48 and *id.*, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society, 1914–1939* (Oxford, 1992), 51–78. On pacifist organizations, see Ingram, *Politics of Dissent*, 2–7.

³⁰ On the foreign policy views of the *jeunes turcs*, see S. Berstein, *Histoire du Parti Radical: Crise du radicalisme* (Paris, 1982), 94–109.

³¹ On this question, see, above all, Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 248–323.

III

Despite its anxiety over German military potential, the Deuxième Bureau acknowledged that Germany was in no shape to undertake a war in 1932. The German economy was in a state of utter collapse. The Reichswehr, moreover, was still no match for the French army, which remained the largest and best equipped in Europe.³² The chief danger to the peace, as one intelligence overview observed in 1931, lay in the destabilization of the Weimar regime: 'Should the present democratic system founder, it will almost certainly be replaced by an authoritarian regime of the nationalist right which would repudiate Germany's responsibilities to the international community and begin rearming as quickly as possible.'³³ The chief candidates to bring down the Weimar Republic and to establish a dictatorial regime were Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist Party.

Along with the rest of the world, French intelligence followed the slow death of the Weimar Republic closely. The effects of the Great Depression and the progressive radicalization of German politics were detailed in hundreds of reports forwarded to Paris during the early 1930s. One of the central themes in this intelligence picture was the rise in fortunes of Hitler and the Nazi Party. Initially, French observers in Berlin had been dismissive and even contemptuous of the Nazi Movement. Hitler was referred to as the 'house painter from Vienna' and rated as a 'third-rate street demagogue' whose rhetoric embodied 'the most violent and distasteful extremes in German culture and politics—rabid nationalism and visceral racism'.³⁴ But this perspective changed after 107 National Socialist Deputies were elected to the Reichstag in September 1930. From this point forward Hitler and his movement were taken much more seriously. Members of the Section Allemande in Paris read *Mein Kampf*, followed the activity of the Nazi Party attentively, and prepared a detailed study of the National Socialist programme for the high command and for the defence minister. Citing extensively from *Mein Kampf*, this report stressed the racist core of Hitler's world-view and concluded that 'the programme of the NSDAP is based essentially on *racism*, that is to say, it places the growth and

³² SHAT, 7N 2623, 'Note sur la situation générale et militaire de l'Allemagne et de l'Italie en juillet 1932' and 7N 2638-1, 'Situation politique, économique et militaire de l'Allemagne de janvier 1931 à janvier 1932', a 56-page study of 5 Sept. 1932.

³³ SHAT, 7N 2638-2, 'L'Attitude de l'Allemagne à l'égard de la France', 2 Apr. 1931.

³⁴ SHAT, 7N 2585, 'Le Mouvement national-socialist en Allemagne', 11 Feb. 1930.

superiority of the German race above all other objectives'.³⁵ And the strength of the Nazi movement seemed to be increasing exponentially. Another study entitled 'The Attitude of Germany towards France' warned that the Nazis were in the vanguard of an explosion of extreme nationalist and anti-French sentiment in Germany, particularly among German youth, and concluded that '[a] young generation of Germans imbued with the Nazi ideology will certainly constitute the gravest threat to peace in Europe in the years to come'.³⁶

In the summer of 1932 the Nazi Party achieved unprecedented success in Reichstag elections, gaining 230 seats and over 37 per cent of the popular vote to become the most powerful political movement in Germany. The Weimar Republic died a slow death in the months that followed. The extra-parliamentary 'Cabinet of Barons' failed to stabilize German politics; the Social Democratic government of Prussia was subverted and then destroyed; and the street battles between the Nazis and the Communists intensified, undermining confidence in the government's ability to maintain order. Surveying the political situation, the military attaché in Berlin declared that '[d]emocracy is well and truly dead in Germany' and that 'the stability of the regime now depends on the bayonets of the Reichswehr'.³⁷ Even after the temporary setback suffered by the Nazis in the Reichstag elections the following November, the Section Allemande considered Hitler's party 'the decisive element in the unstable political situation in Germany and the primordial obstacle to the effective functioning of any government coalition'.³⁸

Both the attaché reports from Berlin and intelligence syntheses prepared in Paris warned that the accession of Hitler would change European politics fundamentally. In May 1932, for example, the high command, the defence ministry, and the foreign ministry all received a lengthy analysis of Hitler's foreign policy from army intelligence which warned that '[t]he principal element of the Hitlerian conception of

³⁵ SHAT, 7N 2623, 'Programme du Parti National-Socialiste', 4 May 1932. Emphasis in the original.

³⁶ SHAT, 7N 2638-2, 'L'Attitude de l'Allemagne à l'égard de la France', 2 Apr. 1931. See also the military attaché report of 8 Jan. 1932 entitled 'Limites des possibilités d'Hitler', in 7N 2588.

³⁷ SHAT, 2589, Personal letter from Lt. Colonel Chapouilly (military attaché in Berlin to Nov. 1932) to General Maxime Weygand, 2 June 1932 and 'Situation politique: Chute du Cabinet Brüning', 2 June 1932. See also the reports on the 'Situation politique', of 21 and 28 July, 11 Aug., 18 Aug., and 1 Sept. in 7N 2590.

³⁸ SHAT, 7N 2590, 'La Possibilité d'un Cabinet von Schleicher', 1 Dec. 1933.

foreign policy is an extreme hatred of France, which is regarded as the hereditary and mortal enemy of Germany'. According to this study, the long-term goals of Nazi policy were the overthrow of France and domination of Europe from the Atlantic to the Caucasus. In order to realize these objectives Hitler would first seek to isolate France by negotiating prior agreements with Britain and Italy. The report concluded by citing the following passage from *Mein Kampf*: 'The German people must understand that the survival of the German nation depends upon finally putting an end to this sterile conflict, that the annihilation of France is the only way to ensure the greatest expansion possible for our people.'³⁹ Reviewing the stated objectives of the Nazi Party, another *Deuxième Bureau* summary concluded that '[t]he evolution of a Hitlerian dictatorship, or even the accession to power of the National Socialist Party, would have a profound destabilizing effect on the political fabric of Germany, on Franco-German relations and on international politics in general'.⁴⁰ Military attaché General Renondeau in Berlin was even more direct. 'If Hitler becomes Chancellor,' he warned, 'Germany will be transformed into one huge military barracks.'⁴¹

These warnings were repeated and even intensified after the *Machtergreifung*. General Renondeau rejected the widespread belief that vice-chancellor Franz von Papen and his cronies would be able to exert a decisive controlling influence over Hitler and the National Socialist party. He predicted that the Nazis would tolerate a coalition government only until they could gain control over the machinery of the state. 'If they are successful in this,' he judged, 'the destruction of the Republic will follow with a brutality and swiftness which will leave the other European powers with no choice but to accept a *fait accompli*.'⁴² Through the spring and summer of 1933 intelligence observers were unequivocal that the foremost objective of Nazi policy would be

³⁹ SHAT, 7N 2623, 'Attitude du Parti National-Socialiste à l'égard de la France', 4 May 1932.

⁴⁰ SHAT, 7N 2638-1, 'Situation politique, économique et militaire de l'Allemagne de janvier 1931 à juillet 1932', 5 Sept. 1932. See also 7N 2623, 'Note sur la situation générale et militaire en Allemagne et Italie en juillet 1932', 20 July 1932.

⁴¹ SHAT, 7N 2588, 'Service du travail obligatoire', 24 Feb. 1932.

⁴² SHAT, 7N 2591, 'Le Mouvement hitlérien au pouvoir', and 'Un nouveau ministre de la guerre', both of 2 Feb. 1933. This judgement was based in part on a conversation between Renondeau and a young Nazi named Joseph Martin who assured the French attaché that '[i]f the National Socialists must initially agree to cooperate with other parties they will waste no time in getting rid of their colleagues and assuming total control of the government'. For an account of this conversation, see 7N 2591, 'Conversations avec un national-socialist', 30 Jan. 1933.

rearmament and the progressive militarization of German society. Renondeau predicted that:

There is little doubt that Germany intends to regain her position as the greatest military power in Europe. . . . The government which now controls the destiny of the Reich has made no secret of the fact that its first priority upon taking power will be the building of the largest military force possible in the shortest space of time possible.⁴³

A Deuxième Bureau report on the 'Military situation in Germany' concluded that '[s]ince the accession of the Nazi government and the revolution of racist nationalism which has followed, the intentions and pretensions of Germany have changed profoundly. The political and moral unity of the country is under rapid reconstruction in preparation for a policy of military aggression.'⁴⁴ Both air and naval intelligence agreed. Air intelligence had been stressing the importance of air power to the National Socialists for several years. A report prepared in 1931 had warned that, should the Nazis come to power, they would 'immediately begin building the largest air force possible'. The *raison d'être* of this force would be 'to support the vast ambitions of M. Hitler'.⁴⁵ Naval intelligence detailed the destruction of Weimar institutions and the process of political *Gleichschaltung* in a series of studies prepared in 1933. One of these observed that '[t]he future line of the German government is clear. It will trace a pattern of internal reconstruction followed by territorial demands of increasing virility.'⁴⁶ This astute interpretation of the link between internal and external policy in Germany was echoed in a long report prepared by the Sûreté Générale for the minister of the interior which concluded that the brutal tactics used by the Nazis to crush all opposition and seize total control of the state were a prelude to a foreign policy which would be equally ruthless. Hitler's chief objective, according to this assessment, was to 'avoid at all costs any external adventures *for the moment*'. His public assurances that the

⁴³ SHAT, 7N 2591, 'L'Armée allemande de l'avenir', 7 Mar. 1933. See also 7N 2591, 'Reichswehr et politique', 8 Feb. 1933 and 7N 2530-2, 'Plan de renseignements sur l'Allemagne: Situation de l'Allemagne à la date du 15 septembre 1933', 25 Sept. 1933.

⁴⁴ SHAT, 7N 2675, 'Note sur la puissance de l'armée allemande à la date du 1ère avril 1933', 8 Apr. 1933.

⁴⁵ SHAA, 1B 11, 'Hitler et l'aviation', Dec. 1931 and 2B 56, 'Hitler et l'Aéronautique allemande', *BdR*, Aug. 1932.

⁴⁶ Cited from SHM, 1BB2 93, *Bulletin d'étude*, Apr. 1933. See also SHM, 1BB2 90, *BdR*s for Apr., July, Aug.-Sept., and Nov.-Dec. 1933.

Reich desired peace with France were aimed at 'making an impression abroad' as 'Germany needs peace to reconstitute its forces.'⁴⁷

The speed and thoroughness with which the Hitler regime seized control of the machinery of power made a deep impression on French observers. Throughout the spring and early summer of 1933, the Berlin embassy produced detailed analyses of the effects of the Nazi purges of the state bureaucracy. In July French ambassador François-Poncet reported that Hitler could congratulate himself:

on having destroyed, dispersed, dissolved, annexed or absorbed everything which is outside of the National Socialist Party. One after another the communists, the Jews, the socialists, the labour unions, the *Stahlhelm*, the German nationalists, the veterans of the *Kyffhäuser*, the Catholics and the evangelical churches have been forced to submit to his domination. He controls the various police forces which have been augmented by an auxiliary police service comprised of his own Party troops. A suffocating censorship has been imposed on the domestic press, and the entire government apparatus is being purged. Political parties have been marginalized and the Reichstag is dominated by an enormous and monolithic grouping of brownshirts who represent two-thirds of the assembly and are ready to implement any constitutional modifications he desires.⁴⁸

Summarizing the events of the first two months of Nazi rule, army intelligence chief Koeltz warned that the introduction of the 'Decree to Protect the German People and the State' and the passage of the 'Enabling Act' had provided the Nazis with control of the essential levers of power in Germany. 'The German state', he concluded, 'is undergoing such fundamental changes that with the passage of time it will bear little or no resemblance to the Weimar Regime which has passed away.'⁴⁹

The intelligence services also turned up evidence that the Nazi regime had begun laying the foundations for large-scale rearmament. There were indications of a recrudescence in the German armaments industry. Renondeau reported that firms such as I. G. Farben, Krupp,

⁴⁷ France, Archives Nationales, Série F⁷, Ministère de l'Intérieur: Relations Internationales, Carton 13430, 'Politique générale du gouvernement hitlérien', 6 Apr. 1933. This study was forwarded by the minister of the interior (Eugène Frot) to the minister of war (Daladier).

⁴⁸ *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, no. 449, François-Poncet to Paris, 4 July 1933. For further reports on the 'Nazification' of Germany's government machinery, see nos. 94 and 178, François-Poncet to Paris, 6 and 24 Apr. 1933, in the same volume.

⁴⁹ SHAT, 1N 42, Koeltz note to the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, 4 Apr. 1933.

and Rheinmetall were expanding industrial plant and hiring new workers. In early September he correctly judged that Germany was on the verge of leaving the disarmament conference.⁵⁰ Great importance was also attributed to Nazi efforts to link the national labour service (Reichsarbeitsdienst) with Hitler Youth activity and to make voluntary work service compulsory. Mandatory service in the Arbeitsdienst was rightly considered an essential component of the process of *Gleichschaltung* and an important step towards the constitution of a reservist army. German youth would receive both political indoctrination and pre-military training.⁵¹

At the same time, the SR obtained German plans to construct a powerful air force and to incorporate para-military formations into the Reichswehr. The chief sources for this intelligence were Hans-Thilo Schmidt and source 'L'. In August Schmidt provided documents detailing the composition and deployment of the Reichswehr down to company level.⁵² Although 'L' cannot be identified, between June 1933 and April 1934 this source provided the Berlin embassy with eight sizeable dossiers of photographed German mobilization plans and rearmament schemes.⁵³ In October, for example, 'L' provided the embassy in Berlin with photographs of the first rearmament programme of the new German air ministry.⁵⁴ This information formed the basis for a lengthy summary prepared for Premier Daladier by Renondeau, which warned that 'we are on the eve of a complete reorganization of

⁵⁰ SHAT, 7N 2591, 'I. G. Farbenindustrie', 6 Apr. 1933 and 'Industrie des armements en Allemagne', 12 Apr. 1933. On Germany and the Disarmament Conference, see *DDF*, 1ère série, iv, no. 181, Renondeau to Paris, 5 Sept. 1933.

⁵¹ SHAT, 7N 2591, 'L'Armée allemande de l'avenir', 7 Mar. 1933; 7N 2675, 'Note sur la puissance de l'armée allemande à la date de 1ère avril 1933', 8 Apr. 1933. See also François-Poncet's reports on the Arbeitsdienst in *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, no. 143, 19 Apr. 1933 and no. 250, 6 May 1933. See W. Wette, 'Ideology, Propaganda and Internal Politics as Preconditions of the War Policy of the Third Reich', in *GSWW*, i, 130–1 and 150–3 and R. Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1994), 46–7.

⁵² A smattering of the documents from Schmidt remain in the French archives. See e.g. SHAT 7N 2675, 7 Aug. 1933, 'Tableaux d'effectifs de la Reichswehr', and an undated and untitled dossier of photographs of documents and diagrams from the 'Chef der Heeresleitung'.

⁵³ See e.g. SHAT, 7N 2592, 'Le Future système militaire de l'Allemagne', 2 Aug. 1933; 'L.4', 20 July 1933; 'Documents L.6', 14 Aug. 1933; 'Documents L.9', 26 Sept. 1933; 'Documents L.10', 25 Oct. 1933; 'Documents L.12', 30 Oct. 1933, and so on.

⁵⁴ SHAT, 7N 2594, 'Documents L.12', 30 Oct. 1933. This programme called for the manufacture of 1,294 warplanes by Sept. 1934. For a memoir account of this intelligence coup, see Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 25–6. Stehlin wrongly claims that officials in Paris ignored this document.

the German military system which will affect not only the armed forces but the entire country as well'.⁵⁵

Another potential threat emphasized in the appreciations of this period was the increased likelihood of collusion between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Both the army and navy had been preoccupied with the strategic consequences of an Italo-German alliance since the late 1920s.⁵⁶ The ideological affinities between Fascism and National Socialism—reinforced by Hitler's expressed willingness to renounce all German claims to the South Tyrol in order to gain Italian cooperation elsewhere—only increased French uneasiness. Consequently, Mussolini's attempts to mediate between France and Germany during negotiations over the Four-Power Pact in the spring of 1933 were greeted with mistrust in Paris. These suspicions were heightened by intelligence reports of meetings between high-ranking German and Italian political and military officials in Berlin in March.⁵⁷ An overview prepared by the army *Deuxième Bureau* the following September warned that the destruction of French power would remain 'a fundamental objective of Italian policy as long as France remains a Mediterranean power'.⁵⁸ Despite the short-lived Franco-Italian alliance of 1935, the threat of Italo-German collaboration would remain a constant factor in French strategic calculations throughout the 1930s.

By late 1933 the *Deuxième Bureau* had concluded that resistance, either from the left or the right, posed no significant threat to Hitler in the foreseeable future. The army officer corps was considered the most powerful potential enemy to the new regime. But both Hitler and the military chiefs wanted to make rearmament the foremost priority of national policy and had forged a marriage of convenience to achieve this aim. A summary prepared for the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* (CSG) in August 1933 advised that French policy must be based on the reality that 'Germany has since the war pursued obstinately the

⁵⁵ Cited from SHAT, 7N 2592, 'Allocution du Général von Blomberg', 11 Sept. 1933. See also 7N 2592, 'Le Futur système militaire de l'Allemagne', 2 Aug. 1933; 7N 2592, 'Réorganisation du Ministère de la Reichswehr', 9 Nov. 1933.

⁵⁶ See e.g. SHAT, 7N 2520-4, 'Note sur l'éventualité d'une violation de la Suisse par les armées allemande et italienne', 22 Aug. 1930; the navy was obsessed with the threat which the growing Italian navy posed to its interests in the Mediterranean. See e.g. SHM, 1BB2 180, 'Politique navale', study done by Deputy Chief of Staff, François Darlan, 10 Sept. 1930 and esp. the 'Note pour le ministre: La Situation de l'Italie vis-à-vis de la France', 11 July 1932.

⁵⁷ SHAT, 7N 2591, 'Collaboration fasciste-hitlérienne', 24 Mar. 1933; 7N 2592, 'Mission italienne en Allemagne', 8 Sept. 1933; and 'Renseignements divers', 5 Dec. 1933.

⁵⁸ SHAT, 7N 2530, 'Plan de renseignements sur l'Allemagne', 25 Sept. 1933.

destruction of the Treaty of Versailles'. The Nazi government had 'scarcely hidden its desire to return to the policies of expansion of its imperial predecessor and to establish hegemony over Europe' and was 'preparing to impose its will with a policy of force . . . as soon as it has gained clear military superiority'. The time frame of peace was estimated to be no more than five years.⁵⁹

Conspicuously lacking in early appreciations of German plans to rearm, however, is any systematic consideration of the formidable economic and financial restraints on Hitler's ambitions. In keeping with the 'worst case' mentality which had characterized assessments of German military power through 1932, military analysts tended to play down or ignore the importance of the financial crisis and the collapse of industrial production. The result was a persistent tendency to inflate German military capabilities which would characterize intelligence assessments through to the outbreak of war. By the autumn the Deuxième Bureau was predicting that Germany would be capable of sustaining a two-front war within the space of two years and that the German army would be 'ready for all types of offensive operations' by the spring of 1938 'at the latest'.⁶⁰ Surveying the capacities of the German aircraft industry, air intelligence, in a wildly inflated assessment which could only have been an attempt to draw attention to a future threat, predicted that Germany's clandestine air force would comprise a minimum of 800 military aircraft by the end of 1933. Significantly, this appreciation made no distinction between combat aircraft and transport or training machines.⁶¹

These exaggerations of the imminence of the German threat were combined with essentially accurate appreciations of the long-term

⁵⁹ 'Projet de mémoire destiné au Conseil Supérieur de Guerre', 1 Aug. 1933. Cited in E. Du Réau and G. Pedroncini (eds.), *Né pas subir: Écrits du Maréchal Jean de Lattre* (Paris, 1984), 52. De Lattre was a member of General Weygand's personal staff.

⁶⁰ SHAT, 7N 2675, 'Note sur la puissance de l'armée allemande à la date du 1^{er} avril 1933', 25 Sept. 1933 and Fonds Weygand, 1K 130-1, 'Note sur les négociations avec l'Allemagne', 22 Dec. 1933. See also 7N 2530, 'Situation de l'Allemagne à la date du 15 septembre 1933, envisagée du point de vue de ses moyens de guerre', 25 Sept. 1933.

⁶¹ SHAA, 2B 59, 'Note au sujet des armements aériens allemands', 8 Mar. 1933; SHAT, 7N 2530-2, 'Plan de renseignements sur l'Allemagne: Situation militaire à la date du 15 Septembre 1933'; SHAT, 7N 2591, 'Organisation de l'aéronautique', 22 Feb. 1933. See also François-Poncet's report in *DDF*, 1^{ère} série, iii, no. 236, 3 May 1933. Air intelligence was also *au courant* of debate in German military circles between those who believed in a 'strategic' role for the new air force and those who felt that air power should first and foremost support land forces. See SHAA, 2B 56, 'Les Opinions allemandes sur la doctrine du général Douhet', *BdR*, Oct. 1932 and the report by air attaché Léon Poincaré in SHAT, 7N 2592, 31 July 1933.

intentions of the Nazi government. Decision makers were warned repeatedly that the Nazi *Machtergreifung* had wrought a fundamental change in the international situation. This assessment was not based on secret information from a source close to Hitler. Nor did intelligence analysts possess special insight into the mind of the Führer. Rather, intelligence appreciations reflected a 'worst case' perspective based on a close reading of *Mein Kampf* and on the assumption that a lust for conquest and domination was inherent in the German *mentalité*. The army Deuxième Bureau concluded that 'Hitler is a traditionalist who has pushed the Prussian notion of individual service to the state and the racist ideology of pan-Germanism to their most extreme levels'. Hitler's ambitions were not considered an aberration but instead 'the expression of an innate German impulse'.⁶² The picture of the Nazi threat painted by the intelligence services was embraced by a military establishment that had been obsessed with the German threat since the end of the last war.

IV

The thesis that rearmament and war were the central priorities of Nazi policy combined with an acute awareness of Germany's industrial and demographic superiority to produce a distinct change of emphasis in French military planning. In a lengthy overview of the strategic situation prepared in January 1934, army chief of staff General Gamelin predicted that the balance of power in Europe would soon be overturned and argued that France must reconsider its strategic policy. He warned that the military capacities of France's allies in eastern Europe were woefully inadequate in the face of the rebirth of German military power. He submitted that 'new priorities' of French policy must be the implementation of a serious programme of rearmament to modernize the French army and the conclusion of Great Power alliances with Italy and the Soviet Union. Gamelin observed that, from its position in the Mediterranean, Italy could either ensure or threaten the vital lines of communication linking France with its African empire. Moreover, Italy could also function as a 'bridge' linking France to its eastern European allies in a vast front that would encircle Germany on three sides.

⁶² SHAT, 7N 2623, 'Programme du Parti National-Socialiste', 4 May 1932. Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau*, 32.

Gamelin acknowledged that any arrangement with the USSR would be a poor substitute for the pre-1914 alliance with Imperial Russia. But the Soviets possessed the world's largest army and air force. A Franco-Soviet rapprochement would therefore have considerable value as a deterrent. Gamelin speculated that the USSR might serve as the principal arsenal for a prospective eastern front by providing arms to Romania, Yugoslavia, and even Poland. Significantly, in this *tour d'horizon* Gamelin made no mention of the possible benefits of a disarmament convention for French security.⁶³

The assessments of the intelligence services provided army officials with ammunition with which to combat further reductions in military spending. In a series of heavily documented letters to Premier Daladier, Commander-in-Chief designate General Maxime Weygand stressed the seismic changes in the international situation. He warned that Nazism had excited the 'warrior spirit of the German race' and that 'events in Germany have changed the [international] situation entirely'.⁶⁴ It was therefore 'absolutely essential' that France retain its existing superiority in men and material. Weygand maintained that the German demand for equality of armaments was a trap: 'In reality there will be no equality, but a very pronounced superiority for Germany given the military culture of this nation and the intensive efforts already undertaken to prepare the German armaments industry for rearmament.'⁶⁵ The air force general staff adopted a similarly pessimistic view. Intelligence on the still illegal German air force was central to the air staff's campaign for the complete renovation of the French air force by the end of 1938.⁶⁶

But the vivid and alarming Deuxième Bureau appreciations of the situation in Germany had little impact on the evolution of foreign and defence policy. The newly constituted Daladier government did not

⁶³ This document is reproduced in J. Minart, *Le Drame du désarmement français, 1918–1939* (Paris, 1959), 69–71.

⁶⁴ SHAT, Fonds Weygand, 1K 130–1, Weygand to Daladier, 16 Mar. 1933 and Weygand to Gamelin and Daladier, 14 Sept. 1933. See also the missives of 9 Feb. and 28 Apr. 1933 in the same carton and the *Procès-verbal* of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre for 15 May 1933 in SHAT, 1N 33. Weygand's account of his activity during this period is in his *Mémoires*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1950–7), ii, 378–404.

⁶⁵ SHAT, Fonds Weygand, 1K 130–1, 'Note sur les négociations avec l'Allemagne', 22 Dec. 1933. See also the general staff reports in *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, no. 141, 'Note du Département: Indications données par le général Bineau le 19 avril 1933'. See also iii, no. 135, 'Note de l'État-Major de l'Armée', 17 Apr. 1933.

⁶⁶ SHAA, 1B 4–1, 'Intérêt présenté par le Plan Quinquennal', 19 June 1933. This plan was revived in 1935–6.

revise or even seriously review France's foreign and defence policies in the spring and summer of 1933. Neither Daladier nor foreign minister Paul-Boncour were willing to make the vital connection between Hitler's domestic and foreign policies. Although they continued to denounce illegal German rearmament in conversations with the British, both considered that the foreign policy of the Nazi government would continue along the same lines as those of its predecessors.

In 1933 Édouard Daladier was already a seasoned veteran of Third Republic politics.⁶⁷ As President of the Radical Party, he was one of the most powerful politicians in France. Daladier was a 52-year-old baker's son from Carpentras in the Vaucluse region of southern France. He had made his career as a brilliant student at the Lycée in Lyons and was an academically trained historian. After serving with distinction during the Great War, Daladier had forged an impressive political reputation as a pillar of the left-wing of the Radical Party in inter-war France. Intensely proud of his modest southern origins, he enjoyed the reputation of an ardent French patriot, a man of honesty and good sense who had retained his connections with the populace and placed the *patrie* above Party politics. Anatole de Monzie observed that Daladier was possessed of 'an inner probity which was impervious to external pettiness'.⁶⁸ This was a reputation which Daladier cultivated assiduously. His taciturn demeanor and unassuming manner, along with his habit of arriving at important meetings and social engagements on his bicycle, served to reinforce his image as a man of the people.⁶⁹ Daladie also cultivated the impression of resolution. This image, however, was more style than substance. Behind the 'Bull of the Vaucluse' façade was a deeply reflective cast of mind. Like Gamelin, Daladier perceived both sides of every question. According to one of his cabinet colleagues, in his private deliberations Daladier 'heard at all times two voices'.⁷⁰ These are not the predominant characteristics of a man of action. Indeed, Daladier's cabinet colleagues were often exasperated by his penchant for reflection and tendency to change his mind. An immense

⁶⁷ The following description of Daladier is taken from du Réau, *Daladier, passim*; J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l'an 40*, i. *La Guerre: Oui ou non?* (Paris, 1990), 135–47; S. Berstein, *Histoire du Parti Radical*, ii. *Crise du radicalisme* (Paris, 1982); and André Géraud Pertainax, *Les Fossoyeurs, défaite militaire de la France, armistice, contre-révolution* (New York, 1943), i. 187–99.

⁶⁸ Anatole de Monzie, *Ci-devant* (Paris, 1941), 278.

⁶⁹ R. Bélin, *Du secrétariat de la CGT au gouvernement de Vichy: Mémoires 1933–1945* (Paris, 1978), 77.

⁷⁰ De Monzie, *Ci-devant*, 146.

capacity for work and ability to absorb an enormous volume of information only contributed to this contemplative inclination.

Paul-Boncour remained committed to disarmament and internationalism despite the rise of Hitler. Despite mounting evidence of Nazi savagery, he remained convinced that 'France must continue to seek security through international agreements rather than through rearmament'.⁷¹ In March 1933 the Quai d'Orsay received a perceptive summary of the situation in Germany from Pierre Viénot. A member of the Chamber foreign affairs commission, Viénot had been a central figure in the movement for Franco-German *rapprochement* during the 1920s. The rise of Hitler changed his perspective however. He warned the department that, once the Nazi government had completed its 'internal reconstruction', it would turn to treaty revision, supported by 'a dense and united nation, animated by a youthful enthusiasm, full of ambition and ready to struggle with the faith characteristic of its brutal nature'.⁷² But Viénot's warning, like the reports of the intelligence services, had little apparent impact on Paul-Boncour. Several weeks after receiving Viénot's report, the foreign minister assured the Chamber foreign affairs commission that the situation had 'ameliorated considerably to our profit', because Hitler's brutal internal policy had undermined German credibility in Geneva. He also predicted that Nazi hysteria was a passing phenomenon: 'I believe that the true leaders of Germany, the deeper tendencies of this country, will purge this present fever and re-establish the old Germany.'⁷³

Nor was Daladier greatly alarmed at the changes underway across the Rhine. He assured the Senate national defence commissions that 'I am well aware that Hitler is now at the Reichschancellery. But, explain to me in what ways the principles of Hitler's foreign policy differ from

⁷¹ AN, Archives Paul-Boncour, 424 AP 21, 'Conceptions de M. Paul-Boncour sur la politique extérieure française', 10 Mar. 1933.

⁷² MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Léger, vol. 6, 'Note sur la politique générale intérieure et extérieure de l'Allemagne', 18 Mar. 1933. Fred Kupferman mistakenly attributes the authorship of this memorandum to Alexis Léger, *Pierre Laval: 1883-1945* (Paris, 1988), 110. Viénot presented a similar account to the Chamber commission several weeks later. See AAN, Commission des Affaires Étrangères, 15^{ème} Législature, Carton 2¹, 17 May 1933.

⁷³ AAN, Commission des Affaires Étrangères, 15^{ème} Législature, Carton 2¹, Paul-Boncour audition before the commission, 28 June 1933. See also *DDF*, 1^{ère} série, iii, no. 137, Paul-Boncour to French diplomatic agents abroad, 18 Apr. 1933. This view was reinforced by a conversation between René Massigli, France's principal negotiator at the Disarmament Conference, with Norman Davis, the chief American delegate the previous week. Davis assured Massigli that the situation in Germany was 'far from conducive to an easy solution to the problem [of disarmament]'. Cited in *DDF*, 1^{ère} série, iii, no. 104, 'Note du Directeur-Adjoint des Affaires Politiques: Conversation avec M. Norman Davis', 7 Apr. 1933.

those of von Schleicher or from the bases of Brüning's external policy? The situation appears to me to be the same.⁷⁴ Daladier and his personal cabinet focused on the continuity in German foreign policy and failed to understand the long-term ramifications of the Nazi revolution inside Germany.⁷⁵ Before the CSG in May, and again in December, Daladier argued that the diplomatic situation had actually improved during the first few months of 1933 and dismissed the idea that the German threat had intensified with the advent of Hitler.⁷⁶

The best indicator of the way the Daladier government perceived the German threat at this stage are the reductions made to the defence budget of 1933. Deep cuts were imposed on military spending in the aftermath of Hitler's rise to power. Indeed, more than half of the reductions made in government expenditure in 1932 and 1933 came from the military budget. Less than one week after the advent of the Nazis, 638 million francs were slashed from the national defence budget. This was in addition to the 1.6 billion francs that had been cut in 1932.⁷⁷ Between 1931 and 1934 military spending was cut by more than 25 per cent overall.⁷⁸ It is difficult to exaggerate the long-term ramifications of these decisions to the European balance of power. At the same time that French governments were making massive cuts in defence spending, Nazi Germany began laying the moral and industrial foundations for unlimited rearmament. Germany thus secured a decisive head start in the race to rearm after 1935.⁷⁹ French strategic policy was set on a course that led through Munich to defeat in 1940.

⁷⁴ France, Archives du Sénat (cited hereafter as AS), 15^{ème} Législature, 'Inter-Commission de la Défense Nationale', Daladier audition, 14 Feb. 1933.

⁷⁵ France, Archives Nationales (cited hereafter as AN), Archives Daladier, 496 AP 2, 'Note pour le Ministre: Séance du Conseil Supérieur de Guerre du 25 janvier 1933'. A study prepared for Daladier by the chief of the ministerial *cabinet militaire*, General Victor Bourret. This note, prepared before the Nazi accession, served as the basis for the Premier's cost-saving changes to the army's structure through 1933.

⁷⁶ SHAT, 1N 33, *Procès-verbaux* of the meetings of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, 15 May and 18 Dec. 1933.

⁷⁷ AS, 15^{ème} Législature, Commission de l'Armée: Inter-commission de la Défense Nationale, 14 Feb. 1933.

⁷⁸ Robert Frank[enstein], *Le Prix du réarmement français, 1935-1939* (Paris, 1982), 35; Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 369; and Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery*, 145.

⁷⁹ When France undertook serious rearmament for the first time in the autumn 1936 its armaments and aircraft industries were utterly incapable of coping with the large orders which resulted. See Frank[enstein], *Le Prix* and E. Chadeau, *De Blériot à Dassault: Histoire de l'industrie aéronautique en France* (Paris, 1987), esp. 224-307. On German rearmament see, among others, Deist, 'Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', in *GSWW*, i/3, 373-540; Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe*; and R. Overy, 'The German Pre-War Aircraft Production Plans', *EHR* 90 (1975), 778-97.

Why the singular failure of intelligence assessments to influence policy makers? Explanations which emphasize blindness or moral lassitude have proved tempting for many scholars. But a closer look at the economic and political atmosphere in France during this period suggests that the answer to this question is much more complicated. The fact that intelligence gathering was dominated by the military proved unfortunate, because in 1933 civil–military relations had reached a crisis. The government’s spending cuts and plans to restructure the army had led to open and bitter warfare between Daladier and Weygand.⁸⁰ Given this poisoned atmosphere, military intelligence reports had little or no chance to influence civilian decision makers. This state of affairs was exacerbated by the penchant of the armed services to exaggerate the German threat. As Robert Young has noted in relation to a later period, ‘by magnifying the German peril, if only in the interests of proclaiming it, [the French military] was in fact distorting it, making it less real.’⁸¹ In other words, the absurdly inflated projections of German power produced through the 1920s and early 1930s had undermined the credibility of the intelligence services. Daladier, in particular, would later criticize the Deuxième Bureaux for their ‘blindness’ in consistently distorting the military situation in Germany throughout the 1930s.⁸² Intelligence analyses of Hitler’s intentions could thus be dismissed by politicians because the military had a vested interest in producing alarmist assessments of the German menace. Had a French equivalent to the British secret intelligence service been available to provide similar assessments of German intentions, the views of Deuxième Bureau would have been less easily dismissed by France’s political leadership.

The temptation to dismiss intelligence was enhanced by the fact that the Daladier government was receiving less pessimistic appreciations from the Berlin embassy. Ambassador François-Poncet was widely considered France’s leading expert on Germany. His credentials were indeed impressive. He had been a brilliant student of German literature at the École Normale and had served as an adviser first to the wartime economic mission to Washington and then to the French

⁸⁰ On the breakdown in civil–military relations, see Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand*, esp. 49–115; Du Réau, *Daladier*, 103–12; Destremau, *Weygand* (Paris, 1989), 235–304; and F. Guelton, ‘Le Général Weygand, vice-président du Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, 1931–1935’, Thèse de doctorat (Université de Paris I, 1994).

⁸¹ Young, *In Command of France*, 48.

⁸² AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 8, dr. 2, unfinished manuscript entitled ‘Munich’.

forces occupying the Ruhr during the 1920s. During the latter half of the 1920s François-Poncet was a parliamentary deputy with close ties to the powerful Comité des Forges and a prominent advocate of improved commercial relations with Germany. He was thus eminently qualified for his post and upon his arrival in Berlin had cultivated generally excellent relations with the political and military elite of the Weimar regime. He was reputedly the best informed foreign official in Berlin during the early 1930s, and his voluminous reports exerted a tremendous influence on perceptions in Paris.⁸³ Yet, throughout his time in Berlin, François-Poncet failed to develop a systematic interpretation of the Nazi menace.⁸⁴ His reports on the situation in Germany were more nuanced and sophisticated than those of the intelligence services. They were also less accurate when it came to appreciating German intentions. Ultimately, the 'worst case' approach of the military services was better suited to the specific task of assessing the intentions of the Nazi regime.

In the months following Hitler's accession to the chancellorship François-Poncet produced a series of careful appreciations which cautioned against alarmism. He observed that the new regime faced formidable economic and financial difficulties and predicted that it would founder if it was unable to resolve the mess it had inherited.⁸⁵ In early March the ambassador wrote that 'Hitler has succeeded in distracting [public] attention by inflaming nationalist passion, replacing government bureaucrats, bullying local politicians and brandishing the strange Swastika emblem. It will be less easy to find food and work for the unemployed.'⁸⁶ Although François-Poncet perceived that 'Hitler is not a man of the past', he was unwilling to speculate on what Nazism would mean for Germany. He confined himself to reiterating cautious

⁸³ See F. Seydoux, *Mémoires d'Outre-Rhin* (Paris, 1975), 53–4; A. Bérard, *Un ambassadeur se souvient*, i. *Au temps du danger allemand* (Paris, 1976), 95–100, 153–5; Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 32–3. See also Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 56–7 and Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 9–10. For François-Poncet's account of his diplomatic mission in Berlin, see his much quoted *Souvenirs d'une ambassade à Berlin*.

⁸⁴ This is the argument persuasively advanced by A. Messemer in her article 'André François-Poncet und Deutschland die Jahre Zwischen den Kriegen', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 39 (1991), 505–34.

⁸⁵ See, in particular, *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, no. 289. Copy of a commercial attaché report forwarded by François-Poncet to Paris, 17 May 1933. For other examples of the deep scepticism with which the embassy viewed Nazi economic policy during this early period, see *ibid.*, iii, no. 419, François-Poncet to Paris, 22 June 1933; no. 449, 5 July 1933.

⁸⁶ *DDF*, 1ère série, ii, no. 378, François-Poncet to Paris, 7 Mar. 1933. See also iii, no. 143, 19 Apr. 1933.

phrases such as 'Events of profound importance are taking place' or 'It is impossible to predict the outcome of these developments.'⁸⁷ He was equally cautious in his analysis of Nazi foreign policy. Although he characterized the new regime as animated by 'an instinct for domination, a contempt for weakness, an appetite for power and a taste for revenge', the ambassador also considered that Hitler's long-term objectives were essentially the same as those of Stresemann, Brüning, and Papen:

Like the Chancellors who preceded him, Hitler wishes to secure for Germany the means with which to speak the language of a Great Power, both in Europe and in the rest of the world; and he wishes to undertake, under more favourable conditions, problems (such as treaty revisionism and the Corridor) which Germany has no chance of obtaining a satisfactory resolution of today.

Significantly, François-Poncet also considered that 'the Nazi programme, insofar as it merits such a description, in no way precludes an understanding with France'.⁸⁸ He underlined the restraints on Hitler's freedom of action and stressed that fear of isolation would combine with the threat of general social unrest to force Hitler to adopt a more reasonable external policy. A strong challenge from France, he warned, would only provide Hitler with an opportunity to further excite German nationalist sentiment.⁸⁹ He judged that the 'precariousness' of the Nazi government's position presented France with an opportunity to 'extract guarantees and concessions which we might not otherwise be able to obtain'. François-Poncet even speculated that France might 'come to exercise a political and moral influence over the Hitlerian movement'.⁹⁰

During the spring and early summer of 1933 German external policy appeared to be completely at odds with Nazi domestic policy. Hitler made a series of conciliatory overtures to France, both in public and in private, which struck a responsive chord with French statesmen who desired above all to avoid another war. François-Poncet was not

⁸⁷ *DDF*, 1ère série, ii, nos. 275, 232, and 264, François-Poncet to Paris, 8 Feb., 24 Jan., and 5 Feb. 1933, respectively. See also Messemer, 'François-Poncet und Deutschland', 516–23.

⁸⁸ *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, nos. 419, 259, and 70, François-Poncet to Paris, 22 June, 9 and 30 Mar. 1933, respectively.

⁸⁹ *DDF*, 1ère série, ii, no. 252, François-Poncet to Paris, 1 Feb. 1933.

⁹⁰ *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, no. 314, François-Poncet to Paris, 23 May 1933. See also *ibid.*, no. 413, François-Poncet to Paris, 15 Mar. 1933; iii, no. 218, 29 Apr. 1933. See also nos. 191 and 198—both 27 Apr. 1933; no. 251, 7 May 1933; no. 259, 9 May 1933.

immune to the effects of this 'psychological offensive'.⁹¹ After meetings with Hitler in the spring and summer of 1933, he described the Führer as 'courteous, amiable and certainly more open than some of his predecessors'. After Hitler declared his desire to 'leave a Franco-German entente as my legacy to international politics', François-Poncet praised his 'sincerity' and 'visible desire for moderation'.⁹² On balance, although he often forwarded strong denunciations of Nazi brutality, François-Poncet remained a committed proponent of Franco-German *rapprochement* right up to his departure from Berlin in November 1938. The French ambassador championed the need to improve Franco-German commercial relations and argued consistently for a policy of accommodation with regard to German rearmament. At no time during his tenure in Berlin did the Ambassador warn that Hitler's hegemonic ambitions could not co-exist with the vital interests of France.⁹³

François-Poncet was correct in his estimation that the challenge of economic recovery and fears of isolation would combine to limit Nazi revisionism in the short term.⁹⁴ He was mistaken, however, in his judgement that French diplomacy could take advantage of this situation to negotiate a lasting entente with Germany. Indeed, given what we now know about Nazi foreign policy, the idea that France might somehow have influenced decision making in Berlin seems absurd. Yet it is important to remember that French observers were trying to make sense of an extremely complex and fluid situation in Germany. It is also important to remember that the views advanced by military

⁹¹ W. R. von Schramm, *Sprich vom Frieden, wenn du den Krieg willst. Die psychologischen Offensiven Hitlers gegen die Franzosen 1933 bis 1939 Ein bericht* (Mayence, 1983), 13–29. Perhaps the best known of Hitler's public overtures is his 'Friedensrede' (Peace Speech) of 17 May 1933 which is reproduced in N. H. Baynes (ed.), *The Speeches of Adolph Hitler*, 3 vols. (Toronto, 1942), ii, 1041–58. See also the interview between Hitler and Fernand de Brinon in *Le Matin*, 16 Feb. 1933 and O. Abetz, *Histoire d'une politique franco-allemande, 1930–1950* (Paris, 1953).

⁹² *DDF*, 1ère série, iv, no. 215, François-Poncet to Paris, 15 Sept. 1933.

⁹³ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 62–3, 93–9, 381–9; Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 9–10; Messemer, 'François-Poncet und Deutschland', and Adamthwaite, *France*, 264–79; the reports of the embassy during this period were recovered in their entirety after the war. Over 1,500 of these reports are published in the first and second series of the *Documents Diplomatiques Français*. Taken together, this documentation contradicts in many ways the accounts presented in the memoirs of François-Poncet and Armand Bérard, which both assert that the embassy was in no way taken in by Nazi protestations of good faith. See François-Poncet, *Souvenirs*, 89–158 and Bérard, *Au Temps du danger allemand*, 180–245.

⁹⁴ On German perceptions of isolation and fear of a preventative war at this juncture, see Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution in Europe*, 33–7; Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy and Preparation for War', in *GSWW*, i, 573–88; and C. Bloch, 'La Place de la France dans les différents stades de la politique extérieure du Troisième Reich (1933–1940)', in *Les Relations franco-allemandes (1933–1939)* (Paris, 1976), 19–31.

intelligence were only an interpretation of Nazi foreign policy. In 1933 it was impossible to know what Hitler intended. In fact, the divergence in views between François-Poncet and the intelligence services should not surprise. The chief function of the diplomat is to avoid wars. That of the soldier is to plan how to fight them. It would have been self-defeating, and perhaps even irresponsible, for François-Poncet to adopt the fatalistic attitude of the Deuxième Bureaux.

François-Poncet's analysis of the German threat was much more palatable to France's civilian leadership than the bleak assessments forwarded by the intelligence services. Both Daladier and Paul-Boncour were men of the left who had served in the trenches of the Great War and were committed to policies of disarmament and financial austerity.⁹⁵ Daladier was the Radical Party's foremost expert on defence issues, who was convinced that the armed forces could be made more efficient if they were streamlined. Paul-Boncour was a veteran of the foreign policy establishment. He had served as France's chief delegate to Geneva from 1928 to 1931 and had been a close friend and collaborator of Aristide Briand. After Briand's death in 1932, Paul-Boncour became France's foremost proponent of collective security and the League of Nations. The view of the intelligence services, that Hitler was determined to rearm and make war, hardly complemented these priorities and was therefore dismissed in favour of the less categorical interpretation of François-Poncet.

V

The priorities of disarmament and austerity were shaped by the internal social, political, and economic situation. Pacifist sentiment in France reached its zenith in the early to mid-1930s. In 1934 the Rassemblement Universel Pour la Paix claimed more than 16 million adherents.⁹⁶ The rise of Hitler, moreover, had had little effect on the

⁹⁵ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 55–67; Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 355–70; and Pereboom, *Democracies at the Turning Point*, 178–206. On Daladier, see Du Réau's recent biography cited above and Berstein, *Crise du radicalisme*, 70–94. There is no scholarly study of Paul-Boncour. See his memoirs *Entre deux guerres*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1945–6) and a sketch (by an unnamed author) entitled 'Joseph Paul-Boncour, 1873–1972', in the *Cahiers des Nations Unies*, Special Number (Brussels, 1972).

⁹⁶ E. Hermon, 'Une ultime de sauvetage de la Société des Nations: La Campagne du Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix', in Vaisse (ed.), *Le Pacifisme en Europe*, 199.

French political landscape. The French Communist Party line continued to adhere to the standard Comintern view that the rise of Nazism marked the death throes of capitalism and was therefore to be welcomed. The mainstream of the Socialist Party—upon which the Daladier government depended to maintain its majority in parliament—was also slow to recognize the revolutionary nature of the changes taking place in Germany. Through 1935 the leadership of the party consistently argued that disarmament was more important than ever in order to prevent a complete collapse in Franco-German relations. The mainstream of the Radical Party was more suspicious of German intentions but continued to support policies of disarmament and conciliation. The right, like the military, was eager to assume the worst of Germany. Right-wing politicians in the Senate and Chamber clamoured for a hard-line policy and opposed major reductions in military spending. The extreme right-wing press was filled with talk of preventative war. But until February 1934 the left remained in government.

Even more important was the Great Depression. The French reaction to Hitler cannot be understood without taking into account the crushing effect of the world economic crisis which arrived in France in early 1931.⁹⁷ The effects of the crisis slowly paralysed the entire economy. Industrial production fell off by 31 per cent from its 1929 level, with production in such key industries as metallurgy, textiles, and agriculture plummeting much more dramatically. Prices fell, the home and export market contracted, and unemployment increased.⁹⁸ Between 1930 and 1933 national income fell by nearly 30 per cent. By early 1932 the French government faced a significant deficit and responded with policies of strict economic orthodoxy. Although five successive Radical cabinets made major reductions in government spending, the budgetary deficit continued to grow to more than 11.5 billion

⁹⁷ The following summary of the political and economic situation in France is taken from, J. Jackson, *The Politics of Depression in France, 1932–1936* (Cambridge, 1985), 7–28; A. Sauvy, *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1967), iii, 124–288; S. Berstein, *La France des années 1930* (Paris, 1988), 25–43; K. Mouré, *Managing the franc Poincaré: Economic Understanding and Political Constraint in French Monetary Policy, 1928–1936* (Cambridge, 1991), 10–45; and R. Soucy, 'French Press Reactions to Hitler's First Two Years in Power', *Contemporary European History*, 7: 1 (1998), 21–38.

⁹⁸ Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 32. The problem of measuring the extent of French unemployment at this stage is a difficult one. Restricted definitions for *chômage* make official figures unreliable. See R. Salais, 'Why was Unemployment so Low in France during the 1930s?', in B. Eichengreen and T. J. Hatton (eds.), *Inter-War Unemployment in an International Perspective* (Boston, 1988), 247–88.

francs.⁹⁹ Despite the worsening situation, a strong currency and a balanced budget became the central pillars of French economic and financial policy in the early 1930s. The alternative, a devaluation of the *franc Poincaré*, was rejected. Although Great Britain abandoned the gold standard in 1931, and the United States followed suit in 1933, France stubbornly refused to devalue its currency until June 1936.¹⁰⁰ At the heart of this refusal was the ill-founded but widespread assumption that the Depression was a crisis of overproduction. Bitter memories of the inflation of 1924–6 reinforced this belief in France. The result was a policy of deflation and the chief victim of this policy was national defence.

France was a deeply introspective nation when Hitler came to power. The Depression had worsened governmental instability, deepened the ideological fissures in French society, and eroded popular confidence in Third Republic institutions. The bleak assessments of Nazi intentions produced by the intelligence services were therefore profoundly out of step with popular support for disarmament and with the austerity measures introduced to cure France's financial ills. As a result, François-Poncet's arguments for a 'wait and see' approach to Nazism became the basis of French policy towards Germany in 1933. French diplomacy continued its attempts to bind Germany within a multilateral agreement on arms reduction. The internationalist orientation of French diplomacy was strengthened in late February when Alexis Léger replaced Philippe Berthelot as secretary-general at the Quai d'Orsay. Berthelot was known for his scepticism concerning collective security and the League of Nations. Léger, conversely, was a disciple of Briand and a proponent of multilateralism.¹⁰¹ In 1933 the fundamental objective of French policy remained an arms agreement that would include some mechanism of international control and would be

⁹⁹ Sauvy, *Histoire économique de la France*, 381.

¹⁰⁰ On this question, see, in particular, K. Mouré, "Une éventualité absolument exclue": French Reluctance to Devalue, 1933–1936', *FHS* 15: 3 (1988), 479–505; Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 55–9; and Frank, *Hantise du déclin*, 32–5, 167–73.

¹⁰¹ Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 43–4 and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 13–14, 26–7. Our understanding of these key figures in inter-war French diplomacy is limited by a paucity of documents. On Léger, see Crouy-Chanel, *Alexis Léger (Léger's chef de cabinet)*, and E. Cameron, 'Alexis Saint-Léger Léger', in Craig and Gilbert (eds.), *The Diplomats: 1919–1939*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1954), ii. 378–405. On Berthelot, see J.-L. Barré, *Le Seigneur-chat: Philippe Berthelot, 1866–1934* (Paris, 1988); 'Philippe Berthelot', *Bulletin de la Société Paul Claudel*, 28 (1967), 1–67; and R. Challener, 'The French Foreign Office: The Era of Philippe Berthelot', in *The Diplomats*, i. 49–85.

backed not only by the League of Nations but also by the participation of Great Britain and the United States.¹⁰²

Professor Duroselle judged this policy 'lamentable' and Maurice Vaïsse has concluded that France was 'adrift amid the tempests of 1933'.¹⁰³ The emphasis on disarmament and collective security certainly flew in the face of intelligence on the Nazi threat. Yet the alternatives available to French policy makers at this juncture were very limited. A 'preventative war' was never a serious option. Although rumours that France and Poland were planning such a war swirled around Europe in the spring of 1933, there is little evidence that this course of action was seriously contemplated by either civilian or military officials.¹⁰⁴ By reorganizing the military in 1928 and by undertaking the construction of the Maginot Line in 1929, French strategic planners had surrendered the military initiative in European affairs. The army was neither trained nor equipped to mount a punitive strike into Germany.¹⁰⁵ In a memorandum on German violations of the disarmament clauses of the Versailles Treaty, the foreign ministry stressed that 'all military action must be ruled out'. Such a policy would leave France utterly isolated before world opinion and, under the auspices of the Locarno accords, would even force Belgium, Italy, and Britain to come to the aid of Germany.¹⁰⁶ The memo stressed that France could not assume the unequivocal support of the League Council even in the event of a flagrant re-militarization of the Rhineland by Germany. Hence the framework for French policy during the Rhineland 'crisis' of 1936 was in place by the summer of 1933.

¹⁰² The objectives of French policy are summarized in a French Cabinet resolution of 2 May 1933 in *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, no. 229, 'Instructions générales du Conseil des Ministres'. See also Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, esp. 353–65 and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 57–85.

¹⁰³ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 55 and Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 351. An alternative view is articulated by H. Haywood Hunt, 'Édouard Daladier and French Foreign Policy in 1933: From the Disarmament Conference to the Four-Power Pact', *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History*, 7 (1981), 162–72.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Bloch has shown that these rumours were unfounded in 'La Place de la France', 19.

¹⁰⁵ On the reorganization of the army, see F. Paoli, *L'Armée française de 1924 à 1930: Le Temps des compromis* (Vincennes, 1975), 93–242. On the evolution of French defence policy in general, see J. Doise and M. Vaïsse, *Diplomatie et outil militaire: La Politique étrangère de la France, 1871–1991* (Paris, 1992), 345–62 and J. Hughes, *To the Maginot Line: The Politics of French Military Preparation in the 1920s* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

¹⁰⁶ Daladier's note to Paul-Boncour is paraphrased in the foreign ministry's response quoted above and reproduced in *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, no. 448, Paul-Boncour to London, 4 July 1933.

Nor was France in any financial shape to contemplate war on its own. The treasury situation was so bad that in early February finance minister Georges Bonnet was forced to contract a loan from Holland simply to keep the government's finances afloat.¹⁰⁷ The result was a debilitating sense of impotence. Daladier later recalled that in 1933: 'we were faced with a true financial haemorrhage which rendered all political action outside France's borders absolutely illusory.'¹⁰⁸ In any case, the depth of pacifist sentiment all but precluded such a policy. Joseph Caillaux, chairman of the powerful Senate finance commission, summed up the French national mood when he warned the Polish ambassador, 'Do not orient yourselves toward war. This country will not march.'¹⁰⁹

Another possibility was to negotiate a direct entente with Germany, outside the disarmament conference and the League of Nations. This approach was certainly considered by Daladier in the summer of 1933. The possibility of a summit meeting between the French Premier and Hitler was raised in September. After further soundings, using the pro-German journalist Fernand de Brinon as an intermediary, Daladier dismissed the project. Although documentation on this question is sparse, he appears to have decided that the French and German positions were too far apart and that Germany was not interested in negotiating from a position of weakness. He was also under pressure from both the military and the Quai d'Orsay. These discussions had alarmed the military, cast doubt on France's commitment to eastern Europe and provoked the indignant opposition of the foreign ministry.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 3, dr. B, sdr. b, 'Politique financière du gouvernement au cours de l'année 1933'. Bonnet had been forced to turn to Holland for a loan because, although he had appealed to 80 different French banks, he was unable to raise the necessary funds in France: Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 60–2.

¹⁰⁸ France, Assemblée Nationale, *Rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée d'enquêter sur les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945: Documents et témoignages recueillis par la commission d'enquête parlementaire* (cited hereafter as *Les Événements*), 12 vols., i. 9, Daladier testimony.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Wandycz, *Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, 272. On the question of supposed plans for preventative war, see also Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 406–8 and 441–3; Young, *In Command of France*, 47, 51; and E. Bennet, *German Rearmament and the West, 1932–1933* (Princeton, 1978), 337–8.

¹¹⁰ The best discussion of this episode is in Du Réau, *Daladier*, 112–15 and Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 363–4 and 446–8; Wandycz, *Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, 296–7; Jäckel, *Frankreich in Hitlers Europa*, 26–7; Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution in Europe*, 170–3 and de Brinon's *Mémoires* (Paris, 1949), 25–30.

A third course of action was a policy of alliances and rearmament similar to that which would be adopted the following April by the centre-right government of Gaston Doumergue. The two Great Power candidates for a policy of alliances were Italy and the Soviet Union. Italian interests were threatened by German designs on Austria and east-central Europe. The accession of Hitler had left the Soviet Union more isolated than ever. But this policy was fraught with formidable internal and external difficulties. An alliance with Fascist Italy was problematic in the extreme for a government dependent on left-wing support in the Chamber. Moreover, as the intelligence briefs cited above had emphasized, Italy was a revisionist power with many of the same grievances against the Versailles system articulated by Germany. In terms of both ideology and power politics, Italy had greater affinities with Nazi Germany. This immutable fact would stand in the way of any real cooperation between France and Italy against Germany throughout the 1930s. Meanwhile, the prospect of a Franco-Soviet alliance met with determined opposition from the vast majority of the French right, threatened France's relationship with Great Britain and raised the hackles of the Poles, the Romanians, and the Americans.¹¹¹

France's most important potential allies were Britain and the United States. But neither the British nor the Americans were willing to make common cause against Germany. Indeed, British opinion was more sympathetic to Germany than to France at this juncture. For many British statesmen, the French obsession with security was the chief obstacle to peace. A common view within the Foreign Office was that 'by talking obsessively of war, the possibility of war and the probability of war, [France's leadership] is well on the way to making this nightmare prophesy come true'. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald was even more blunt. 'Again and again be it said,' he confided to his diary, 'France is the enemy.'¹¹² Relations with the United States, meanwhile,

¹¹¹ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 63–79; Wandycz, *Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, 259–299; Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 441–9; Young, *In Command of France*, 37–51; Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, 7–25; W. Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy: The Enigma of Italy in French Diplomacy* (Kent, Ohio, 1985), 34–79. On Franco-Soviet relations at this juncture, see also J. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security* (New York, 1984), 55–79 and M. Carley, 'Five Kopecks for Five Kopecks: Franco-Soviet Trade Negotiations, 1928–1939', *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, 33: 1 (1992), 23–58.

¹¹² Public Record Office, Kew, United Kingdom (cited hereafter as PRO), FO 371, 15945, C6074/235/18, Orme Sargent minute on a military attaché report of 11 July 1932. MacDonald quoted in R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London, 1993), 16.

had all but collapsed after France had ceased repayments of its First World War debts the previous December. American isolationism would soon reach its inter-war zenith with the passage of the Johnson Act in early 1934. Conversations with the British and the Americans during this period reveal the yawning gulf which separated the French and the Anglo-Saxon countries. While Daladier and Paul-Boncour continued to harp on German treaty violations, their British and American interlocutors repeatedly stressed the need to reach an agreement with the Germans before an arms race developed.¹¹³

Serious rearmament was out of the question. A balanced budget received absolute priority over the German threat. Before the Senate defence commissions Daladier flatly refused to reconsider his decision to cut the defence budget, arguing that 'financial considerations must take precedence over military policy' and that 'a balanced budget is the best guarantee of national security'.¹¹⁴ He declared to the high command that 'France must above all get through this financial crisis' and that 'once [the crisis] is overcome, in 1936, we will be able to view things differently'.¹¹⁵ Air minister Pierre Cot adopted the same position. He acknowledged that reductions in the air budget were inevitable. The air ministry's budget, minuscule to begin with, shrank by 15 per cent in 1933.¹¹⁶ Although the Conseil Supérieur de l'Air (CSA) approved the

¹¹³ See, in particular, a meeting of French, British, and American statesmen in the *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, no. 376, 'Compte-rendu: Notes prises au cours d'une conversation tenue le 8 juin 1933 au Quai d'Orsay'. Other accounts of the meetings between French leaders and British and American representatives in late 1932 and early 1933 are in the *DDF*, 1ère série, ii, no. 392, 'Conversation franco-britannique du 10 mars 1933'; no. 404, 'Conversation franco-britannique du 13 mars 1933'; no. 418, 'Conversation franco-britannique du 16 mars 1933'; and iv, no. 300, 'Conversation d'Aubert avec Norman Davis et Hugh Wilson', 12 Oct. 1933. A superb study of the debt question at this juncture is P. Clavin, *The Failure of Economic Diplomacy: Britain, Germany, France and the United States, 1931-1936* (London, 1995), 116-93. The most thorough consideration of French policy is Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 351-477. On American policy and Franco-American relations, see E. Mechoulan, 'L'Incompréhension diplomatique franco-américaine, 1932-1933', *RHMC* 42 (1995), 577-92; M. Leffler, *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1979), 355-69; H. Blumenthal, *Illusion and Reality in Franco-American Diplomacy, 1914-1945* (Baton-Rouge, La., 1986), 176-252; and M. Rossi, *Roosevelt and the French* (Westport, Conn., 1993), 13-21.

¹¹⁴ AS, 15ème Législature, Inter-Commission de la Défense Nationale, Daladier audition, 14 Feb. 1933.

¹¹⁵ SHAT, 1N 33, *Procès-verbal* of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, 18 Dec. 1933.

¹¹⁶ AAN, Commission de l'Aéronautique, 15ème Législature, Denain auditions, 8 Feb. 1933 and 9 Mar. 1934. See also Cot's audition before the Senate nationale defence commissions in AS, 15ème Législature, Inter-Commission de la Défense Nationale, 14 Feb. 1933 and *DDF*, 1ère série, iii, no. 358, Cot to Daladier, 4 June 1933. Finances were not the only consideration. Part of the problem was a lack of modern prototypes which could be ordered for the air force. See also T. Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire de la France, 1933-1939* (Paris, 1997),

air force's rearmament programme in June 1933, the necessary approval from parliament was not obtained until June 1934. The badly needed renovation of the French aircraft industry was delayed and Germany thus secured a crucial head start in the air power race.

In sum, expenditure on rearmament was completely at odds with the prevailing politics of disarmament and deflation. Nor did France's political leadership recognize just how quickly the military balance could change. Fourteen years of military predominance on the European continent had created the impression, among politicians of the left in particular, that French security was over-insured. This impression did not dissipate even after France officially forsook its policy of disarmament in April 1934. The modest rearmament programmes introduced by the Doumergue government at this time would eventually be emasculated by the deflationary policies of the subsequent governments of Pierre-Étienne Flandin and especially Pierre Laval.¹¹⁷

French foreign policy was caught on the horns of an insoluble dilemma. Given that significant rearmament was impossible, preserving French security required maintaining France's short-term military superiority over Germany while at the same time securing Anglo-American support in the event of a Franco-German war. During the early 1930s, however, these two objectives became increasingly contradictory as British and American statesmen put intense pressure on France to relinquish its military advantages in order to forge an effective disarmament agreement. The entire scenario was misguided in the extreme. Rearmament was at the very heart of German national policy. Anglo-American pressure on the French to disarm in the vain hope that this might induce Adolf Hitler to limit German rearmament was based on a reading of Nazi foreign policy which was much less realistic than that of either Daladier or Paul-Boncour. Nonetheless, the choice facing French diplomacy was between Anglo-American goodwill (the benefits of which were far from concrete) and France's existing military superiority (which would be difficult or even impossible to maintain if Germany began to rearm in earnest). A third alternative, a policy of Great Power alliances with either Italy or the USSR, raised internal difficulties and sparked doubts about France's commitment to eastern Europe.

75–103; Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 20–4, 54–7, 315–19 and D. Boussard, *Un Problème de défense nationale: L'Aéronautique militaire au Parlement, 1928–1940* (Vincennes, 1983), 78–85.

¹¹⁷ On these issues, see Frank, *La Hantise du déclin*, 32–5; Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 608–10; and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 56–79.

Under these circumstances French statesmen abandoned the initiative altogether and adopted a reactive policy aimed at preserving the status quo. The Italian proposal of early March to forge a four-power directorate to oversee the peaceful revision of Versailles was greeted with little enthusiasm in France. The French response was to propose revisions which removed any real revisionism from the stipulations of the original proposal.¹¹⁸ The focus of French foreign policy became instead to ensure that Germany would be blamed for the failure of the disarmament conference. Nor did Germany's departure from the conference and from the League in October prompt a reconsideration of French national policy. As the post-war European order slowly crumbled, the focus of French political elites remained decidedly inward.

To conclude this chapter, it is clear that the situation inside France was decisive in shaping the course of external policy at this juncture. Intelligence forecasts of Hitler's intentions or future German military might had little impact on civilian decision makers. The assessments of Hitler's intentions were 'worst case' estimates based on long-standing assumptions about the German national character, memories of the Great War, and a close reading of *Mein Kampf*. But they were also accurate. There can be little doubt that the right information was available and reached the very top of France's governmental hierarchy. It was ignored, however, by civilian leaders who were preoccupied with the crippling effects of the economic crisis and with the great ideological divide between right and left in France. It did not help, moreover, that the German military threat remained a threat in the indeterminate future. The judgement that the German military would be ready for a European war in 1938 was to prove startlingly accurate. But it lacked immediacy to politicians who, given the chronic instability of Third Republic politics, could not count on retaining their portfolios for more than a few months. In response to being ignored, and to combat the prevailing trend towards defence cuts, military officials painted a ridiculously exaggerated picture of German military strength. But this 'politicization' of the intelligence process was ultimately counter-productive. In a trend that would become even more pronounced under the Laval government in 1935, politicians intent on reducing

¹¹⁸ On France and the Four-Power Proposal, see Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 70–4; Wandycz, *The Twilight of France's Eastern Alliances*, 274–84; Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, 17–23; and Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 400–1.

military expenditure were inclined to dismiss intelligence reports as deliberately exaggerated. Intelligence became marginalized in the decision making process. This priority of domestic issues over external threats would remain the chief obstacle to preparations for war in France throughout the 1930s.

Finally, there was another factor at work in this 'dialogue of the deaf'. It is possible, even probable, that France's political leadership was psychologically incapable of accepting the message they were receiving from military intelligence. To accept the Deuxième Bureau's interpretation of the European situation was to admit the likelihood of war. For a generation of politicians with vivid memories of the horrors of the last war, this was an extremely difficult, if not impossible, step to take. It was much more tempting to agree with François-Poncet and to dismiss *Mein Kampf* as a violent flight of fancy rather than a 'programme for world domination'. It would be several years before civilian leaders were able to cross this psychological threshold and begin preparing for another world war.

Intelligence and the National Socialist *Gleichschaltung*, 1933–1936

DURING THE first three years of National Socialist rule, German foreign and domestic policy focused on establishing the necessary political, social, and economic preconditions for unlimited rearmament and a war of conquest in eastern Europe. France's intelligence services correctly reported that the Nazi Party was restructuring German society and reorganizing the German economy to serve the aims of Hitler's expansionist foreign policy. They also provided detailed warning of the decisive head start which the German rearmament effort had gained over the moribund French armaments and aircraft industries. This information only deepened the sense of inferiority and vulnerability in relation to Germany that characterized French perceptions of the German threat. On one level, this sense of inferiority was entirely justified. German demographic and industrial superiority meant that the Reich possessed considerably greater military potential. On another level, however, French intelligence suffered from what might best be described as an inferiority complex when it came to evaluating German military power. Intelligence assessments tended to focus on the iron grip the Nazi regime had imposed on the state, on the remarkable recovery of German industrial production, and on the apparently total subordination of the national economy to the requirements of rearmament. The weaknesses which analysts identified in German military potential, conversely, did not figure prominently in the sweeping assessments of German military power produced by the Deuxième Bureaux. Intelligence assessments both reflected and at the same time contributed to the growing pessimism of the defence establishment during this period.

I

In the aftermath of his accession to power Hitler declared to his cabinet that Germany's economic problems could not be resolved by classical economic means but would be overcome instead by a policy of territorial expansion. The German economy would therefore be subordinated to requirements of rearmament. In the earliest budget discussions he demanded 'everything for the armed forces' and asserted that 'in the future, the economy of the Reich [must] be primarily aligned along the needs of German rearmament'. When it came to allocating financial and raw material resources, Hitler stipulated that 'in any clash between the demands for the military and demands for other purposes, the interest of the Wehrmacht must under all circumstances prevail'. The objective was to achieve the highest possible level of rearmament in the shortest possible period of time.¹ The result was a massive increase in government investment in German heavy industry in general and the aircraft and armaments industries in particular. During the first year of Nazi rule this investment more than doubled. By 1936 it had increased fivefold. In 1936 spending on rearmament was ten times what it had been in 1933. The objective was to stimulate the German economy with a rearmament boom financed by the state.² This investment programme served as the motor for both an impressive German industrial recovery and the astonishing growth of Germany's armed forces down to 1939. By the end of 1935 German industry had recovered completely and output actually exceeded pre-Depression levels.³ By the spring of 1936 the Reich's war industries were outproducing those of France by a decisive margin. By 1938 Germany would possess the largest army and air force in Europe.

¹ *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (cited hereafter as *DGFP*), HMSO, 1954–66, Series C (1933–7), i, no. 37. On the priority of rearmament, see also H. E. Volkmann, 'The National Socialist Economy in Preparation for War', in *GSWW*, ii, 197–223; Overy, *War and Economy, passim*; and A. Barkai, *Nazi Economics: Ideology, Theory, and Policy* (Oxford, 1990), 159–62.

² Estimates of rearmament expenditure vary considerably. For an overview of the state of research on this question with tables, see Volkmann, 'The National Socialist Economy', 231 and 237.

³ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 386 and D. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Output in Western Europe* (Cambridge, 1969), 394.

II

Assessments of the economic and political situation across the Rhine would play a central role in overall perceptions of the German threat. The First World War had provided ample evidence of the importance of these kinds of estimates. The predominant lesson taken from the experience of total war was that the criteria used to evaluate a nation's military capacity had to be expanded dramatically. In May of 1935 the Deuxième Bureau and the SGDN collaborated on a 221-page study entitled 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne' which began with the recognition that:

The experience of the war of 1914–1918 has demonstrated that in the case of prolonged hostilities a great state must possess not only military power, reserves of manpower, and productive factories. It must also have at its disposition raw materials and foodstuffs as well as the moral force which efficient social and political organization provide.⁴

Modern warfare had made social and economic structures decisive factors in calculations of the military strength of a given state.

This interpretation of the anatomy of military power was also manifest in the analysis of the course of the war prepared by the operations bureau of the general staff in 1923. Assessments prepared in the aftermath of the conflict concluded that economic warfare had played a decisive role in bringing Germany to its knees in 1918.⁵ Economic privation was considered 'the single most important factor in the internal collapse which preceded the defeat of the German armies on the western front'.⁶ The will of the German people to continue the struggle had been undermined by the effects of the Allied blockade: '[Germany was] defeated on the home front as thoroughly, and perhaps more quickly, as it was on the field of battle. In the grips of ever worsening economic difficulties . . . morale gave way, unity collapsed, and the government fell.'⁷ This view was central to French strategic thinking right up to the outbreak of war. It underpinned the conviction that the best hope to defeat Germany was to engage it in *materialschlacht* where the superior resources of France and its allies would once again prove

⁴ SHAT, 2N 151–3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935.

⁵ See e.g. SHAT, 7N 2611–2, 'L'Évolution militaire de l'Allemagne depuis l'armistice', a 36-page study produced by the Deuxième Bureau for the École Supérieure de Guerre.

⁶ SHAT, 2N 52–1, 'Étude sur le blocus', 23 Jan. 1923. See also 'Étude historique du Blocus pendant la guerre 1914–1918', no date.

⁷ SHAT, 2N 151–3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935.

decisive. Hence the importance of Britain and of the naval blockade to French strategy. A general staff overview produced in 1923 stressed that economic warfare was 'absolutely indispensable to any hope of victory in a long war'.⁸ Accordingly, the Deuxième Bureau attributed pivotal importance to the political and economic situation inside Germany in its analyses of German war potential during the inter-war period.

The picture of the German political situation constructed by French intelligence correctly emphasized the growing control Hitler and the National Socialist party exercised over all levels of German society. By late 1934 French analysts had effectively ruled out any hope that the Nazi regime was in danger of being overthrown by popular unrest. While this picture was based in part on a fairly accurate reading of the extent to which the Nazi Party was able to extend its authority over the German state, it also rested on more crude generalizations about the German national character. Germans were assumed to have an innate respect for authority and a predisposition towards authoritarian forms of government. Intelligence officers also judged the average German intellect to be 'lacking faculties of critical and independent thought'. This was a manifestation of widely held assumptions that the average German was 'sadly deficient in intellectual vivacity'.⁹

These stereotypes were central to the Deuxième Bureau's view of Germany as a nation that inclined naturally towards authoritarian forms of government. Such a view was greatly reinforced by the remarkable success achieved by crude Nazi propaganda. General Renondeau, for example, described the German 'taste for stability' as a key factor in 'the undeniable popular support Hitler enjoys among Germans of every class'.¹⁰ A long report on German war potential considered that the political traditions of the Prussian state rested on an 'innate respect for authority', and the desire 'to be governed with a firm hand' which were distinctive features of the German national character. The liberal Weimar regime 'did not agree with the national temperament' which 'yearns for authoritarian rule'.¹¹ The chief of the Section Allemande attributed the astounding successes of Nazi propaganda to 'an almost total absence of critical thinking' in German

⁸ SHAT, 2N 52-1, 'Étude sur le blocus', 23 Jan. 1923.

⁹ Cited in R. Schor, *L'Opinion française et les étrangers, 1919-1939* (Paris, 1985), 147-8. See also G. Pistorius, *L'Image de l'Allemagne dans le roman français entre les deux guerres* (Paris, 1964).

¹⁰ SHAT, 7N 2601, Renondeau to Paris, 26 Jan. 1938.

¹¹ SHAT, 2N 151-3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935.

public opinion.¹² Nor was this perspective on the German psyche confined to military officials. It was shared by an emerging generation of intellectuals. Raymond Aron, for example, thought that the German people possessed a 'truly admirable vitality'. This vitality, according to Aron, found expression in the 'statist-dynamism' which animated German political culture.¹³

Consequently, intelligence appreciations of the political situation in Germany were based on the assumption that the population constituted a disciplined and unquestioningly obedient mass at the disposal of the Nazi government. In early 1934 Renondeau reported that '[although] the regime has its opponents and continues to experience periodic difficulties, its foundations are robust and solid'.¹⁴ The Deuxième Bureau was of the same view. A wide-ranging report on the situation in Germany prepared in May 1935 concluded that the regime was strong and that '[a]ll individual interests bow willingly to the general interest of the racial state'.¹⁵

The lone node of resistance within the state attributed any importance by French intelligence was the general staff of the German army. Both Renondeau and the Deuxième Bureau stressed that a widespread hostility to the Nazi Party in general, and to the SA in particular, existed within the traditionalist Reichswehr officer corps. But the conclusion was that the army and the party had forged an alliance of convenience. Renondeau credited Hitler with having made a shrewd choice in naming General Werner von Blomberg Defence minister. Renondeau described Blomberg as a 'fervent disciple' of Hitler and correctly judged that '[a]s long as rearmament is given priority Hitler can count on the cooperation of the army'.¹⁶ The Section Allemande concurred. The *Bulletin de Renseignements* for January–February 1934

¹² SHAT, 7N 2512, *RH*, 17–23 Mar. 1936.

¹³ Cited in M.-C. Granjon, 'L'Allemagne de Raymond Aron et de Jean-Paul Sartre', in H. Manfred Bock, R. Meyer-Kalkus, and M. Trebitsch (eds.), *Entre Locarno et Vichy: Les Relations culturelles franco-allemandes dans les années 1930* (Paris, 1993), ii. 471–2.

¹⁴ SHAT, 7N 2594, 'Malaise politique à l'intérieur du Reich', 11 Dec. 1934. See also the assessment of the Deuxième Bureau in 7N 2506, 'Instruction prémilitaire et paramilitaire en Allemagne', *BdR*, Mar.–June 1934.

¹⁵ SHAT, 2N 151–3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935.

¹⁶ SHAT, 7N 2592, 'Allocution du Général von Blomberg', 11 Sept. 1933; 7N 2593, 'Le National-socialisme dans la Reichswehr', 23 Jan. 1934. In this perceptive summary of Reichswehr attitudes towards the regime, Renondeau warned that support for National Socialism was strongest among the younger members of the officer corps. See also SHAT, 7N 2593, 'Instruction politique dans la Reichswehr', 11 Apr. 1934. For a historical analysis, see Müller, *Das Heer und Hitler*, 112–19.

observed that Blomberg was 'utterly devoted' to Hitler and concluded that any challenge to the Nazi regime would have to be preceded by a change in army leadership.¹⁷

Intelligence reports did identify the acute tension between the Reichswehr and the SA. During the first year of Nazi rule the ranks of the SA had swollen to nearly three million party fanatics. Moreover, Ernst Röhm, the SA 'Commander in Chief', did not conceal his ambitions for the SA to supplant the Reichswehr as the chief organ of national defence in the new Germany. In late 1933 and early 1934 intelligence reports began predicting a bloody showdown between the regular army and the Nazi militia.¹⁸ But even Renondeau, was caught off guard by the vicious purge of the SA leadership of 30 June. More importantly, French analysts failed to perceive that the 'Night of the Long Knives' marked a decisive stage in the process of subordinating the army to the dictates of the Nazi government. Both Renondeau and the Section Allemande considered the purges an unmitigated victory for the interests of the Reichswehr. Renondeau judged that Hitler had acted 'under intense pressure from the Reichswehr' and that the army general staff 'has regained or will soon regain the preponderant position that it enjoyed in Imperial Germany'.¹⁹

This was an understandable misinterpretation of a very complex situation. In reality, the authority of the army was being steadily undermined by the National Socialists. Failure to recognize this trend led French observers to exaggerate the potential threat which the Reichswehr posed to the Nazi regime. In the ensuing months Renondeau continued to portray the army general staff as 'the only important officials in Germany today who have retained their reason'.²⁰ He reported deep distaste for and resentment of the Party within the military but concluded that a mutually beneficial arrangement continued to exist between army and party: 'Whatever the subterranean rumblings of the army, the ground is still firm under Hitler's feet.' The Wehrmacht had

¹⁷ SHAT, 7N 2506, *BdR*, Jan.–Feb. 1934, 'Le Haut Commandement allemand'. See also Castellán, *Réarmement clandestine du Reich*, 85–9.

¹⁸ SHAT, 7N 2592, 'Le Ministre Röhm', 5 Dec. 1933; 7N 2593, 'Reichswehr et Hitlerisme', 20 Feb. 1934; 'Caractère militaire des SA', 4 Apr. 1934; and esp. 'Reichswehr et SA', 23 Apr. 1934.

¹⁹ SHAT, 7N 2594, 'Reichswehr et SA: Événements du 30 juin', 5 July 1934 and 7N 2514, *RH*, 9–15 July 1934. See also 7N 2594, 'Échos officiels sur les événements du 30 juin et leurs conséquences', 18 July 1934; 'Les événements du 30 juin et la France', 19 July 1934; and 'Le Reichswehr et les événements du 30 juin', 19 July 1934.

²⁰ SHAT, 7N 2596, 'Convention militaire sur les armements terrestres', 3 July 1935.

'no desire to start a civil war'. Yet Renondeau also speculated that, once fully restored, the army might be tempted to do away with the regime. Indulging as much in wishful thinking as in objective analysis, he characterized the attitude of the military as 'shrewd' and 'patient'.²¹ 'The army', he concluded in mid-1935 'is absorbed in rebuilding itself; it will wait until it is stronger to intervene.'²² Air attaché Léon Poincaré similarly advised the air ministry that evidence of a 'serious divergence of views between the Party and the chiefs of staff' during this period but also advised that 'these fissures in the German edifice do not in themselves pose a threat to the regime'.²³

As the Nazi Party extended its control over the state, however, hopes that the regime would be deposed by a military coup faded and were replaced by the more realistic judgement that the army played a moderating influence in the counsels of the Führer. Renondeau correctly surmised that the military approved of Hitler's expansionist ambitions but was opposed to involving Germany in another war before the necessary preparations were completed.²⁴ This interpretation of the role of the Reichswehr in Hitler's counsels would endure in intelligence assessments through to the outbreak of war.

The authority which the Hitler regime had established in Germany facilitated the implementation of a series of social policies which French intelligence interpreted as virtual military preparations. The *Bulletin de Renseignements* of December 1935 judged the fundamental objectives of Nazi domestic policy to be 'the *Wiederwehrhaftmachung* [militarization] of all levels of German society' and 'the construction of a National-Socialist *Volkgemeinschaft*'. Nazi social policy, it noted, performed the dual functions of steeling the population for the demands of war while at the same time consolidating the Nazi hold on power.²⁵

Education was correctly judged to be a central element to this strategy. The Deuxième Bureau reported that the Nazification process began at primary school and continued through to the university

²¹ SHAT, 7N 2596, 'La Wehrmacht et le national-socialisme', 14 Aug. 1935. See also 7N 2594, 'La Reichswehr dans l'État national-socialiste', 7 Aug. 1934.

²² SHAT, 7N 2596, 'L'Armée et le radicalisme Nazi', 6 Aug. 1935.

²³ SHAT, 7N 2599, 'Considérations sur le développement de l'armée de l'air allemande en 1936', 13 Jan. 1937.

²⁴ SHAT, 7N 2598, Renondeau report, 2 Dec. 1936.

²⁵ SHAT, 7N 2506, *BdR*, Nov.–Dec. 1935 and 2N 151–3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935. On the Nazi policy of creating a 'racial community', see Wette, 'Ideology, Propaganda and Internal Politics', 125–33 and M. Burleigh and W. Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, 1991).

system. The motivating principle behind Nazi education policies was considered to be the desire to 'prevent German youth from receiving the type of education which develops the faculties of criticism and reflection'.²⁶ The central objective was instead the development of a universal military ethos. A study of education in the Third Reich by the Section Allemande reported that all German schoolchildren recited 'The state exists only for war' and that 'We will be conquerors in the next war' every morning along with Christian prayers and a salutation to the Führer.²⁷ In evaluating the Nazi approach to education Renondeau concluded that 'Germany's leadership is not interested in cultivating the intellectual faculties of its youth, but desires instead a generation of young people of energetic character and athletic disposition who know only the National Socialist ideal and who are blindly devoted to Hitler'.²⁸ Renondeau's reports combined contempt for the intellectual stultification imposed by this system with wholehearted approval of the importance attributed to physical preparation which, he judged, would provide the Wehrmacht with superior soldiers.²⁹ The emphasis on physical education in the Nazi curriculum had a tremendous impact on French observers. The military attachés in Berlin prepared a 44-page report that outlined the political and military benefits of this programme, which emphasized traditional military virtues of fitness and discipline while at the same time providing basic preparation for military training.³⁰

Much attention was paid to the role of propaganda. The Section Allemande produced tri-annual reports on Nazi propaganda in order to monitor the political situation. The overriding theme in all assessments was that '[t]he single and unifying objective of National Socialist propaganda is the psychological preparation of the nation for war'.³¹ Renondeau judged that Nazi brainwashing techniques

²⁶ SHAT, 7N 2633-3, 'Propagande à l'école', undated. See also 7N 2506, 'La Jeunesse universitaire et la préparation militaire en Allemagne', *BdR*, May-June 1933.

²⁷ SHAT, 7N 2633-3, 'Éducation hitlérienne', Spring 1935.

²⁸ Cited from SHAT, 7N 2597, Renondeau report, 18 Apr. See also 7N 2633-3, 'Les Universitaires et le national-socialisme', Nov. 1938. On the question of Nazism in the German university system during this period, see M. Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastward* (Cambridge, 1991).

²⁹ SHAT, 7N 2597, 'Éducation physique en Allemagne', 25 Mar. 1936.

³⁰ SHAT, 7N 2597, 'Éducation physique en Allemagne', 25 Mar. 1936; 7N 2506, 'Instruction pré militaire et paramilitaire en Allemagne', *BdR*, Mar.-June 1934.

³¹ SHAT, 7N 2633-1, 'Compte-rendu tri-mestriel de renseignements concernant la propagande allemande', 1 Sept. 1937.

were aimed at creating a 'war psychosis' which would ensure that the German population would follow the government into war without serious questioning or resistance.³² Nazi propaganda, combined with the pervasive mechanisms of censorship and oppression in the Hitler State, was thought to have effectively stifled serious resistance to the regime. The Section Allemande attributed the lack of vocal dissent to the 'culture of extreme violence' in Nazi Germany which 'does not hesitate to torture and kill those who oppose the official ideology'.³³

Complementing education and propaganda were a range of youth programmes, National Socialist clubs, and the National Labour Service. The Section Allemande advised that the objectives of institutions such as the Hitler-Jugend, the Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps, and the Nazionalsozialistisches Fliegerkorps were to inculcate qualities of discipline and dedication in German youth while at the same time providing further exposure to Nazi ideology in a military environment.³⁴ Gauché emphasized the 'central place' of these organizations in the efforts of the regime to 'develop a predominantly military culture' which was based 'above all on the enthusiasm of German youth'.³⁵ Another essential component of the process of Nazification and militarization was the Arbeitsdienst (National Labour Service) which the regime reconstituted as a preliminary stage to military service. In June of 1935 the Nazis made labour service compulsory for all youths eligible for conscription. Military intelligence reported that the Arbeitsdienst daily routine devoted several hours to military training and that '[t]he men of the Labour Service are virtual soldiers who lack only military equipment in order to be ready for combat'.³⁶ This was an error. The German army had no intention of using National Labour Service units in combat, and even if it had, the material to equip these formations did not exist.³⁷

³² SHAT, 7N 2599, Personal letter from Renondeau to Gamelin, 14 Jan. 1937.

³³ SHAT, 7N 2633-1, untitled study of German propaganda, 1 Sept. 1939.

³⁴ SHAT, ARR, 1120, dr. 904, 'Note au sujet des camps de vacances de la jeunesse hitlérienne', 24 July 1935; SHAT, 7N 2629-3, *BdR*, Nov.-Dec. 1936; 7N 2596, 'L'Armée allemande et le corps automobile national-socialiste', 31 July 1935; 7N 2599, 'Le Problème des réserves dans l'armée de l'air allemande et le rôle du Deutscher Luftsportverband', Poincaré report, 18 Feb. 1937; and 'Création du corps national-socialiste d'aviation', Poincaré report, 22 Apr. 1937. On the Nazi Flying clubs, see also SHAA, 2B 58, *BdR*, 1er trimestre 1936.

³⁵ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur l'armée allemande', given by Colonel Gauché to the CSG in Mar. 1939.

³⁶ SHAT, 7N 2680-2, *BdR*, Mar.-Apr. 1937.

³⁷ On the Arbeitsdienst, see Wette, 'Ideology, Propaganda and Internal Politics', 130-2; Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State* (London, 1981), 244; and Overy, *War and Economy*, 46-7.

Underlying the perception that Germany had been thoroughly militarized were assumptions that militarism was an integral component in the German national character. It was assumed that the German 'warrior spirit' would permit the German population to endure restrictions and sacrifices that other peoples would find unpalatable.³⁸ This characterization of 'German militarism' had its origins in a psychological portrait of the typical German as a 'warrior who worships force' that was common currency in French opinion after the Great War. The Section Allemande considered this mentality 'unique among the European peoples'.³⁹ The image of the German as militarist was the central theme of historian Jacques Bainville's immensely popular and influential *Histoire de deux peuples*, written during the war and reprinted yearly through the inter-war period.⁴⁰

These supposedly typical German characteristics were thought to have facilitated Nazi efforts to reorganize German society around a distinctly military ethos. According to intelligence reports the national police service (Schutzpolizei), the disaster relief service (Technische Nothilfe), the national railway service (Bahnschutz), and even the national postal service (Postschutz) had been militarized and would function as auxiliary military units in the event of mobilization. The overriding impression was that the Nazi government was transforming the Reich into an armed camp.⁴¹ This view was an important factor in the Deuxième Bureau's chronic tendency to discern potential soldiers everywhere in Germany which led, in turn, to massive exaggerations of the reserve strength of the German army and air force. These exaggerations notwithstanding, intelligence officials were correct in predicting that the net result of the militarization of German society would be a revolution in the European balance of power.⁴²

³⁸ SHAT, 7N 2521-6, 'Note sur les conséquences à tirer de la renonciation par l'Allemagne du traité de Locarno', 8 Apr. 1936.

³⁹ Quotations from SHAT, 2N 151-3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935; 7N 2521-6, 'Note sur les conséquences à tirer de la renonciation par l'Allemagne du traité de Locarno', 8 Apr. 1936 and from Schor, *L'Opinion française*, 147-9. See also R. Rémond, 'L'Image de l'Allemagne dans l'opinion publique française de mars 1936 à septembre 1939', Hildebrand and Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich*, 6-7.

⁴⁰ J. Bainville, *Histoire de deux peuples*, 1st edn. (Paris, 1915). Bainville also published 2nd and 3rd edns. in 1927 and 1933.

⁴¹ See e.g. SHAT, 7N 2639, *BdR*, Nov.-Dec. 1936; 7N 2680-2, *BdR*, Mar.-Apr. 1937.

⁴² This is the thesis advanced in two important assessments of the political and economic situation in Germany: SHAT, 2N 151-3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935 and 7N 2506, *BdR*, Nov.-Dec. 1935.

III

The conviction that Hitler's government was preparing the Reich for the demands of total war was central to intelligence assessments of the industrial and economic situation in Germany. The objectives of intelligence work on the German economy were threefold. The chief aim was to track the progress of German rearmament in order to estimate the size and combat worthiness of the German army after mobilization. Another immediate objective was to ensure that France was not caught unawares by a German mobilization by watching for signs of the mobilization of the German economy for war. The third function of research on the German economy was to measure the overall preparedness of the Reich for a long war.⁴³ Estimates of the output of Germany's armaments industry were the key statistics in assessments of the level of German rearmament. Efforts to monitor industrial activity in the Reich were dependent upon estimates of the amount of human, financial, and raw material resources which were diverted to defence-related industry from other sectors of the economy. The raw material situation was the chief consideration in efforts to estimate Germany's vulnerability to economic warfare. It must be emphasized that economic intelligence was not as advanced in France during this period as it was in Britain. There was no French equivalent to the Economic Pressure on Germany Sub-Committee in London nor was there an Industrial Intelligence Centre. In the long run, economic intelligence provided a relatively realistic picture of Germany's ability to sustain a prolonged war effort. But serious errors were made in estimating both the levels of armaments production as well as the extent to which the German economy had been mobilized for rearmament.

The Nazi government's fanatical commitment to secrecy placed formidable obstacles in the way of intelligence gathering. Upon assuming power the Nazi regime imposed a suffocating clampdown on information relating to virtually all defence-related industries—which eventually expanded to include most of the German economy. From 1934 onward the government did not publish an official budget. This was not a terrible blow to the French intelligence effort however. As Renondeau noted, German governments had been producing dishonest budgets since the Weimar period.⁴⁴ More important was the

⁴³ SHAT, 2N 151-3, General Jamet (Director of the SGDN) to Lt. Colonel Koeltz (Chief of the Deuxième Bureau), 3 Feb. 1933.

⁴⁴ SHAT, 7N 2598, 'Dépenses d'armement', 26 Oct. 1936.

comprehensive anti-espionage legislation introduced in 1933 and zealously enforced by the increasingly powerful and effective secret police network. Foreign representatives were to observe only what the regime wanted them to see and information on German economic development was as closely guarded as military secrets. Divulging information related in any way to national defence was punishable by death. Industrialists were forbidden to discuss production techniques, the activity of individual factories, or even to publish photographs of industrial installations. Renondeau lamented frequently that Germany was increasingly becoming a 'police state' in which the 'military and industrial secrets are guarded with fanatical secrecy'.⁴⁵

As a result, there were virtually no reliable statistics on military expenditure, the German balance of trade, agricultural production, or domestic consumption. Such information was subject to an extremely thorough policy of censorship and suppression which shrouded economic activity in Germany in uncertainty. The situation worsened after April of 1934 when the flow of intelligence from source 'L' ceased abruptly.⁴⁶ The Deuxième Bureau thus lost its only source on the planning and execution of successive German rearmament programmes. Although the information provided by 'L' had always been treated with great caution, this was a grievous blow. The result was a critical dearth of reliable data concerning arms and aircraft production which plagued French intelligence right up to the outbreak of war. From mid-1934 onward assessments of the activity of Germany's armaments industries included, almost as a matter of routine, qualifications of some sort which explained that estimates were necessarily rough approximations owing to the lack of precise figures.⁴⁷

The SR experienced similar difficulties in procuring clandestine information. In their annual reports prepared in January 1937 virtually all of the posts stressed that, as the Nazi regime imposed ever tighter restrictions on travel to and from Germany, access to information inside the Reich decreased sometimes dramatically. Agents were

⁴⁵ SHAT, 7N 2594, 'Conservation du secret en Allemagne', 6 June 1934; 'Réarmement de l'Allemagne', 27 Sept. 1934.

⁴⁶ The last communication from 'L' that has survived and is in the archives is entitled simply 'Documents photographiés' and is dated 30 Apr. 1934: SHAT, 7N 2593. There is no clue as to what happened to 'L'. One possible explanation is that this source was compromised by its links to the clandestine German Communist Party.

⁴⁷ Among numerous examples are SHAT, 2N 151-3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935; 7N 2629-3, *BdR*, Nov.-Dec. 1936; 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur le matériel dans l'armée allemande: L'Industrie allemande et le réarmement', April 1937.

increasingly difficult both to liaise with and to recruit. At the same time, honourable correspondents travelled less frequently to Germany and were often placed under close observation during their voyage. The chief of the Metz SR post suggested a return to many of the methods employed during the First World War.⁴⁸ The impression that German society was being placed on a war-footing was reinforced greatly by Nazi security measures.

Concern over this lack of information was widespread within the defence establishment. In March 1935 General Jamet, head of the SGDN, informed the minister of Defence that the 'nearly impenetrable veil of secrecy' which had descended over the German defence industry in the three years of Nazi rule had made obtaining anything close to precise figures on German armaments production all but impossible.⁴⁹ At the Foreign ministry, the DAPC similarly lamented the unavailability of reliable figures on armaments production.⁵⁰ The problem was most critical with air intelligence. At the same time, the air force Deuxième Bureau noted that all efforts to improve information gathering on German aircraft production had ended in failure. This failure was due primarily to:

the security measures imposed by the German air ministry to ensure complete secrecy at all levels of design and production. Nor is this problem limited to the aeronautical industry. The construction of combat tanks and other material in Germany remains equally shrouded in mystery.⁵¹

As a result, the intelligence services were forced to turn to other sources of information on the situation inside Germany. Published material was by far the most utilized source of information on German economic activity. The local and national press were surveyed daily for information concerning the labour and raw material situation. Of particular importance were trade publications such as *Der Deutsche Wirtschaftler* and *Ostdeutsche Wirtschaftzeitung*. The military attachés in Berlin contributed monthly surveys of all books and articles published on the relationship between the economy and the military in Germany. The exploitation of published sources of information on the German economy was so exhaustive, in fact, that in early 1938 the SGDN and

⁴⁸ SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'L'Activité du poste au cours de l'année 1936', 8 Jan. 1937. The reports of the other SR stations are also in this dossier.

⁴⁹ SHAT, 2N 19, General Jamet (Director of the SGDN) to the Haut Comité Militaire, 22 Mar. 1935.

⁵⁰ MAÉ, Papiers Massigli, vol. 10, 'Réarmement en Europe', 3 Nov. 1936.

⁵¹ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1935.

the SAÉ collaborated to produce a 217-page bibliography of literature pertaining to rearmament and the economy in Germany published since the accession of the Nazi Party in 1933.⁵² In addition to published sources, intelligence officials cultivated ties with French citizens with business interests in Germany. A final, and important, source were the reports of French officials posted on diplomatic missions to Germany's most important trading partners. A central responsibility of attachés posted to states such as Great Britain, Sweden, Holland, Romania, or Yugoslavia was to prepare reports on commercial relations between these states and Germany.⁵³

Using these sources, French intelligence was able to construct a detailed picture of the overall aims of Nazi economic policy that correctly identified rearmament as the engine for the German 'economic recovery'. It was far less successful, however, at gauging the progress of Nazi rearmament. The biggest flaw in these assessments, one that will surface repeatedly in this study, was a failure to consider the impact of raw material shortages on the pace of rearmament. The key vulnerability in Germany's military potential was a lack of the natural resources necessary to sustaining a prolonged war effort.⁵⁴ The conviction that the Allied exploitation of this weakness had been a decisive factor in Germany's defeat in 1918 led both the Deuxième Bureau and the SGDN to devote enormous energy to tracking the raw material situation in Germany throughout the inter-war period. In order to determine levels of raw materials imports the SGDN compiled lengthy dossiers breaking down German trade with every major state in six-month intervals.⁵⁵ The weekly intelligence reports produced by the SAÉ testify to the importance which military planners attributed to this question. There were summaries of the raw material situation in Germany in each *rapport hebdomadaire* circulated to the general staff, defence ministry, and foreign ministry during this period.

⁵² SHAT, 7N 2643-4, 'Les Données économiques du réarmement allemand depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir du national-socialisme', Spring 1938.

⁵³ SHAT, 7N 2530-2, 'Plan de renseignements sur l'Allemagne: Plan "D"', 25 Sept. 1933 and 'Plan de renseignement établie par le 2e Bureau pour le Plan D^{bis}', 28 Aug. 1935.

⁵⁴ For informative discussions of the raw materials situation and the German rearmament effort, see Volkmann, 'The National Socialist Economy' and Murray, *Path to Ruin*, 4-27.

⁵⁵ The detailed nature of the files that survived the archival destruction of 1940-4 leave no doubt as to the industry and the comprehensive approach of the officials responsible for monitoring German commerce within the SGDN. These files are mainly in SHAT 2N and 6N and well as 7N 2644.

The most critical shortages were iron ore and oil. The Deuxième Bureau concluded that, had the German military not seized control of the iron fields of north-eastern France during the First World War, the German war effort would have ground to a halt for lack of adequate armaments. It was estimated that Germany was dependent on imports for 75 per cent of the iron ore it consumed.⁵⁶ This figure was thought to be increasing as German iron and steel production increased. The Section Allemande judged that production of cast iron in Germany had increased from 3.9 million tons in 1932 to 18.8 million tons in 1936 while the amount of ore obtained from indigenous sources had remained roughly the same. German iron ore, moreover, was of inferior quality and was less efficient in the process of smelting for the production of both cast iron and steel.⁵⁷ The most important source of iron ore for Germany in the event of a Franco-German war was Sweden. Imports from Sweden and France constituted 75 per cent of total German iron and steel production. According to the army and air force Deuxième Bureaux, Swedish mines could, if necessary, make up the shortfall which would result if the French supply was cut off. Intelligence assessments therefore judged, correctly, that Germany's performance in a future conflict would depend on its ability to maintain a steady supply of iron ore via the Baltic Sea.⁵⁸

The Reich also lacked indigenous oil reserves. In 1934 French intelligence calculated that Germany imported more than two-thirds of its total consumption of oil. Imports were expected to increase massively and to constitute a critical vulnerability in the event of war. Renondeau stressed that '[o]il is the lifeblood of modern armies and German consumption of oil must be expected to double in wartime'.⁵⁹ Germany's chief sources of petrol imports were Venezuela, the United States, and Romania. During wartime, however, an Allied blockade was expected to deprive Germany of 85 to 90 per cent of its imports from the

⁵⁶ SHAT, 2N 151-3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935.

⁵⁷ SHAT, 7N 2644, 'Allemagne: Ravitaillement en minerai de fer', 25 Jan. 1937. For the British perspective on this question, see Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 177-8 and Patrick Salmon, 'British Plans for Economic Warfare against Germany, 1937-1939: The Problem of Swedish Iron Ore', *JCH* (1981), 53-71.

⁵⁸ SHAT, 7N 2596, 'Situation économique', 21 Aug. 1936; 7N 2644-1, 'L'Approvisionnement de l'Allemagne en matières premières', 29 Nov. 1937. For the views of air intelligence, see SHAA, 2B 60, 'La Politique allemande et les possibilités de son approvisionnement en cas de conflit', 27 Sept. 1938; and 'La Situation économique de l'Allemagne', 28 Sept. 1938.

⁵⁹ SHAT, 7N 2597, 'Carburants', 29 Jan. 1937.

Americas. Romania would therefore be Germany's chief source of oil in the event of a conflict and productive capacities of the Ploesti oil fields became an important factor in French calculations of the strategic balance.⁶⁰

A third key raw material that Germany was forced to import in large quantities was bauxite. Bauxite was essential to the production of the aluminium used to construct modern air frames. Germany possessed almost no indigenous sources of bauxite. According to air intelligence German imports of bauxite had increased from 326,000 tons in 1934 to 900,000 tons in 1937. Aluminium production had more than quadrupled during the same period. But stockpiles of bauxite were never estimated to be sufficient for more than four to five months production at peacetime levels.⁶¹ Germany was therefore vitally dependent on a steady flow of this product from Hungary and especially from Yugoslavia to fuel its aircraft industry.

The insatiable appetite for raw materials generated by unlimited rearmament placed a severe financial strain on the German economy. The increasingly preponderant portion of industrial activity devoted to armaments and other defence-related manufacturing reduced production of the exports upon which Germany depended to balance its trade. The result was a worsening balance of trade and a looming financial crisis. Germany lacked the currency reserves with which to pay for the imports of raw materials and foodstuffs which were expanding as national production shifted to defence-related industries. The SGDN rated Germany the world's largest importer of agricultural products in the 1930s.⁶² In order to finance rearmament, the National Socialist government was forced to spend money that it did not have. In March 1933 Nazi Party member Hjalmar Schacht was appointed President of the Reichsbank. It was Schacht who devised a programme whereby the government negotiated short-term bonds to be redeemed out of future tax revenues (MEFO Bills).⁶³ This scheme provided credits for rearmament virtually out of thin air. To alleviate the pressures on

⁶⁰ Peter Jackson, 'France and the Guarantee to Romania, April 1939', *INS* 10 (1995), 242-72.

⁶¹ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 2^{ème} trimestre 1936; 2B 62, 'Mémento: L'Industrie aéronautique allemande', 1 Dec. 1937; 2B 61, 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938; 2B 60, 'Situation économique de l'Allemagne', 28 Sept. 1938.

⁶² SHAT, 2N 152-6, 'La Capacité de production agricole de l'Allemagne', 18 Aug. 1937.

⁶³ W. Carr, *Arms, Autarky and Aggression: A Study in German Foreign Policy, 1933-1939* (London, 1972), 22-65; Volkman, 'The National Socialist Economy', 223-5; Barkai, *Nazi Economics*, 159-217; and Overy, *War and Economy*, 183-91.

the nation's finances, the government negotiated barter arrangements with the raw material exporting states of south-eastern Europe.⁶⁴ But many imports, Swedish iron ore in particular, could not be obtained by this means. Unprecedented restrictions on foreign trade were therefore introduced after 1930 in order to control spending on 'non-essential' imports and a tight regime of exchange controls was imposed. The end result of all of this was a chronic shortage of hard currency with which to finance government programmes.

Another effort to relieve the financial strain and to prepare for war was the Nazi regime's ambitious programme aimed at producing synthetic raw materials. Corporations such as I. G. Farben and Siemens worked closely with the Nazi government in an attempt to free the German economy from reliance on foreign states for key strategic raw materials.⁶⁵ But, as French analysts recognized early on, autarky was 'an impossible dream' for Germany.⁶⁶ Iron ore, for example, was not only the most important raw material to the rearmament effort, it was also the most difficult to produce synthetically. At no time did French observers consider that Germany could come anywhere near manufacturing enough indigenous iron ore to meet its ever-expanding requirements. In a 'best case' scenario, it was estimated that the Germans could produce at most one-half of its 1935 consumption at the expense of immobilizing massive capital and sharply reducing production in other areas of the economy.⁶⁷ Nor were the Germans much more successful in developing synthetic oil production. Although French analysts initially overestimated the success of these efforts, by 1935 it was clear that the immense quantities of lignite the synthetic process required were lacking in Germany. As a result, petrol imports

⁶⁴ On German economic diplomacy in the Balkans, see among others David Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War* (New York, 1981) and Christian Leitz, 'Arms as Levers: *Matériel* and Raw Materials in Germany's Trade with Romania in the 1930s', *IHR* 19: 2 (1997), 312–32.

⁶⁵ See e.g. the detailed reports in SHAT, 2N 152–2.

⁶⁶ SHAT, 7N 2593, 'Achats de matières premières par l'Allemagne', commercial attaché report, 15 June 1934; 7N 2596, 'Possibilités d'accroissement de la production allemande de minerai de fer', 25 Oct. 1935. See also 7N 2629–3, 'Allemagne: Le Problème des matières premières et des produits de remplacement', Dec. 1934.

⁶⁷ SHAT, 7N 2596, 'Possibilités d'accroissement de la production allemande de minerai de fer', 25 Oct. 1935. See also 7N 2629–3, 'Allemagne: Le problème des matières premières et des produits de remplacement', Dec. 1934; 'Note sur la situation militaire de l'Allemagne', Nov.–Dec. 1936; 7N 2644–1, 'Allemagne: Ravitaillement en minerai de fer', 25 Jan. 1937; 'L'Approvisionnement de l'Allemagne en matières premières', 29 Nov. 1937; and 7N 2524–1, 'Note sur les moyens qui pourraient être employés pour mener contre l'Allemagne une guerre économique', 14 Apr. 1939. For the period to 1935, see Castellan, *Réarmement clandestin*, 212–15.

were increasing steadily. By 1937 the Deuxième Bureau estimated that natural and synthetic production together supplied less than 30 per cent of total consumption of oil in Germany. The Reich was dependent on imports for the remainder.⁶⁸

In sum, at no time did the army and air Deuxième Bureaux or the SGDN consider that autarky was a realistic objective for the Reich. Although Germany could make significant progress in the production of synthetic textiles, leather, and especially rubber, it would remain dependent on foreign imports for large portions of its foodstuffs, bauxite, oil, and iron ore.⁶⁹

For this reason estimates of German raw material stockpiles assumed especial importance in intelligence assessments. The Section Allemande estimated that the objective of German war planning was to secure one year's worth of stocks of key strategic raw materials. This conclusion rested on the views expressed publicly by the economic planning office within the Reichswehr general staff.⁷⁰ But neither the Deuxième Bureau nor the SGDN believed that Germany would succeed in amassing this volume of reserves. In fact, intelligence sources reported continual shortages of raw materials right through to the outbreak of war. This consideration was central to the French long war strategy, which aimed at reducing Germany's war capacity with an economic blockade before mounting a decisive offensive.

Through most of the 1930s, however, German economic vulnerability was overshadowed in intelligence assessments by the growing conviction that the Nazi regime was constructing a war economy.

⁶⁸ For the initial assessment, see SHAT, 7N 2629, 'Allemagne: Le Problème des matières premières et des produits de remplacement', Dec. 1934. For the subsequent, more accurate, estimates, see SHAT, 7N 2629-3, 'Le Problème des carburants en Allemagne', and 'Allemagne: Note sur la situation économique de l'Allemagne en août 1936', both in the *BdR* for Nov.-Dec. 1936; SHAA, 2B 60, 'La Situation économique de l'Allemagne', 28 Sept. 1938. SHAT, 7N 2644-1, 'L'Approvisionnement de l'Allemagne en matières premières', 29 Nov. 1937. On this question, see also Castellan, *Réarmement clandestin*, 225-8.

⁶⁹ SHAT, 2N 152-6, 'Le Plan de Quatre Ans et l'agriculture', 25 Mar. 1937; 2N 153-6, 'La Recherche d'autarchie en Allemagne', 22 Nov. 1936; 7N 2644-1, 'L'Approvisionnement de l'Allemagne en matières premières', 29 Nov. 1937. For air intelligence views on the German quest for autarky, see the report on the Four Year Plan in SHAA, 2B 58, 'Le Plan de Quatre Ans', *BdR*, 1er trimestre 1937.

⁷⁰ SHAT, 7N 2629-3, 'Résumé d'une Conférence du Colonel Thomas sur "la conduite de la Guerre et l'économie"', 6 Apr. 1937 and 'Note au sujet d'une conférence fait par le Général Thomas Chef de la Section Économique au Ministère de la Guerre du Reich sur l'économie de guerre', 7 Mar. 1939. For the impressions of the SGDN see 2N 151-4, 'L'Économie de guerre et le Plan de Quatre Ans', 9 Feb. 1937 and 2N 224-3, 'Conduite de la guerre économique', 11 Feb. 1937.

For the past twenty years historical debate has considered the question of whether Nazi Germany was rearming 'in breadth' for a *Blitzkrieg* war or 'in depth' for a long war.⁷¹ But within the French intelligence community there was no serious questioning the conclusion that the Nazi government had indeed chosen 'guns over butter'.⁷² This assumption was based on countless public assertions by both military and Party officials that the fundamental role of the national economy was to serve the cause of national defence.⁷³ Particular importance was attributed to statements and literature emanating from the Wehrwirtschaftstab (Economic Planning Staff) which had been established within the Wehrmacht general staff under the direction of Colonel (later General) Georg Thomas and his deputy Major Dr Kurt Hesse. This organ was charged with organizing the economic and human resources of the Reich behind the rearmament effort. The rhetoric of the Economic Planning Staff repeatedly proclaimed the primordial necessity of preparing for total war. From 1934 to the very eve of war Colonel Thomas consistently warned publicly that Germany had lost the last war because the German military had failed to understand the relationship between economics and military planning. He also argued that in order to have any hope of victory in a future war Germany must prepare its economy for war in peacetime. These statements made a tremendous impression on French observers. The service attachés in Berlin routinely forwarded synopses of these views of both Thomas and Hesse to army and air force intelligence in Paris. The views of Colonel Thomas were carefully analysed and disseminated widely within the general staff, the air ministry, the ministry of defence, and the SGDN and served as a basis for the conviction that the Germans had undertaken 'in depth' preparations for war.⁷⁴

⁷¹ For a summary of this debate, see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship* (London, 1993), 84–101. The most recent and authoritative research on this question conducted by Richard Overy has made a compelling case for the argument that German military planning was indeed aimed at total war. See Overy, *War and Economy*.

⁷² Renondeau first forwarded this thesis in a report on 'Finances et réarmement', on 19 Dec. 1935 in SHAT 7N 2596.

⁷³ For examples of French impressions of these announcements during the last six months of 1936, see the *RHs* of 30 June–6 July, 29 July–3 Aug., and esp. 27 Oct.–2 Nov. 1936 in SHAT 7N 2513. See also General Renondeau's dispatches to Paris of 30 June, 28 July, 11 Aug., 21 Aug., and 22 Sept. 1936 in 7N 2598.

⁷⁴ For Renondeau's summaries, see SHAT, 7N 2597, 27 Apr. 1936; 7N 2598, 20–30 June 1936 and 7N 2599, 18 Feb. and 28 Apr. 1937. For the analyses of the Section Allemande, see SHAT, 7N 2643–1, 'La Mobilisation économique en Allemagne', 28 June 1936; 'Résumé d'une Conférence du Colonel Thomas sur "la conduite de la guerre et l'économie"', 6 Apr. 1937; and 'Note au sujet d'une conférence fait par le Général Thomas Chef de la Section

Another important source which shaped French perceptions of the dominance of military considerations in Nazi economic planning was a series of books concerning the relationship between war and economics that appeared in Germany during the early and mid-1930s. Three monographs in particular, *Der Kriegswirtschaftliche Gedanke* (The Idea of the War Economy), *Krieg und Finanzen: Bevölkerungsentwicklung unter Kriegswirtschaftlichen Gesichtspunkten* (War and Finance: Development of the Population from the Point of View of the War Economy), and *Die Organisation und Kriegsrohstoffbewirtschaftung im Weltkrieg* (Organization and Exploitation of Raw Materials for the War Industry in a World War), were considered to exercise tremendous influence in the making of German economic policy. They were translated and studied at great length by both the Section Allemande and by the SGDN.⁷⁵

The overriding impression gained from these sources was that the Nazi regime had subordinated economic policy to rearmament policy. In late 1933 the SAÉ prepared a lengthy report on the situation in Germany that identified two central thrusts to Nazi economic and industrial policy. The first was a quest for economic self-sufficiency or autarky. In order to achieve autarky the regime had intensified efforts to produce synthetic replacements for key raw materials—particularly oil and rubber—that Germany was forced to import from abroad. The second was the renovation and expansion of the automobile, armaments, and aircraft industries to pave the way for rearmament. The study concluded that

There can be no doubt that the transformations underway in the Reich today are part of a programme which is being pursued methodically and whose goal is the strengthening of German capacities for production and economic resistance with a view to an eventual conflict.⁷⁶

This interpretation, which was a logical corollary to the belief that Hitler was determined on a policy of conquest, became official doctrine within both the SGDN and the Deuxième Bureau for the remainder of the decade.

Économique au Ministère de la Guerre du Reich aux l'économie de guerre', 7 Mar. 1939. For the impressions of the SGDN, see 2N 151-4, 'L'Économie de guerre et le Plan de Quatre Ans', 9 Feb. 1937 and 2N 224-3, 'Conduite de la guerre économique', 11 Feb. 1937. See also the naval intelligence analysis in SHM, 1BB2 91, *BdR*, 25 Feb.-18 Mar. 1937.

⁷⁵ SHAT, 2N 151-1, untitled dossier on economic mobilization in Germany and 7N 2643-1, 'La Mobilisation économique en Allemagne', 28 June 1936.

⁷⁶ SHAT, 7N 2629-4, 'Allemagne: Situation industrielle', 14 Oct. 1933. See also Castellan, *Réarmement clandestin*, 209-13.

But this view was challenged by the embassy in Berlin in early 1934. Renondeau and François-Poncet had both reported major increases in German imports of strategic raw materials. Both concluded that this was evidence that the pace of rearmament had been accelerated under Hitler. But François-Poncet argued that this acceleration was not necessarily the first step towards unlimited rearmament. From December 1933 through to the following April, the French ambassador argued consistently that Hitler genuinely desired to reach an understanding with France and was willing to limit German rearmament to the construction of a 300,000 man army and modest air force.⁷⁷ Renondeau appears to have agreed. Adopting a more optimistic view of the German policy—influenced, perhaps, by the domineering François-Poncet—the military attaché reported that the Nazi regime was deeply concerned over the financial costs of massive rearmament. He detected ‘a hesitancy to rush the nation into an adventure that must result in either war or financial ruin’. Renondeau judged that this hesitancy would make Hitler genuinely amenable to an armaments agreement with France. While he admitted that the Germany would doubtless breach the agreement eventually, he argued that such a Franco-German armaments accord could forestall a European arms race for ‘ten or twelve years’.⁷⁸

François-Poncet and his team had misread the dynamics of Nazi policy. Although Hitler and his collaborators went to great lengths to reduce the chances of war with frequent declarations of Germany’s desire for peace, the Nazi regime was willing to run the risk of war in order to press forward with rearmament. The operating assumption in Nazi counsels was that the Western governments would not respond to violations of Versailles with force.⁷⁹ Nor, as we have seen, was Hitler much concerned with the financial or economic implications of rearmament. Yet the dispatches from the Berlin embassy were to continue in this vein through to the end of June 1934. Both François-Poncet and Renondeau adopted much more cynical interpretations after members of the embassy were accused of

⁷⁷ *DDF*, 1ère série, v, no. 47, François-Poncet to Paris, 23 Nov. 1933. See also the account of François-Poncet’s conversation with representatives of army intelligence on 8 Jan. 1934 in SHAT, 7N 2593.

⁷⁸ SHAT, 7N 2593, ‘Les Achats de matières premières par l’Allemagne’, 12 June 1934 and ‘Conversation avec le Général von Reichenau au sujet des armements’, 27 Feb. 1934. See also ‘Fabrications de guerre’, 7 Feb. 1934.

⁷⁹ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, 159–80; Messerschmidt, ‘Foreign Policy’, 581–605.

collusion with 'enemies of the German people' in the aftermath of the purges of 30 June.⁸⁰

The interpretation put forward by the Berlin embassy in early 1934 was dismissed by analysts in Paris. The Section Allemande underlined the sharp increases in military and defence-related spending during the first two years of Nazi rule in making the case that rearmament remained the absolute priority of German policy. In late March the only budget ever published by the Nazi government revealed an increase in military spending of 352 million marks. The Deuxième Bureau warned that this figure (which caused a sensation in French political and media circles) comprised only a small portion of the true increase in defence-related spending in the Reich. Intelligence officials reckoned that, when the investment in the armaments, aircraft, and other related industries was taken into account, total defence spending would triple in 1934. A Deuxième Bureau study prepared in July concluded that '[t]here can be no doubt that Germany has accelerated and intensified its rearmament programme for 1934'.⁸¹ The assumption that Germany was rearming as quickly as possible had become an axiom in intelligence assessments.

This assumption was to prove accurate. But, through to the outbreak of war, France's intelligence services would perform far less well in the equally important task of estimating the pace of German rearmament. This failure is perhaps to have been expected. As Renondeau noted, the Nazi government made its own rules for managing the economy and was answerable to no one.⁸² Added to this difficulty was the chronic dearth of reliable information on defence production. The resulting uncertainty strengthened the central role of stereotypes in shaping French perceptions of the situation across the Rhine. At the heart of French assessments of German industrial activity were generalizations about teutonic efficiency and German organizational genius which were as widespread in inter-war France as they are today.⁸³ These caricatures of the German national intellect and character were all the more influential in shaping common perceptions as this epoch

⁸⁰ François-Poncet's more pessimistic assessment of the Hitler regime dates from this experience. See the angry assessment of the situation in a personal letter to Massigli in MAÉ, Papiers Massigli, vol. 97, 19 July 1934. See also François Poncet's account in his *Souvenirs*, 182–96 and that of Bérard in *Au temps du danger allemande*, 236–44.

⁸¹ SHAT, 7N 2506, 'Les Dépenses militaires du Reich en 1934', *BdR*, July–Aug. 1934.

⁸² SHAT, 7N 2598, 'Dépenses d'armement', 26 Oct. 1933.

⁸³ Rémond, 'L'Image de l'Allemagne', 9 and Schor, *L'Opinion française*, 147–8.

lacked the current sensitivity to the dangers of stereotyping. What might today be regarded as unfair generalizations, if not worse, functioned as automatic frames of reference in analyses of this period.

Unspoken assumptions conditioned assessments at every level. The report on German military potential prepared in 1935, for example, concluded that the rise of Germany as an industrial power was founded on its people's 'instinctual discipline, innate talent for organization and immense capacity for hard work'.⁸⁴ Renondeau considered that 'penchant for sound organization and a repulsion for improvisations' were distinctive features of the German national character.⁸⁵ Intelligence analysts tended to assume that innate qualities of militarism and organizational brilliance combined to imbue the German economy with a military character.⁸⁶ The prevalence of these assumptions extended into parliament. In debate within the Chamber General Jean Fabry, President of the Chamber army commission and later minister of war, stressed that Nazi Germany's 'power of organization' was a decisive factor in the military balance between France and the Reich.⁸⁷

This was a serious miscalculation. The organization of the German economy was chaotic and fragmentary. A panoply of separate and often competing agencies were responsible for economic planning. The various defence industries competed for scarce labour and raw materials and there was little coherence to the policies adopted by the Nazi regime for the rationalization of resources. This state of affairs actually worsened after Hermann Göring assumed control of the German economy in the autumn of 1936.⁸⁸ But a lack of reliable information on defence production prevented French analysts from penetrating the veil of Nazi rhetoric to discern the confusion and raw material shortages that hampered the rearmament effort in Germany.

⁸⁴ SHAT, 2N 151-3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935.

⁸⁵ SHAT, 7N 2601, Renondeau to Paris, 26 Jan. 1936.

⁸⁶ See e.g. SHAT, 7N 2629-3, 'Note sur la situation économique de l'Allemagne', *BdR*, Nov.-Dec. 1936; 7N 2676, 'Note sur l'armement dans l'armée allemande et considérations sur la mobilisation industrielle', 20 Apr. 1936; 7N 2643, 'Résumé d'une conférence du Colonel Thomas sur la conduite de la guerre et l'économie', Apr. 1937; and 7N 2676, 'L'Industrie allemande et le réarmement', Apr. 1937.

⁸⁷ *Journal Officiel de la République française* (hereafter *JO*), Chamber Debates, 16 Mar. 1935.

⁸⁸ On the confusion and inefficiency of the German economy during the Nazi era, see among many others R. Overy, *Goering: 'The Iron Man'* (London, 1984); Volkman, 'The National Socialist Economy'; and Peter Hayes, 'Polycracy and Policy in the Third Reich: The Case of the Economy', in J. Caplan and T. Childers (eds.), *Re-evaluating the Third Reich* (New York, 1993), 190-210.

Instead, unspoken assumptions about German efficiency and organizational genius combined with a predilection for 'worst case' assessments to shape estimates of armaments and aircraft production in the Third Reich. Intelligence appreciations assumed a much greater degree of organization and cooperation among those responsible for the German economy. Nazi propaganda appears to have been taken at face value and the ability of the government, and of Göring in particular, to impose its will upon German industrialists was overestimated.⁸⁹ In reality the transition to a rearmament-based economy was much slower than had been anticipated and German armaments production did not approach the levels of efficiency that were attributed to it by French analysts. Shortages of both labour and raw materials hampered production in defence industries to a much greater extent than French observers realized.⁹⁰ These errors were consistent with the tendency of the Deuxième Bureau to emphasize all manifestations of increased German military power. Conversely, evidence that did not correspond to the general picture of a productive and efficient German war industry was either ignored or played down during this period.

Absent from Deuxième Bureau assessments was any careful consideration of the constraints which the chronic shortage of raw materials would place on the rearmament of the Wehrmacht. In lieu of confirmed intelligence, the image of Germany as an industrial colossus became the central element in assessments of German rearmament. Intelligence appreciations were based on the assumption that Germany's armaments and aircraft industries could produce weapons as quickly as the Reichswehr and the Luftwaffe could train army reservists or pilots and aircrew. 'The Germans lack officers and trained effectives,' the chief of army intelligence advised the high command in 1935, 'matériel is not the problem.'⁹¹

This was a pivotal misperception. The rearmament programmes drawn up by the Reichswehr general staff during this period were divorced from reality. No consideration was given to the ability of the German economy to obtain the massive imports of raw materials necessary for this programme.⁹² The result was a series of dramatic

⁸⁹ SHAT, 7N 2598, 'Réunion par Göring des chefs d'industrie', 22 Dec. 1936 and 7N 2600, 'Economie et réarmement', 22 Sept. 1937.

⁹⁰ Overy, *War and Economy*, 145–73; *id.*, *Goering*, 87–8; Volkmann, 'The National Socialist Economy'; and Carr, *Arms, Autarky and Aggression*, 60–5.

⁹¹ AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, 'Rapport', 24 Mar. 1935.

⁹² Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', in *GSWW*, i/2, 449–53.

exaggerations of German military power that would play an important role in the formulation of external policy for the remainder of the decade.

Attention was focused instead on the German economic recovery. National production increased by 14 per cent during the first year of Nazi rule and by 1935 output had recovered to its pre-Depression level. Recovery was particularly noticeable in the defence-related industries. The production of steel, machine-tools, and automobiles more than doubled during this period. Meanwhile, the number of unemployed fell dramatically from nearly six million to just over two million.⁹³ In June 1934 the French commercial attaché in Berlin declared that 'German industry has awakened from its slumber of the past four years'. He warned that German resurgence would 'completely alter the industrial and commercial balance in Europe'.⁹⁴ This realization explains the anxiety with which French observers followed the German recovery. Concerns over the changing European economic and commercial balance were exacerbated, moreover, by the conviction that the Nazis had 'placed this powerful economic juggernaut at the service of rearmament'.⁹⁵ This conviction imbued all discussion of the Reich's superior military potential with a frightening immediacy that British statesmen, in particular, failed to comprehend.

IV

The steady stream of reports that civilian and military leaders received on the political and economic situation in Germany played an important role in shaping official perceptions in Paris. The realization that National Socialist Germany was playing by a completely different set of political rules to that of democratic France, reinforced an already existing sense of inferiority within French decision makers. The contrast between the political situations in France and Germany was highlighted in assessments of the strategic situation crafted within the French war ministry. The SGDN concluded, for example, that the power of the one-party state was 'a crucial element in [Germany's] military potential. In the internal domain national unity is integral,

⁹³ R. Overy, *The German Economic Recovery, 1933-1938* (London, 1980), 55-9 and Barkai, *Nazi Economics*, 158-224.

⁹⁴ SHAT, 'Achats de matières premières par l'Allemagne', 6 June 1934.

⁹⁵ SHAT, 7N 2626, 'La Mobilisation intégrale en Allemagne', 15 Jan. 1934.

opposition has been suppressed, political parties have been dissolved, political quarrels have been stifled and social classes have been forced into at least apparent reconciliation.’ This internal cohesiveness, it must be noted, possessed a real attraction for conservative French officers. The unity, or enforced conformity, of the political regime established by Nazi tactics of oppression was judged ‘a factor of enormous importance in terms of military potential’. The same report concluded that ‘[t]he achievements of the Third Reich in overcoming unemployment, increasing national production, and restoring national morale highlight the immense results which can be achieved when the national interest is placed resolutely before all particular interests, whatever they may be’.⁹⁶ Clearly, in the minds of French military observers, this impression of the unity of purpose and national resolve stood in sharp contrast to the chronic instability and endless political infighting of the Third Republic that most French military officials viewed with revulsion. The serious breakdown in civil–military relations during the mid-1930s becomes easier to understand when one takes into account the demoralizing effect that intelligence about the situation in Germany had on the French military establishment.⁹⁷

France’s political leadership also betrayed dismay, and at times even envy, at the relative freedom of the Nazi regime from the political constraints imposed by parliamentary democracy. This feeling was not restricted to the extreme right enemies of parliamentary democracy, or to the centre-right groups that openly endorsed Hitler’s anti-Bolshevism. Nor was it confined to the ‘neo-socialist’ splinter of the SFIO that was in the process of being seduced by Fascism. It was also present among mainstream politicians, many of whom were responsible for the making of national policy. Pierre Cot, for example, air minister in six different Radical cabinets during the 1930s, observed that ‘[the Nazi] social regime, however odious, permits the Reich to consecrate more funds and more resources to its air force than any other state’.⁹⁸ Léon Blum similarly lamented that ‘[b]y attempting to oppose Fascism’s bid for power . . . one is too often tempted to follow in its footsteps’. Significantly, both of the governments formed by Blum in the 1930s fell when the Senate refused to extend to the Premier the right to use decree laws

⁹⁶ SHAT, 2N 151–3, ‘Potentiel militaire de l’Allemagne’, May 1935.

⁹⁷ The best discussions of these issues are in de la Gorce, *La République et son armée*, 215–81; Bankwitz, *Weygand*, 208–89; and Nobécourt, *Histoire politique de l’armée*, i. 197–270.

⁹⁸ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 6, ‘Rapport du Ministre de l’Air au Président du Conseil’, 6 Dec. 1937.

to shore up the nation's wobbly financial situation. Daladier, who did obtain the right to govern by decree, was characteristically blunt when he mused out loud: 'if only I was served like Hitler.'⁹⁹

The chief effects of intelligence on the *Gleichschaltung* of German society were first to reinforce the defence establishment's belief that Germany was determined on a policy of military expansion and secondly to further drive home the conviction that a remilitarized Germany was too dangerous an enemy for France to face alone and without the assistance of Great Power allies. These twin assumptions lay behind the growing reliance on Great Britain in French policy. A sense of France's weakness in relation to Germany would condition intelligence assessment, military planning, and foreign policy making down to the outbreak of war.

⁹⁹ *Le Populaire*, 19 July 1937. See also J. Lacouture, *Léon Blum* (Paris, 1977), 379–92 and J. Colton, *Léon Blum: Humanist in Politics* (New York, 1966), 270–6 and 301–5. Daladier quoted in R. Coulondre, *De Staline à Hitler: Souvenirs de deux ambassades, 1936–1939* (Paris, 1951), 145.

Initial Responses to Nazi Rearmament: Intelligence and Policy, 1934–1935

BETWEEN OCTOBER 1933 and the end of 1935 Germany laid the military and diplomatic foundations for a revolution in the European balance of power. At the international level, a non-aggression pact was signed with Poland, a commercial offensive was mounted in south-eastern Europe, and a naval agreement was signed with Great Britain. In terms of domestic policy, the entire national economy was gradually subordinated to the requirements of land, air, and naval rearmament. In March of 1935 the curtain was raised on this vast programme. On 10 March, in an interview with the London *Daily Mail*, Göring publicly announced the existence of the Luftwaffe. Less than one week later, Hitler summoned François-Poncet to announce that he had just approved the reintroduction of universal conscription and that Germany would construct a peacetime army of twelve corps and thirty-six infantry divisions. The ‘risk’ phase of German rearmament was over and the stage was set for a series of foreign policy coups that would begin with the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March of 1936.¹ Europe was about to enter a five-year long war of nerves that would culminate in war over Danzig in September of 1939.

Throughout this period French intelligence continued to produce essentially accurate appreciations of German intentions but consistently overestimated German capabilities. Although a preference for the worst case is characteristic of service intelligence estimates, there were other factors at work in the French tendency to exaggerate German military power. In particular, an increasing shortage of precise information on armaments and aircraft production forced intelligence officials

¹ See the various chapters on German war preparations by Wette, Volkman, Deist, and Messerschmidt in *Germany and the Second World War*, i. *The Build-up of German Aggression (GSWW)* (all of which have been cited above). See also Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich*, 67–88 and 179–204.

to make rough estimates of the pace of rearmament in the Reich. As a result, stereotypes about the German national character continued to play a central role in the intelligence process. The intelligence picture was further distorted by the politicization of intelligence appreciations, particularly in the spring of 1934. The military establishment, waging a desperate campaign against the politics of disarmament and financial austerity in France, provided civilian leaders with inflated estimates of German military power in order to avoid further cuts to the defence budget. In the end, the high command succeeded in its fight against a disarmament agreement but failed to secure the necessary financial commitment to rearmament. The rearmament measures adopted by the Doumergue cabinet in 1934 were undermined by a series of defence cuts under Pierre Laval's government the following year. Warnings of a future threat from Nazi Germany could not overcome preoccupation with France's own ongoing political and economic crisis.

I

The command of the French army changed hands midway through this period. In late January 1935 Maxime Weygand retired and was replaced as commander-in-chief designate by Maurice Gamelin. Whatever his shortcomings as *generalissimo*, General Weygand cannot be accused of ignoring intelligence, or of complacency before the Nazi threat. But the bitterness which characterized civil–military relations in France during this period had generated profound mistrust between soldiers and politicians which was ultimately very detrimental to French security. His successor was expected to restore a measure of cooperation between civil and military authorities. By all accounts, Maurice Gamelin was a soldier of extraordinary intellectual qualities.² In 1935 he had already made a brilliant career, graduating first in his class at St Cyr and distinguishing himself as a member of General Joffre's staff during the war. Gamelin's star had risen steadily in the post-war decade. A reputation as a good republican soldier played an important role in this rise towards the pinnacle of the French military establishment, earning him the trust of parliamentarians and securing

² The best analyses of General Gamelin's personality and career are Alexander, *Republic in Danger* and P. Le Goyet, *Le Mystère Gamelin* (Paris, 1975).

allies across the political spectrum from Tardieu to Daladier. By the time he replaced Weygand as inspector-general of the army he was 62 years of age, had been army chief of staff for nearly four years and had acquired vast experience in the difficult arena of civil–military relations under the Third Republic. Less confrontational than his predecessor, Gamelin was a reassuring presence at the head of the army, particularly for those politicians inclined to view the military with suspicion. He was also a man of cultivated tastes. From early in his career, an interest in painting and the philosophy of Henri Bergson had earned for him the reputation of an uncommonly bookish and academic officer. He combined these interests with a predisposition for introspection uncommon among soldiers of any rank. But a formidable intellect and unusual subtlety of thought were not unalloyed virtues for soldiers and statesmen during the 1930s. The many assessments Gamelin prepared for civilian superiors during his tenure as chief of staff unfailingly presented both sides of every issue in all of their complexity. Gamelin was not a decisive general.

France's strategic situation had deteriorated markedly by the time Gamelin assumed command of the army. On the diplomatic front the Nazi regime managed to short-circuit French efforts to build a united front against German rearmament by forging bi-lateral agreements with France's erstwhile allies. In January of 1934 a ten-year non-aggression pact was signed with Poland which marked the first breach in Germany's diplomatic isolation. Hitler also offered to renounce forever all claims to Alsace and Lorraine in exchange for French approval of German rearmament. In an interview with François-Poncet in November 1933, he had pledged to limit German rearmament to an army of 300,000 short-term conscripts and an air force half the size of the French *Armée de l'Air*. The offer was rejected by the Daladier government, but this did not deter Hitler from publicly flouting the armament limitations of the Versailles Treaty in March 1935. This unilateral renunciation of the peace of 1919 received the official endorsement of Great Britain when the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was concluded the following June.

Intelligence appreciations of German intentions during this period were little different from those of 1933. Evidence that the Reich had initiated ambitious rearmament programmes and begun to implement measures of industrial mobilization only confirmed the prevailing interpretation of Nazi foreign policy. In early 1934, for example, a weekly appreciation prepared for the high command and minister of

defence concluded that '[t]he fact that Germany's formidable economic force is in feverish preparation for war is beyond doubt. The leaders of the Reich protest their peaceful intentions, but the facts tell a different story. The entire German economy is being organized methodically to serve the needs of the military.'³ Nor had this interpretation been modified one year later. In January 1935 army and air intelligence collaborated on a lengthy study of German rearmament which began with the observation that in 1934 Germany had 'completely abandoned the military clauses of the Versailles Treaty and has resumed complete liberty of action in all military domains'. As a result, the document continued, 'The Nazi government has made rearmament the absolute priority of its national policy.' It also observed that '[i]n order to get through the "dangerous period" (when Germany is rearming but still unprepared for a generalized conflict) Chancellor Hitler has cloaked the feverish rearmament of the Reich behind frequent declarations of his desire for a peaceful Europe.' The Nazi regime was rearming in preparation for a long-term policy of war and conquest.⁴

It must be emphasized that this judgement was not based on access to privileged sources within Hitler's entourage. It was instead the product of the 'worst case' approach to interpreting German (and especially Nazi) foreign policy, reinforced constantly by incoming information on the political and economic situation in Germany. Indeed political intelligence was pivotal to the Deuxième Bureau's analysis that the Nazi leader exercised total control over the formulation of foreign policy. Hitler's control of the Nazi Party was considered at least as solid as the stranglehold which the Party had gained on political power in Germany. According to the Deuxième Bureau, the German chancellor possessed 'all of the attributes of the absolute sovereign'. Hitler's popularity was considered the 'primordial factor' in the success of the National Socialist *Gleichschaltung*.⁵ Another study asserted that '[t]he most powerful Prussian emperors did not possess such extensive control over their people', and that the Führer's popularity had permitted the imposition of draconian restrictions on economic life which the German people had accepted with 'a warlike discipline and resolution'.⁶ 'The objectives of German policy', Gauché concluded, 'are

³ SHAT, 7N 2508, *Fiche hebdomadaire*, 19–26 Jan. 1934.

⁴ SHAT, 7N 2638–2, 'Note sure les armements français et allemands', 24 Jan. 1935.

⁵ SHAT, 7N 2629–3, 'Études Allemagne', Nov.–Dec. 1936.

⁶ SHAT, 2N 151–3, 'Potentiel militaire de l'Allemagne', May 1935.

those of the Führer, who at the moment enjoys unprecedented prestige and commands unanimous support within Germany.⁷

If the intelligence services possessed a relatively accurate conception of the motivations and objectives of German policy, predicting the pace at which these objectives would be pursued was more difficult. The gathering of information on German intentions presented unique difficulties because the course of Nazi expansionist policy hinged on the decisions of one man. Renondeau, for example, had little respect for Hitler as a strategist, characterizing the Führer as 'a house painter who knows nothing of military matters outside the realm of a simple soldier'. At the same time, he realized that the decision for war or peace hinged ultimately on Hitler's combination of ignorance and impulsiveness. This was the chief difficulty in predicting the precise timing of the Führer's next move.⁸ Hitler was indeed the most inscrutable of statesmen. To contemporaneous observers his glorification of war and his contempt for rudimentary economic principles were completely outside accepted parameters of reason and rational behaviour. François-Poncet described him as a creature of impulse, driven by his own personal demons.⁹ As Europe edged ever nearer to another general war French analysts sensed that Hitler was losing touch with reality. There were reports of frequent outbursts of violent, even uncontrollable, anger followed by equally severe bouts of depression and lassitude. Reinforcing this impression were reports that the Hitler's personal physician was on hand at all times to administer regular 'treatments' comprising injections of 'serum' of an indeterminate nature.¹⁰

The combination of irrationality and impulsiveness, exacerbated by growing doubts about Hitler's grasp on reality, meant that efforts to divine the Führer's thoughts were fraught with uncertainty. French intelligence officials developed a twofold approach to dealing with this problem. On the one hand, the 'worst case' interpretation was consistently prominent in assessments of German intentions. For greater precision, however, French officials adopted a model for Hitler's decision

⁷ SHAT, 7N 2521-6, 'Note sur les conséquences à tirer de la renonciation par l'Allemagne du traité de Locarno', 8 Apr. 1936.

⁸ SHAT, 7N 2601, Renondeau to Paris, 26 Jan. 1938.

⁹ François-Poncet, *Souvenirs*, 348, 352. On this question, see R. Young, 'Reason and Madness: France, the Axis Powers and the Politics of Economic Disorder, 1938-1939', *Canadian Journal of History*, 20 (Apr. 1985), 65-83.

¹⁰ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Cabinet Bonnet, vol. 1, 'Note: Remise à la Directeur politique du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères', 8 Sept. 1938 and SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Tour d'horizon', 12 Sept. 1938.

making which attributed excessive importance to his various political and military advisers. Intelligence appreciations considered Hitler to be constantly pulled in different directions by the radicals of the Nazi Party, on the one hand, and conservative elements from the military, on the other. Party figures such as Goebbels, Himmler, and Ribbentrop were thought to be urging an adventurist policy on Hitler while military officials such as Blomberg, Fritsch, and, in particular, Göring were advising caution and seeking to delay the coming of war until Germany was better prepared militarily.¹¹ This model was very similar to the one formulated by the British SIS which was widely accepted in both the Foreign Office and in Whitehall.¹² But it was flawed because, while it represented accurately the division of views around the Führer, it failed to understand that Hitler was more radical than any of the supposed 'radicals' within the Party and listened to his advisers only when their views complemented his own. Views expressed to Hitler were customarily framed to conform to his preconceptions. If they did not, they would be dismissed as biased or inaccurate.¹³

Despite these inherent difficulties in interpreting Nazi foreign policy, French intelligence produced fairly accurate estimates of German intentions. In August of 1935, for example, the SAE produced a strategic overview that reiterated Germany's intention to expand eastward as a prelude to a general European war. Czechoslovakia was identified as the first objective of this *Ostpolitik* due to its geographic position 'on one of the axes of Germanic expansion towards the east'. The priorities of German diplomacy were therefore to weaken the Little Entente and isolate Czechoslovakia. This would set the stage for a 'localized conflict' that would aim at the partitioning of Czechoslovakia by Germany, Hungary, and Poland. Such a development would 'put [Germany] in a very favourable situation, capable of pressing forward with all of the territorial demands of Germanism'.¹⁴ Analyses of the impact of the Abyssinian crisis of autumn 1935 on European politics were similarly perceptive. In September of 1935 the army and naval *Deuxième Bureaux* both predicted that the chief beneficiary of an Italian attack on the African state would be Nazi Germany. They judged that Italian

¹¹ SHAT, 7N 2596, 'L'Armée et le radicalisme Nazi', 6 Aug. 1935. See also 7N 2514, *RH*, 15–22 Nov. 1937.

¹² See Andrew, *Secret Service*, 602.

¹³ This argument is advanced persuasively by David Kahn throughout *Hitler's Spies*.

¹⁴ SHAT, 7N 2638–2, 'Note sur les projets allemands en Europe centrale', 18 Aug. 1935.

aggression in Africa would break the Stresa Front, thereby providing Germany with an opportunity to press forward with its rearmament, improve its relations with Italy, and accelerate its planning for 'grave adventures to the detriment of Austria or Czechoslovakia'.¹⁵ French soldiers and statesmen did not lack sound estimates of Hitler's intentions.

II

The prevailing interpretation of Nazi foreign policy within the intelligence services meant that the central question was not whether or not Hitler's Germany would disrupt the peace, but was instead: how soon would Germany be ready to undertake a major European war? Up to the end of 1935 it was clear that the Reichswehr could not yet contemplate a war of aggression. But the intelligence services warned that the rearmament of the Wehrmacht was well under way and that German military power would soon eclipse that of France both on the ground and in the air.

In late 1933 army intelligence received evidence that the Reichswehr had begun training certain SA units as reservists and had placed training facilities at the disposal of Nazi para-military formations.¹⁶ By November it was clear that a massive expansion of the German army was under way. In February 1934 the Deuxième Bureau reported that the Reichswehr had increased in size to nearly 200,000 professional soldiers. It predicted that, by the end of the year, the German army would grow to 300,000 effectives and that the number of regular divisions would increase threefold to twenty-one. It also judged, correctly, that this would constitute the initial stage in a much more ambitious rearmament scheme.¹⁷ Thereafter, speculation in Paris centred on when Germany would make its rearmament public in order to reintroduce

¹⁵ SHAT, 7N 2520-5, 'Note envisageant les répercussions possibles du conflit italo-éthiopien', 9 Sept. 1935; 7N 2520-5, 'Étude des répercussions pour la défense nationale du conflit italo-éthiopien et les complications internationales que peuvent en résulter', 8 Oct. 1935; and 7N 2520-4, 'L'Allemagne en face du conflit italo-éthiopien', 1 Nov. 1935. For naval intelligence assessments, see SHM, 1BB2 180, 'Evolution de la politique en europe', 14 June 1935 and 1BB2 90, 'La Guerre italo-éthiopienne et l'attitude de l'Allemagne', *BdR*, Oct. 1935.

¹⁶ SHAT, 7N 2625, 'Valeur militaire des milices hitlériennes', 15 Nov. 1933 and 7N 2626, 'Organisation territoriale des formations hitlériennes', 8 Jan. 1934. See also Castellan, *Réarmement clandestin*, 89-95.

¹⁷ SHAT, 7N 2508, *RH*, 28 Feb.-3 Mar. 1934 and Castellan, *Réarmement clandestin*, 91-2.

short-term service and conscription.¹⁸ This would be a crucial step. The combination of short-term service and conscription would provide the Reichswehr with a mass of trained reservists available for mobilization. In 1934 such reserves were still non-existent.

But the fact that the Reichswehr did not possess trained reserves did not prevent the Deuxième Bureau from continuing to exaggerate the fighting power of existing para-military units and erroneously characterizing these as reservist formations. Estimating the number and quality of reservist formations the Reichswehr could field in the event of war was one of the most important tasks of the army Deuxième Bureau. The chronic exaggeration of German reservist strength was thus the Bureau's greatest failure of the 1930s. The failure was not a product of complacency or neglect. From Berlin Renondeau and his assistants forwarded weekly summaries of the size and deployment of the SA, SS, and all other para-military organizations. This information was supplemented by a constant stream of intelligence from the SR network and from all French consuls inside Germany.

The reservist question was an obsession for military intelligence and there was an important historical dimension to this obsession. In 1914 military intelligence had predicted that the German army would not attempt an invasion of France through Belgium because it lacked the active manpower for such an operation and would not use large number of reservists in initial operations. This error had nearly cost France the war as reserve divisions played a crucial role in the Schlieffen Plan.¹⁹ The memory of this mistake endured into the inter-war period and ensured that intelligence analysts would pay careful attention to the size of the German reservist force.²⁰ Yet, it is also clear that by the mid-1930s French analysts were either unable or unwilling to subject the reservist question to rigorous and objective analysis. The myth that the Reichswehr could put more than a million reservists into the field within a few days of mobilization had become firmly entrenched in intelligence assessments over the course of the 1920s. And this myth

¹⁸ SHAT, 7N 2593, 'Conversation avec le Général von Reichenau au sujet des armements', 27 Feb. 1934. See also 7N 2627, 'Renseignements sur l'activité militaire de l'Allemagne', 11 Sept. 1934.

¹⁹ On this question, see Andrew, 'France and the German Menace'; J. K. Tanenbaum, 'French Estimates of Germany's Operational War Plans'; and J. Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, NY, 1984), 98–104.

²⁰ See e.g. Daladier's allusion to this issue before the Chamber army commission: AAN, Commission de l'Armée, 16ème Législature, Carton 15, Daladier audition, 17 Dec. 1936.

was only reinforced by perceptions of the progressive militarization of German society under the Nazi regime.

As a result the Section Allemande characterized the Grenzschutz (German frontier security units) as a force comprising nearly one million men that would be available to take part in 'defensive operations' by the third day of hostilities.²¹ Crucially, however, little consideration appears to have been given to the question of what this mass of reservists would fight with or who would command them in battle. The reports prepared by Renondeau and secret information from source 'L' both indicated that, despite the rapid expansion of the armaments industry, actual weapons production remained limited in Germany through 1934.²² Moreover, the expansion of the Reichswehr officer corps was considered insufficient to cover the build-up of the regular army, let alone huge contingents of reservists.²³ Yet these considerations do not seem to have been incorporated into overall assessments of total German strength after mobilization. French intelligence continued to project that the Reichswehr would mobilize the Grenzschutz and the Nazi para-military organizations as a ready reserve. The reality, however, was that the German army lacked the necessary material to equip all of its active units let alone Grenzschutz and other para-military formations. The German high command warned that '[w]e must not suppose that training in the para-military organizations, which provide most of our volunteers, is much more than playing at soldiers'.²⁴ The worst case view of the Deuxième Bureau resulted in a massively overblown picture of latent German military power.

The intelligence services paid careful attention to the evolution of German military doctrine. Since the mid-1920s, French analysts had produced regular and detailed studies of military thinking across the Rhine. They understood that the overriding objective of German military planning was to avoid a long war of attrition. Reichswehr doctrine would emphasize mobility and aim at a decisive rupture of the enemy's

²¹ SHAT, 7N 2625, 'Note sur le Grenzschutz', 8 Jan. 1934; 'Renseignements sur le Grenzschutz', 7 Mar. 1934; 'Les Formations du Grenzschutz', 11 May 1934.

²² SHAT, 7N 2593, 'Renseignements sur la construction de matériel de guerre', 1 Feb. 1934; 'Documents L', 21 Feb. 1934; 'Activité militaire de l'Allemagne', 15 Mar. 1934; 'Fabrications de guerre', 7 Feb. 1934; 'Conversation avec le Général von Reichenau', 27 Feb. 1934; 'Documents photographiés', 30 Apr. 1934; 'Les Achats de matières premières par l'Allemagne', 12 June 1934.

²³ SHAT, 7N 2626, 'Incorporation des recrues dans la Reichswehr', 11 May 1934; 7N 2627, 'Rétablissement d'une école de guerre à Berlin', 23 July 1934 and 'Renseignements sur l'armée allemande', 12 Dec. 1934.

²⁴ Quoted in Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', in *GSWW*, i/2, 406.

defensive front. Appreciations of German doctrine also noted disagreements within the German army leadership over the best means of achieving such a breakthrough. Both Renondeau and the SAE prepared detailed analyses of the debate within the German high command over such issues as the use of large independent armoured and mechanized formations and close cooperation between air and ground forces on the battlefield.²⁵

Contrary to widespread belief, assessments of German military doctrine were never ignored by the French high command. Indeed, the danger of an *attaque brusquée* breaching France's network of border defences was a persistent bogey during the 1930s and lay behind the high command's obsession with ensuring the *couverture* of the national frontier. But the general staff regarded theories of mobile war with considerable scepticism. The idea of a large armoured force operating virtually independently of regular infantry divisions was under consideration within the high command, particularly after Gamelin succeeded Weygand in early 1935; but, in general, French doctrine remained wedded to the notion of armour as primarily an infantry support weapon. This did not preclude an appreciation of the importance of motorization and mechanization however. The army's first light mechanized division had been created in 1933 and two more of these formations were planned. But there was no consensus on the value of independent armour.²⁶ In practice the high command remained confident that the French system of fixed defensive positions, supported by a motorized reserve, would turn back an *attaque brusquée* provided the Germans did not achieve total surprise.²⁷ In 1934 this was a safe assumption. The development of doctrine remained far ahead of production of armoured vehicles in Germany. But it would become an increasingly risky proposition by the late 1930s.

The above themes were all present in a wide-ranging survey of German military power prepared for the high command and the defence minister in January of 1935.²⁸ The effects of Nazi efforts to

²⁵ SHAT, 7N 2593, 'Évolution de la doctrine militaire allemande', 6 Feb. 1934; 'Formations blindées', 6 Mar. 1934; 7N 2594, 'Le Haut Commandement et la guerre éclairée', 19 Sept. 1934.

²⁶ Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 147–59 and 191–6; Vaisse, *Diplomatie et outil militaire*, 372–6; Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler*, 118–88; Doughty, *Seeds of Disaster*, 94–112.

²⁷ SHAT, 1N 42–2, 'Les Moyens de parer à une attaque brusquée', CSG discussion of 15 Dec. 1934. On this question, see also R. Young, 'L'Attaque brusquée and its Use as a Myth in Inter-War France', *Historical Reflections*, 8: 1 (1981), 93–113.

²⁸ SHAT, 7N 2506, 'Les Forces militaires allemandes (janvier 1935)', *BdR*, Apr. 1935.

militarize German society received great emphasis in estimates of the quality of the new German army. The calibre of the average recruit was considered very high and this was attributed to the physical and psychological preparation received in Nazi youth programmes and in the National Labour Service. Because the term of service had been reduced to one year for those incorporated during 1934, the new volunteers would constitute a well-trained ready reserve upon their discharge. The report asserted that Nazi rule had created a situation analogous to 1914: 'The National Socialist military movement has, in 1934, psychological aspects comparable to the mood of 1914, when young volunteers rushed to the colours and made up those reservist corps which were to fight and die so heroically on the western front during the opening stage of the war.' This perception of the domestic situation in Germany reinforced the myth that the Reich could mobilize millions of reservists within days of the outbreak of war.

Turning to the size and equipment of the armed forces, the study estimated that the Reichswehr would soon comprise 400,000 regular soldiers in twenty-one infantry and three cavalry divisions. There was also evidence that one of the cavalry units was being transformed into a mechanized division and that several of the infantry divisions were being motorized. At least one light mechanized division and an indeterminate number of motorized brigades were also identified. Yet, despite the progress made in rearmament in 1934, the Reichswehr continued to lack the heavy equipment necessary for modern warfare. The Section Allemande concluded that 'the process of motorization and mechanization has only just begun' and stressed that 'the Reichswehr has almost no heavy artillery'.²⁹ It was equally clear, however, that important strides had been taken towards remedying the Wehrmacht's material and organizational deficiencies. Intelligence 'from a range of the most diverse sources' pointed to 'a constant intensification' in German armaments production. The activity of the big armaments firms of Rheinmetall and Krupp was reported to be 'particularly remarkable'. The study revealed that there was 'no doubt' that the Germans were also manufacturing light tanks 'in quantities that are unknown but are increasing constantly' most notably at Krupp and Daimler Benz. But the report was vague about actual levels of armaments production because the Deuxième Bureau could provide no

²⁹ See also SHAT, 7N 2506, 'Note sur la motorisation de l'Allemagne', *BdR*, Nov. 1934 and 7N 2676, 'Composition des unités d'artillerie et moyens de combat', 22 Jan. 1935.

precise figures beyond the rough estimate that Rheinmetall consortium could produce a maximum of 200 light field guns per month and that Krupp's monthly capacity had risen to approximately ninety 75mm cannons.

The Deuxième Bureau's appreciation of the 'material effort' underway in Germany was of limited use because it provided no estimate of the length of time required before the German army would possess the heavy equipment necessary for a continental war. It was forced to admit that the vast majority of its information was 'fragmentary and incomplete' and that, as a result, 'it is not possible to provide precise figures on the progress of material rearmament in the Reich.' More useful was the judgement that German rearmament was being expanded constantly and that '[a]s ambitious as the present programme appears, it represents only an initial step in the reconstitution of German military power. . . . By the time each new rearmament programme is introduced and orders are placed, the high command has already laid the foundations for its successor.' In other words, there were no discernible limits to German plans for the rearmament of the Wehrmacht.³⁰ All of this intelligence was reproduced in a series of reports prepared for the HCM when Germany openly proclaimed its intention to rearm on a massive scale the following March. Hitler did not shock French observers with his proclamations in spring 1935.

After Germany went public with its rearmament the key for the intelligence services was to determine how quickly the Reichswehr could be built up to a total strength of twelve corps, thirty-six divisions, and over 500,000 troops. A range of sources indicated that this force's construction would be accelerated by formal incorporation of the Landespolizei into the regular army—a vindication of the French argument at Geneva that German 'special police' were military personnel in disguise. The SR and Renondeau forwarded frequent, detailed reports on this process to Paris beginning in the summer of 1935. The SAE *rappports hebdomadaires* were replete with reports from the SR concerning the steady transformation of the German army.³¹ By November 1935 both 'open' and 'secret' sources reported that all auxiliary

³⁰ SHAT, 7N 2506, 'Les Forces militaires allemandes (janvier 1935)', *BdR*, Apr. 1935. See also 7N 2638–2, 'Note sur les armements français et allemands', 24 Jan. 1935.

³¹ See SHAT, 7N 2510 and 2511 for the *fiches hebdomadaires* for 1935. At least 80 per cent of these fiches were based on information from the SR. For a selection of Renondeau's reports, see SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Étude sur la loi du 21 mars 1935', 27 May 1935; 7N 2596, Renondeau to Paris, 16 July 1935; and 'Passage de Landespolizei dans l'armée', 30 July 1935.

police units had been inducted with the significant exception of those Landespolizei units in the demilitarized Rhineland zone.³² But observers in Paris and Berlin predicted that the process of expansion and reorganization would take time. At the end of 1935 Renondeau and the analysts within SAE agreed that the thirty-six division regular army described by Hitler the previous March could not be ready until mid-1937. Renondeau cited this period as 'probably the latest date that we can assign to the eventual German reoccupation of the right bank of the Rhine'.³³

The chief weakness in the Reichswehr after 1935 was the quality of training of both officers and troops. The breakneck growth of the regular army meant that most newly-formed units were desperately short of experienced officers. The principal measure taken to fill this gap was the promotion of non-commissioned officers. The Deuxième Bureau thesis of the 1920s, that the Reichsheer under von Seeckt constituted an officer cadre for a much larger army, thus proved correct. Yet it was clear to analysts in Paris that the peacetime army would remain critically short of experienced officers for the foreseeable future.³⁴ It was also clear that the situation would be much more desperate in the event of mobilization. Neither the officers nor the reservists in the mobilized field army would have received even minimal training. To redress this key flaw in its effectiveness, the German army had introduced measures to train up the *Ergänzung* classes—men born between 1900 and 1916 who had not received military training in compliance with the restrictions of Versailles.³⁵ Once trained these classes would constitute the Ersatzreserven. By the following spring the Section Allemande estimated that 240,000 members of the Ersatzreserven were receiving two months of military instruction per year. As an untapped pool of conscripts, the *Ergänzung* was considered a crucial advantage during the

³² SHAT, 7N 2511, *RH*, 21–9 Nov. 1935 and 7N 2596, Renondeau to Paris, 21 and 25 Nov. and 19 Dec. 1935.

³³ SHAT, 7N 2596, Renondeau to Paris, 4 Dec. 1935. For the views of the Section Allemande, see 7N 2638–2, 'Étude sur l'armée allemande en 1935', 2 Dec. 1935 and 7N 2596, SAE to Renondeau, 6 Dec. 1935.

³⁴ SHAT, 7N 2595, 'Conversation avec une personnalité militaire sur la réorganisation de l'armée allemande', 10 Apr. 1935; 'Commentaire de la loi militaire du 21 mars 1935', 22 May 1935; 7N 2676, 'Étude sur la loi du 21 mars 1935', 27 May 1935; and AN, Papiers du Général Victor Henri Schweisguth, 356 AP, Carton 2, dr. 1, 'Rapport', 16 Mar. 1935.

³⁵ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Organisation des unités d'Ergänzung-Einheiten', 6 Oct. 1935; 'Rétablissement officiel du corps des officiers de complément', 23 Dec. 1935; 7N 2595, 'Le Nouveau Corps des officiers de réserve', 23 May 1935; 'Instruction relative au recrutement et à l'incorporation en 1935', 4 June 1935.

'lean years', when available manpower in Germany was calculated to be twice as great as in France. The SAE calculated that, once these classes had received the requisite training, Germany would be capable of fielding an army of over 2.4 million effectives upon mobilization.³⁶ Predictably, the measures taken for the training of *Ersatz* reserves made a profound impression on French analysts. A note prepared by the SAE for the HCM in March warned that Germany was on the verge of surpassing France in terms of military power.³⁷

III

Following the build-up of German air power was a formidable task given the confusion that characterized planning within the new Reich air ministry and the constant acceleration of air rearmament under the Nazi regime during the 1930s.³⁸ This, combined with the relative inexperience of the officers charged with intelligence work and the complexities involved in estimating rates of aircraft production, meant that errors were all but inevitable. And, like army intelligence, the air force Deuxième Bureau quickly developed a habit of erring radically on the side of caution.

The key criteria used in evaluations of German air power were: the number of first line and reserve aircraft available to the air force; the proportion of these which could be considered modern (in 1938, for example, this meant those possessed of engines exceeding 1500 horsepower or speeds exceeding 400 km per hour); the level of training provided to pilots and ground crew; the doctrine that the new Luftwaffe would use in employing its aircraft; and, finally, the productive capacities of the German aircraft industry. Using this formula the intelligence section of the air force general staff tracked the evolution of the Luftwaffe from its beginnings as a clandestine planning section within the Truppenamt to the largest and most powerful air force in Europe by the end of the decade.

³⁶ AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 356 AP 2, dr. 1, 'Rapport', 19 Mar. 1935. See also SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Note sur l'armée allemande', 12 May 1936 and 7N 2597, Renondeau to Paris, 31 Mar., 19 May 1936.

³⁷ SHAT, 2N 19-3, 'Note sur la situation relative des forces allemandes et françaises et sur les conséquences à en tirer aux points de vue national et international', 17 Mar. 1935.

³⁸ On this question, see Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe; Völker, Die Deutsche Luftwaffe 1933-1939* (Stuttgart, 1967); and R. Overy, 'The German Pre-War Aircraft Production Plans: November 1936-April 1939', *EHR* 90 (1975), 778-97.

One constant in all assessments prepared by the air force Deuxième Bureau was the assumption that air rearmament would be a priority of the new regime. Even before the Nazi accession to power, the air force Deuxième Bureau had prepared a lengthy study of the importance attributed to aviation and air power in the Nazi Party propaganda. This report stressed that the aircraft served as a metaphor for modernity and technological progress in Germany and that it had been adopted by the National Socialist Party as a powerful symbol in its campaign for a transformation of German society.³⁹ In early 1934 air intelligence warned that the Nazi government had undertaken a major expansion and retooling effort aimed at establishing its aeronautical industry as 'the most modern and powerful in the world'.⁴⁰ Intelligence bulletins warned continually that the volume of plant and machine-tool capacity in Germany far outstripped that of the French aeronautical industry.⁴¹

The initial stages of the Luftwaffe build-up were followed with relative precision. In late 1933 'L' provided the SR with a photographed copy of the first *Lieferprogramm* devised by the new Reichsluftministerium. This plan called for the construction of 294 military aircraft by September 1934. 'L' also provided size and performance specifications for the various Dornier, Messerschmidt, Heinkel, and Focke-Wulf prototype aircraft that were to be produced under the auspices of this programme.⁴² In March the Deuxième Bureau correctly estimated that Germany had constructed more than 500 military aircraft during the first year of Nazi rule.⁴³ In May air intelligence reported that, according to the official German budget, funds allocated to Göring's new ministry would increase by 270 per cent and added that '[t]he credits voted by the Reichstag represent only a fraction of total spending on aviation in Germany'. The remainder would either come from 'occult

³⁹ SHAA, 2B 56, 'Hitler et l'aéronautique allemande', Aug. 1932; 'L'Allemagne et le désarmement aérien', Jan. 1932; 'Potentiel aérien allemand', *BdR*, Feb.–Mar. 1933. See also P. Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 180–92 and Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe*, 50–2.

⁴⁰ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1934. See also Castellan, *Le Réarmement clandestin*, 164–76.

⁴¹ See e.g. SHAA, 2B 56, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1934 and SHAT, 7N 2626, 'La Constitution de l'aviation militaire allemande', 14 May 1934.

⁴² SHAT, 7N 2594, 'Documents L.12', 30 Oct. 1933. For a memoir account of this intelligence coup, see Paul Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire* (Paris, 1964), 25–6. Stehlin wrongly claims that officials in Paris ignored this document.

⁴³ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1934; 1 B 11, 'Armements aériens de l'Allemagne', 9 Mar. 1934; SHAT, 'La Constitution d'une aviation militaire allemande', 14 May 1934.

accounts' or would be concealed in the budgetary projections for public works.⁴⁴ The following summer the SR provided further intelligence obtained from a German officer garrisoned at Sarrebrück.⁴⁵ A bulletin based on this information appeared in November 1934. It was estimated that by the following autumn the as yet clandestine German air force would comprise 900 aircraft organized into forty bomber squadrons, ten fighter squadrons, and ten reconnaissance squadrons. The bulletin predicted that by mid-1936 the Luftwaffe would grow to more than 1,500 first-line aircraft. It also estimated that over 3,500 pilots had received extensive flight training either with Lufthansa or with the para-military Deutscher Luftsportverbund. The November study concluded with the prediction that Hitler would 'present the world with the *fait accompli* of a powerful German air force at the first favourable moment'. This bulletin was forwarded to London and served as the basis for British estimates of German air rearmament into 1935.⁴⁶

But by mid-1934 the flow of reliable information had already begun to dry up and analysts were faced with the difficult task of distinguishing good intelligence from misinformation. This task became all the more difficult when, after March 1935, Göring's air ministry mounted a sustained campaign of deception aimed at amplifying foreign perceptions of the size of the Luftwaffe. The task of collecting accurate intelligence was facilitated at this stage by an exchange of air attachés with the Luftwaffe. Poincaré was considered too valuable to be replaced by a military official and so remained in Berlin. Captain Stehlin was named assistant air attaché in August. In the months that followed Poincaré and Stehlin managed to cultivate close relations with the self-proclaimed francophile Göring and his entourage. Both were invited regularly to visit airfields, training schools, and aircraft factories. Relations were so good, in fact, that in early 1936 the German air ministry provided the French air attachés with the use of an aeroplane, which proved invaluable in the task of charting the growth and deployment of both the Reichswehr and the Luftwaffe.⁴⁷ Yet, despite

⁴⁴ SHAA, 1B 11, 'Note sur les dépenses du Reich pour l'aéronautique', 25 May 1934.

⁴⁵ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1934 and Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 25–6.

⁴⁶ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1934 and SHAT, 2627, 'Programme d'aviation militaire allemande', 22 Oct. 1934. This estimate corresponds roughly to the reality as presented by Overy, 'Pre-War Aircraft Production Plans', 781–7. For British use of the report, see Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 42.

⁴⁷ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 38, Colonel de Geffrier's Riom testimony, 30 Aug. 1940 see also Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 41–2.

the close relationship that existed between the French air attachés and their Nazi hosts, the widely accepted view that air intelligence was duped into grossly overestimating the power of the Luftwaffe does not stand up to close scrutiny.⁴⁸ An intelligence bulletin of late 1935 recognized that '[e]very effort is taken to deceive those seeking to follow the true evolution of German aerial rearmament'. Nor was much credence given to the boasts of General Göring regarding the progress of the Luftwaffe. Göring's bragging, the report explained, was usually a mixture of 'sincerity, bluster and deliberate deception'.⁴⁹ The process of overestimating German air power was complex and cannot be attributed solely to German deception.

The most striking aspect of German air power throughout this period was the spectacular growth of the aircraft industry during the first five years of Nazi rule. In 1933 this industry was a disorganized collection of artisanal workshops. By 1938 it had grown to become the largest manufacturing industry in the Reich. But calculating the size of the labour force and the productive capacities of this industry was far from an exact science. As a succession of *Deuxième Bureau* assessments admitted, the chief obstacle to accurate reporting was the intense security maintained in airframe and aircraft motor factories. All workers in the aircraft industry were required to wear identification tags, manuals outlining the tactics employed by foreign espionage had been distributed to workers and all major installations were patrolled by soldiers.⁵⁰ The situation worsened as, at least from mid-1934 onward, the SR lacked a well placed and reliable source for secret information on aircraft production. Consequently, as in the case of calculations of German armaments production, air intelligence reports were customarily prefaced with the qualification that all projections were necessarily rough estimates. In October 1935 a *Bulletin de Renseignements* confessed that '[a]ll efforts to obtain better information on the activity of the German aircraft industry have been practically without result'. Another study lamented that '[t]he dispositions adopted by the Reich air ministry to assure secrecy in defence industries have rendered it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to follow the day to day

⁴⁸ See among others W. Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power*, 235–47; Adamthwaite, *France*, 120–3; and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 341–2.

⁴⁹ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 3^{ème} trimestre 1935.

⁵⁰ SHAA, 2B 57, 'La Conservation du secret dans le domaine aérien', *BdR*, 1^{er} trimestre 1936 and SHAT, 7N 2596, Poincaré to Paris (report on a Daimler Benz motor factory), 15 Oct. 1935.

activity of factories working for air rearmament in any detail'.⁵¹ The dearth of reliable data forced air intelligence to adopt patently imprecise methods in its appreciations of the activity of the German aircraft industry. The number of workers employed at a given factory, for example, was usually calculated based on the size of its cafeteria. The SAE-AIR combined the estimated number of workers at a given plant with the estimates of the hours of labour required to build a given plane to arrive at a figure for the production of individual plants. It was calculated, for example, that the Heinkel He 51 fighter required an average of 15,000 man hours to complete while the average Junkers Ju 52 transport/bomber required 25,000 to 30,000 hours of labour.⁵²

This rather crude system for estimating aircraft production levels proved utterly inadequate when it came to determining the types of aircraft being manufactured. The result was increasing uncertainty as to the ultimate objectives of German air rearmament and a series of flawed assessments of German air strength. First, partly as a result of misleading information from the SR agent in Sarrebrück, the SAE-AIR underestimated the scope of the 'Rhineland Programme' established by the German air ministry in July of 1934. This programme envisaged the construction of 17,015 total aircraft and an air force of 243 squadrons by 1938. But underestimating the Rhineland programme was not a serious error because the air force that resulted from this scheme was composed primarily of trainers and outdated aircraft of limited military value. The programme's targets were set at an unrealistically high level. The aim was to maximize aircraft production in order to build the largest manufacturing base in the shortest period of time possible. This meant producing large numbers of trainers and obsolete aircraft during the initial phases of the Luftwaffe build-up. Such an outcome was accepted by Nazi economic planners obsessed with maximizing productive capacity because it would pave the way for mass production of the next generation of far more technically advanced military aircraft.⁵³ Hence the key mistake made by French observers lay not in underestimating the scope of the Rhineland programme but in assuming that the bulk of aircraft in production

⁵¹ SHAA, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1936.

⁵² SHAT, 7N 2596, 'Visite aux usines Heinkel', 1 Oct. 1935; Poincaré to Paris, 15 Oct.; SHAA, 2B 57, 'Guide de l'informateur aérien', Oct. 1935; and *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1935. The Ju 52 was a transport plane that the Germans intended to convert into a bomber if necessary during the early 1930s.

⁵³ Overy, 'German Pre-War Production Plans', 779–85; Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe*, 75–88; and Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', in *GSWW*, i/2, 485–8.

would become first-line machines in the new Luftwaffe. This error meant that, during the initial phase of German air rearmament, French intelligence slightly underestimated total aircraft production in the Reich but consistently overestimated the number of combat-ready planes available to the Luftwaffe. In the long term, it would eventually translate into critical mistakes in assessments of the Luftwaffe's reserve aircraft pool, of the ratio of combat aircraft to trainers, and, finally, of the ratio of modern aircraft to outdated models both in service and in reserve. The end result was a series of significant exaggerations of German air power that played a major role in the evolution of French policy after 1936.

There was also persistent uncertainty about the status of German air doctrine. Uncertainty was unavoidable given that, until spring 1935, the Luftwaffe did not officially exist and there was no official air staff whose views could be examined. Lacking reliable intelligence, analysts within the air force *Deuxième Bureau* concluded that the first priority of the German air force would be to mount long-range bombing offensives.⁵⁴ This conclusion was based in part on the assumption that Germany's fleet of civilian aircraft could be converted to a bomber force with relative ease. It was also based on the blueprints for German air rearmament received from 'L' and from various SR sources which indicated a preponderance of heavy aircraft in the construction programmes for 1934 and 1935. It was reinforced, finally, by a rather selective survey of German military literature and a few discussions between air attaché Poincaré and officials from the new German air ministry regarding the role of air power in military operations.⁵⁵

Significantly, however, the *Deuxième Bureau's* interpretation of Luftwaffe doctrine was also a product of 'mirror imaging'. In the early and mid-1930s the air ministry was integrating many of the ideas of Italian air theorist Giulio Douhet into French air doctrine. Douhet was the foremost proponent of long-range bombing as a strategic weapon and predicted that the next Great Power conflict would be determined by huge fleets of heavy bombers able to strike at the enemy heartland,

⁵⁴ SHAA, 1B 3-2, 'Note sur la conduite des opérations aériennes au début d'un conflit éventuel', 1 Mar. 1933; 1B 4-1, 'Comparaison entre les potentiels des flottes de bombardement allemande et française', 27 Nov. 1934.

⁵⁵ SHAA, 2B 56, 'La Doctrine du Général Douhet: Opinions allemandes', Oct. 1932; 'L'Allemagne: Aviation sportif et la renaissance de son aviation militaire', 29 Nov. 1932; 'Potentiel de guerre allemande', Mar.-Apr. 1933; 1B 3-4, 'Note sur les possibilités comparées des aviations française et étrangères', 8 May 1934; 2 B 11, 'Note sur l'orientation de l'aviation militaire allemande', 18 Oct. 1934.

destroy its industry, and demoralize its population. This doctrine complemented the air ministry's campaign for an independent role for air power in French war planning.⁵⁶ However, the air force faced formidable opposition from an army high command determined to impose air force cooperation with ground forces as the basis of French war planning. This debate remained largely unresolved right up to the final months of peace. France went to war in 1939 without an established and coherent air doctrine.⁵⁷

Commitment to a 'strategic' role for the Armée de l'Air conditioned air intelligence appreciations of Luftwaffe doctrine. In a classic case of 'mirror imaging', air intelligence officers assumed that the Luftwaffe would fight hard for its independence and that Göring's status as Hitler's chief lieutenant would guarantee a more independent role for air power in German military planning.⁵⁸ The foundations were thus laid for a fundamental misreading of German air doctrine. In reality, the primary function of air power in German war doctrine was support for ground operations. Although the Luftwaffe high command was intrigued by the prospects of long-range bombing offensives, 'strategic' bombing was never a central pillar of German military planning.⁵⁹ Yet, right through the 1930s, the air intelligence predicted that the German air force would mount massive bombing raids on French urban and industrial centres almost from the moment hostilities were declared.

Air intelligence was more effective when it came to formulating qualitative assessments of Luftwaffe material and personnel. Throughout the 1930s the Deuxième Bureau was able to obtain reliable information on the performance specifications of virtually all German military aircraft. In the early and mid-1930s, intelligence assessments considered that Germany remained behind both France and

⁵⁶ General Guilio Douhet, *Command of the Air* (London, 1943). On French air doctrine during this period, see among others, the superb study by Patrick Facon, *L'Armée de l'air dans la tourmente* (Paris, 1997), 35–66; Vivier, *La Politique aéronautique militaire*, 53–92; and R. Young, 'The Strategic Dream: French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919–1939', *JCH* 9 (1974), 57–76.

⁵⁷ Facon, *L'Armée de l'air*, 64–5 and Young, 'The Strategic Dream', 64–8.

⁵⁸ SHAA, 2B 56, 'Hitler et l'aéronautique allemande', Aug. 1932; 1B 4–1, 'Comparison entre les potentiels des flottes de bombardement allemande et française', 27 Nov. 1934. See also the argument between the army and air general staffs in the archives of the HCM in SHAA, 1B 3–2 and SHAT, 2N 19.

⁵⁹ K. Maier, 'Total War and German Air Doctrine before the Second World War', in Deist (ed.), *The German Military*, 210–19; H. Boog, *Die deutsche Luftwaffenführung 1935–1945: Führungsprobleme, Spitzengliederung, Generalstabsausbildung* (Stuttgart, 1982), 164–77; W. Murray, *Luftwaffe: Strategy for Defeat* (Baltimore, 1985), 8–15.

Britain in the research and design of high performance aircraft engines. Sources revealed that aero-engine firms Daimler-Benz, BMW, and Junkers were developing a new generation of air-cooled and liquid-cooled motors. But in 1934–5 there were no prototypes ready for mass production. An air intelligence synthesis prepared in the summer of 1934 concluded that German engine development ‘remains significantly behind that of France in technical terms’.⁶⁰ These technical deficiencies were not considered to have been rectified until the second generation of German aircraft began entering into service in the spring of 1937.⁶¹

Added to these problems in development and design were the inevitable difficulties involved in building an air force from scratch. Besides the challenges of recruiting and training personnel were difficulties in the organization and the development of infrastructure. Airfields had to be constructed, air staffs constituted, and squadrons staffed and equipped. By early 1935 air intelligence considered that important strides had been made in these domains and the fledgling air force was judged to comprise close to 700 modern first-line combat aircraft. Military flight training centres had been identified at Brunswick, Cottbus, Döberitz, Gotha, Jüterborg, and Schlessheim. It was estimated that more than 4,000 future pilots were receiving instruction at these centres.⁶²

But in 1935 air intelligence stressed that the Luftwaffe remained a threat for the future. In November 1934 it had predicted that France would maintain superiority over Germany through 1936. But from late 1936 onward, it projected, ‘the situation could be reversed in a very dramatic fashion’.⁶³ The following year assessments continued to judge that the newly constituted German air force was not ready for a military confrontation. In August 1935, for example, Poincaré reported that, despite claims that the Luftwaffe was already second to none, German air power remained in a state of organizational confusion. He advised his superiors in Paris that ‘the Luftwaffe has yet to decide upon a definitive structure, that is to say the mould in which it must shape

⁶⁰ SHAA, 2B 56, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1934 and SHAT, 7N 2626, ‘La Constitution de l’aviation militaire allemande’, 14 May 1934.

⁶¹ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1935 and 2B 58, *BdRs*, 1er, 2ème, and 3ème trimestres 1936.

⁶² SHAT, 7N 2506, ‘Les Forces militaires allemandes (janvier 1935)’, *BdR*, Apr. 1935.

⁶³ SHAA, 1B 4-1, ‘Comparaison entre les potentiels des flottes de première ligne allemande et française’, 27 Nov. 1934.

itself little by little . . . its contours are not yet defined.' From this he concluded that 'the Luftwaffe will not even constitute a true air force until next year'.⁶⁴ But this situation would not last. Citing the assessments of Poincaré, François-Poncet advised the Quai d'Orsay and the air ministry that '[i]t is incontestably towards aviation that the Reich is devoting its principal rearmament effort'.⁶⁵ Air intelligence warned that the 'veritable fanaticism' of Göring and his team at the German air ministry was already achieving impressive results. It estimated that Germany was producing more than 200 military aircraft per month. This, it observed, was 'a rate which will permit the Luftwaffe to rapidly surpass in size every other air force in Europe'.⁶⁶ Prospects for the future were grim indeed.

IV

Naval intelligence took a different view of the German threat. Predictably, the perspective of the naval staff was shaped by the role of sea power in French grand strategy. The experience of the Great War had driven home the importance of an uninterrupted flow of manpower and raw materials to any French war effort. The overriding role of the Marine in French war plans was therefore to secure the vital lines of communication between the metropole and the empire.⁶⁷ But throughout the inter-war period Germany's ability to disrupt French shipping remained very limited. The Imperial Navy had been destroyed at Scapa Flow in 1919. Moreover, the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles ensured that the Kriegsmarine could not pose a serious threat to French security on its own. Germany was forbidden to build capital ships over 10,000 tonnes, from constructing a submarine fleet, and from developing a naval air arm. Moreover, because naval construction was more costly and much slower than armaments and aircraft production, the process of rebuilding German maritime power would be much slower than land and air rearmament. These

⁶⁴ SHAT, 7N 2596, 'Les Problèmes de l'organisation de l'aviation allemande', 14 Aug. 1935.

⁶⁵ SHAA, Archives Guy la Chambre, Z 12961, 'Estimation des forces aériennes de l'Allemagne', 9 May 1935.

⁶⁶ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1935. See also SHAA, 2B 58, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1937.

⁶⁷ Doise and Vaisse, *Diplomatie et outil militaire*, 325–60 and Young, *In Command of France*, 28–9.

factors had combined to place major limitations on the extent of German naval rearmament in the Weimar period and thereafter.

During the early and mid-1930s the prime threat to French maritime security was instead the Italian navy. Italy's geographic position in the Mediterranean posed a grave menace to the sea lanes between France and its North African empire. The chief danger posed by German naval power, in the view of the French naval staff, was that the *Kriegsmarine* would act in concert with the Italian navy in attacking French shipping in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. The *Marine* had therefore waged a determined campaign against the principle of naval parity with Italy to which the French delegation at the Washington Naval Conference had agreed in 1922. To strengthen its case, naval officials argued that France would inevitably face a coalition of Germany and Italy in the event of war. The campaign was successful. The naval rearmament programme introduced in 1924 aimed at ensuring naval parity with the combined fleets of Italy and Germany. This objective became embedded in defence policy in 1932 when the CSDN decreed that France would maintain a two-power standard with Germany and Italy.⁶⁸

Marine intelligence assessments were based on a range of assumptions about the nature of naval power that had changed significantly since the early 1920s. By the early 1930s the prevailing orthodoxy within all of the world's leading navies held that capital ships were the true measure of naval power. Developments in anti-submarine technology since the war, along with international agreements limiting the use of submarines in warfare, underpinned the widespread conviction that the submarine was no longer the decisive weapon that it had been during the Great War. Meanwhile, the development of the aircraft carrier proceeded slowly and incrementally during the inter-war period. In 1934 the role of aviation in a future war at sea remained uncertain.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ SHAT, 2N 4, *Procès-verbal* of the CSDN, 28 Oct. 1932. This principle had received implicit approval at the CSDN meeting of 30 Jan. 1929; SHAT 2N 7–13, 'Note sur les plans minimum et maximum', 25 Oct. 1932. On perceptions of a combined Italo-German threat at this stage, see SHM, 1BB2 180, 'Note au Ministre: Situation de l'Italie vis-à-vis de la France', 13 July 1933; 'Note pour le Ministre: Situation navale de la France', 27 June 1933 and 'Note sur les missions de la Marine en temps de guerre', 13 June 1933. For the background to naval policy at this stage, see E. Taillemite, 'Georges Leygues 1917–1933: Une politique maritime pour la France', *RHA* 2 (1996), 31–42; J. Blatt, 'The Parity that Meant Superiority: French Naval Policy towards Italy and Interwar Foreign Policy', *FHS* 12: 2 (1981), 223–48; and P. Masson, 'Réarmement et la marine française', *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire*, 73 (1991), 71–80.

⁶⁹ On the submarine question, see the useful overviews by Holger Herwig, 'Innovation

As a result, the capital ship once again became the 'gold standard' in measurements of naval power. This process was accelerated by the development of the German 'pocket battleship' (Panzerschiffe) in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Displacing between 10,000 and 15,000 tonnes, the Panzerschiffe were raiding ships *par excellence* because they could run away from battleships but possessed 280 mm guns that could destroy the heaviest cruisers. The advent of the pocket battleship led to a new round in capital ship building, most notably in France, and reinforced the trend towards attributing decisive importance to the capital ship in estimates of foreign naval power.⁷⁰

When the Nazis came to power in 1933 the German navy had not even managed to build up to the limits imposed by the peace treaty.⁷¹ In terms of 'modern' (post-1919) vessels, Germany possessed only five light cruisers and twelve torpedo boats. Planning during the Weimar period had envisaged the construction of an aircraft carrier and a fleet of submarines.⁷² But only three Panzerschiffe were under construction by 1933 and only one of these, the *Deutschland*, would come into service by the end of the year. The situation would not change dramatically under the Nazis. Naval rearmament received the lowest priority in the allocation of resources right down to the final months of peace. Hitler had frequently criticized Germany's naval policy under Tirpitz before 1914 and was opposed to a naval build-up that would jeopardize his plans for an alliance with Britain. Hence German naval planning under the direction of commander of the Kriegsmarine Admiral Erich Raeder was initially limited to the pursuit of eventual naval parity with France.⁷³ This was the objective of the 'Replacement Shipbuilding

Ignored: The Submarine Problem', in W. Murray and A. Millet (eds.), *Military Innovation in the Inter-War Period* (Cambridge, 1996), 227–64 and Richard Burns, 'Relegating Submarine Warfare, 1921–1941: A Case Study in Arms Control and Limited War', *Military Affairs*, 35 (1971), 56–62. On the development of the aircraft carrier, see Geoffrey Till, 'Adopting the Aircraft Carrier', in Murray and Millet (eds.), *Military Innovation*, 191–226. For the French perspective, see Coutau-Bégarie, *Le Désarmement naval* (Paris, 1995), 215–18 and V. de la Forest Divonne, 'Les Porte-avions et la Marine française, 1910–1940', *Mémoire de maîtrise* (Université de Paris IV, 1986).

⁷⁰ For a French naval assessment of the Panzerschiffe, see SHM, 1BB2 134, 'Étude des conséquences du réarmement allemand', Mar. 1934.

⁷¹ The following paragraph on German naval rearmament is drawn largely from J. Dülfer, *Weimar, Hitler und die Marine. Reichspolitik und Flottenbau 1920–1939* (Dusseldorf, 1973), 194–268 and 570 and Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 456–72.

⁷² On Weimar naval policy, see W. Rahn, *Reichsmarine und Landesverteidigung 1919–1928: Konzeption und Führung der Marine in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 1976).

⁷³ G. Schreiber, 'Die rolle Frankreichs im strategischen und operativen Denken der deutschen Marine', in Hildebrand and Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich*, 167–213.

Programme', approved in March 1934, which called for the construction of eight battleships, three aircraft carriers, and seventy-two submarines. Germany secured British approval for the construction of this fleet under the auspices of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935. The new programme was inaugurated when two battle-cruisers, the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, were laid down in February of 1934. When compared to German land and air rearmament, however, the pace of the planned naval build-up was moderate. The 1934 programme was to be completed only in 1949. But this plan would be accelerated steadily over the course of the next five years. In early 1935 the German naval staff resolved to build a 40,000-tonne battleship and received the funds for this project the following December. By the spring of 1939 naval rearmament had gained priority in the allocation of scarce raw materials.⁷⁴

French naval intelligence was slow to react to this threat. Obtaining good intelligence on the naval situation in Germany was given low priority compared with the search for information on the Italian navy. Throughout the 1930s the Deuxième Bureau of the Marine general staff lacked reliable sources on the state of German naval planning. The French naval attaché, Captain Tracou, was not permitted access to German shipyards and the Deuxième Bureau appears to have lacked other sources in the German shipbuilding industry.⁷⁵ The naval SR was apparently unable to recruit agents in German shipyards and French signals intelligence remained unable to penetrate the German naval codes. The studies prepared by the Section d'Études routinely lamented the lack of dependable information, secret or otherwise, on the situation in Germany. One possible explanation for this state of affairs is the lack of funding which seems to have crippled the Marine SR during the inter-war period. But it is also clear that Germany was not the overwhelming priority for the naval Deuxième Bureau that it was for army and air intelligence.⁷⁶ To a certain extent, this was understandable. Given the lead times involved in mounting and finishing a construction programme, the Kriegsmarine did not pose the type of

⁷⁴ Deist, *Rearmament of the Wehrmacht*, 80–5 and Dülffer, *Hitler und die Marine*, 452–60.

⁷⁵ On British assessments of German naval power during the same period, see Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 129–37; J. Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany* (London, 1998), 63–132 and *id.* '“I Believe the Hun is Cheating”': Admiralty Technical Intelligence and the German Navy, 1936–1939', *INS* 11 (1996), 32–58.

⁷⁶ See e.g. SHM, 1BB2 93, 'Idées militaires et conceptions stratégiques dans la Marine Allemande', 12 Nov. 1932.

imminent threat presented by either the Italian navy or the land and air armaments programmes of the Reich.

This is not to say that German naval policy was ignored in Paris. Indeed, the first capital ships built in France since 1914, the *Dunkerque* (from the naval *tranche* of 1931) and the *Strasbourg* (approved in January 1934), were both 26,500-tonne battlecruisers commissioned in response to the German *Panzerschiffe*.⁷⁷ But the initial phase in assessment of the German naval threat was characterized by the assumption that naval rearmament would receive low priority under the Nazi regime. The naval Deuxième Bureau concurred with army intelligence that Hitler was 'obsessed' with the notion of war and conquest in the east. Naval power would play only a secondary role in the coming *Drang nach Osten*.⁷⁸ The intelligence bulletin for December 1933 observed that

Since the accession to power of Chancellor Hitler, Germany has undertaken vast preparations towards rearmament on land and in the air. But as far as naval rearmament is concerned, it seems the projects of the *Marineleitung* have not changed and that the government of the Reich is still restrained in this question by the desire not to incur the hostility of England.

Significantly, intelligence appreciations failed to recognize that the chief objective of German naval policy was parity with France. A report prepared the following spring noted that 'Hitler and his government refer to naval questions only superficially' and judged that 'Germany will continue to conform, from the naval point of view, to the general prescriptions of the Versailles Treaty'. The study acknowledged that Admiral Raeder and his staff were not happy with this state of affairs and would eventually push for a more ambitious naval programme. 'But for the moment,' it was concluded, 'the *Marineleitung* must be content with a moderate rearmament.'⁷⁹ Similarly, a study of 'the consequences of German rearmament' prepared by the Section d'Études in January 1934 assumed that German building programmes through to the late 1930s would aim for a capital ship contingent of only five pocket battleships.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ A common misconception is that the *Strasbourg* was a response to the larger *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. But plans for the *Strasbourg* were presented to parliament by (then) minister Albert Sarraut in Jan. 1934, before the two larger German ships had been laid down. For clarification, see Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 44–6; H. Coutau-Bégarie and C. Huan, *Darlan* (Paris, 1989), 85–6; Perrett, 'French Naval Policy', 84–8; and R. Dumas, *Les Cuirassés Dunkerque et Strasbourg* (Bourg en Bresse, 1993), 7–19.

⁷⁸ SHM, 1BB2 90, 'L'Évolution de la politique hitlérienne', 17 July 1933.

⁷⁹ SHM, 1BB2 90, *BdRs*, Nov.–Dec. 1933.

⁸⁰ SHM, 1BB2 194, 'Étude des conséquences du réarmement allemand', Jan. 1934.

The chief problem was the lack of information. Intelligence reports were generally sketchy about the progress of German naval construction. Although naval intelligence reported that the keels had been laid for what would eventually be the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau*, the precise armament and displacement of these new capital ships remained a mystery.⁸¹ In reality, both were designed as replies to the *Dunkerque*. German plans called for them to eventually mount 11 inch guns and to displace nearly 32,000 tonnes. The following spring the Kriegsmarine announced their displacement to be 25,000 tonnes. Thereafter, despite rumours from an undisclosed source that one of these vessels was actually a 35,000-tonne battleship, the Deuxième Bureau continued to describe the two vessels under construction as 26,000-tonne battlecruisers.⁸²

Marine intelligence also proved unable to keep track of the state of the German U-boat programme. After the principle of equality had been granted in 1932 there was little doubt that the Kriegsmarine would eventually build submarines. But the more important question of when Germany would possess a submarine fleet remained unanswered in intelligence appreciations. In a spring 1934 report the Deuxième Bureau concluded that '[t]he question of submarines remains provisionally set aside for diplomatic reasons'.⁸³ Later that year, however, some evidence appears to have surfaced indicating that there were submarines under construction in the Krupp shipyard at Kiel. On 31 October naval intelligence chief Captain Chevalier informed the British naval attaché in Paris that the Germans had five submarines under construction in the slipways at Kiel. He estimated the length of each vessel to be sixty metres and produced a photograph of the slipways in question which was taken from a considerable distance and was thus inconclusive.⁸⁴ On the surface, therefore, it appears that the French did obtain accurate information on German U-boat construction at Kiel. But a closer look at the available documentary record raises difficult questions. No mention of German submarine construction appears in any of the monthly or weekly bulletins produced by

⁸¹ SHM, 1BB2 90, *BdR*, Nov.–Dec. 1934.

⁸² SHM, 1BB2 90, *BdRs*, Jan., Feb., Apr., May, July, and Sept. 1935. Rumours that at least one of the ships was much larger appear in the May *bulletin*. These appear to have been dismissed outright. On the state of German naval construction: M. Salewski, 'Marineleitung und politische Führung, 1931–1935', *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 2: 10 (1971), 113–58 and Dülffer, *Hitler und die Marine*, 570.

⁸³ SHM, 1BB2 90, *BdR*, Mar. 1934.

⁸⁴ PRO, FO 371, C7485/2134/18, 'Construction of submarines at Kiel', Paris embassy report, 2 Nov. 1934.

French naval intelligence in 1934. Nor is there any reference to this question in the more voluminous documentation produced by the Section d'Études during this period. In fact, assessments in December and the following January both stated that Germany had yet to begin U-boat construction.⁸⁵ Naval intelligence continued to misinterpret the true aims of German naval policy through to the spring of 1935. In fact, the intelligence bureau did not produce conclusive evidence that the Germans were building submarines until only a few weeks before the first U-boat was actually commissioned in April of 1935.⁸⁶

The most likely explanation for this contradiction between intelligence reports and what French officials were telling the British is that the Marine general staff suspected that the Germans were building U-boats at Kiel and was attempting to pry further information from the Admiralty. The British, at any rate, were very sceptical. Robert Craigie, the chief Foreign Office expert on naval affairs, observed that '[t]he French have had stories of this kind before, and we could not confirm them'. The British naval attaché in Berlin rejected the French claims and added that '[i]n the past the French government have been so anxious to prove breaches of the treaty that they have exaggerated, and few of their accusations have proved justified.'⁸⁷ Whether or not British suspicions about French duplicity were well-founded, an opportunity to establish bases for collaboration in intelligence gathering about the U-boat threat was lost in 1934. But the importance of this missed opportunity should not be exaggerated. The prevailing orthodoxy within all of the great navies held that capital ships were the true measure of naval power. During the inter-war period developments in anti-submarine technology and international agreements limiting the use of submarines in warfare underpinned the widespread conviction that the submarine was no longer the decisive weapon that it had been during the Great War. Consequently, like their counterparts in the British navy, the Marine general staff would continue to underestimate the danger of German submarine construction right through to the outbreak of war.

⁸⁵ SHM, 1BB2 90, 'L'Allemagne et la conférence navale de 1935', Dec. 1934 and 1BB2 97, 'Situation des marines étrangères au 1^{er} janvier', Jan. 1935. The relevant intelligence bulletins are in this carton. The *Bulletins d'Études* for this period are in SHM, 1BB2 93. Relevant material from the Section d'Études is concentrated in Cartons 1BB2 166–221.

⁸⁶ SHM, 1BB2 90, *BdR*, May 1935.

⁸⁷ PRO, FO 371, C7883/2134/18, 'Alleged construction of submarines at Kiel', Berlin embassy report, 22 Nov. 1934 and Craigie minute of the initial Paris embassy report cited above. See also Maiolo, *Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 102–9.

A second phase in naval assessment was inaugurated when Italy announced its intention to lay down two 35,000-tonne battleships in June 1934. The following April it became clear that the German U-boat programme was much further advanced than either French or British observers had realized. The most important development of this period, however, was the signature of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935, where Germany's demand to build a navy totalling 35 per cent of the total tonnage of the Royal Navy received official British approval. These developments revolutionized the naval balance in Europe and overturned the bases of French naval policy. The construction programmes announced by Germany and Italy during this twelve-month period rendered the French two-power standard an impossibility.

The two new Italian battleships had been anticipated by the Marine general staff as an acceptable trade-off for its refusal to consider a Franco-Italian naval accord. Such an accord would have restricted the building plans of the naval ministry and precluded the construction of a second battlecruiser. In the view of the rue Royale, this would have eroded French superiority over Italy and Germany and compromised French security in both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Hence, after parliamentary approval was obtained for the *Strasbourg* in January of 1934, a new Italian building programme was considered inevitable. In fact, the French navy had already begun planning the construction of two new capital ships before the Italian shipbuilding programme was even announced.⁸⁸ France and Italy thus began a naval race that was moderated only slightly by the political, military, and air accords negotiated by the two states in early 1935. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that, of the three services, the Marine was the most reluctant to embrace the short-lived Franco-Italian alliance and the first to resume planning for offensive operations against the Italians after the rapprochement fell apart in the wake of the crises of 1935–6.⁸⁹

While the French government was aware of ongoing discussions between British and German naval representatives, the details of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement caught the rue Royale by surprise. Significantly, the chief flaw in naval staff reckoning at this juncture lay

⁸⁸ SHM, 1BB2 195–1, Decoux to Larosière (French AN in Rome), 10 Apr. 1934; *DDF*, 1ère série, vi, no. 96, Piétri to Barthou, 16 Apr. 1934; *ibid.*, no. 248, Piétri to Barthou, 27 May 1934 and *ibid.*, no. 284, Piétri to Barthou, 4 June 1934.

⁸⁹ See Perrett, 'French Naval Policy', 158–76 and R. Salerno, 'The French Navy and the Appeasement of Italy, 1937–1939', *EHR* 112: 445 (1997), 66–104.

not in misunderstanding German policy, but in misreading British intentions. French observers had been aware of the German demand to build a fleet at least one-third the size of the Royal Navy since the previous November. What they did not expect was that the British government would acquiesce to this claim. In talks with various French officials through to the spring of 1935, British representatives had discussed a German fleet of 200,000 tonnes.⁹⁰ In April, Laval had reassured Piétri that the scope of the German demand 'leaves no possibility of an accord'.⁹¹ The only indication to the contrary emanated from the London embassy during the final week of May when Ambassador Charles Corbin, echoing the views of the French naval attaché in London, warned that 'certain personalities' in the London 'political milieu' were convinced that the best course was to accept the demand for 35 per cent ratio and thus extract a pledge from the Nazi government to limit German naval construction. But Corbin judged, erroneously as it turned out, that the Foreign Office opposed this view.⁹²

The result was that French officials were surprised and not a little angry when British negotiators indicated their intention to agree to the German demands after only one day of talks. Under the auspices of the 18 June accord the Germans also secured the right to possess a submarine force equal to that of the Royal Navy and reserved the right to 're-examine' the terms of the agreement should 'third powers' alter the naval equilibrium with 'abnormal construction'. The British argument was that the German fleet could build up to a level of 420,000 tonnes, which would guarantee the Marine a margin of superiority. In keeping with the prevailing interpretation of German intentions among the intelligence services, the naval staff judged that that British policy was 'based on a number of illusions'. The chief British misconceptions were the hope that the Germans would not build up to the maximum 420,000 tonnes allowed under the auspices of the agreement and the assumption that they would proceed at a moderate pace.⁹³ The chief

⁹⁰ SHM, 1BB2 193, 'Sommaire des conversations navales de Londres, 9-10-11 juillet 1934'; 'Compte-rendu des renseignements', 7 Feb. 1935; and 'Compte-rendu de la visite de M. Piétri à Londres', May 1935. See also Decoux's memoirs, *Adieu Marine* (Paris, 1957), 301-2.

⁹¹ SHM, 1BB2 193, 'Revendications allemandes en matière navale', Laval to Piétri, 18 Apr. 1935.

⁹² SHM, 1BB2 193, Corbin to Paris, 29 May 1935. On the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, see Maiolo, *Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 11-86 and C. Scammel, 'The Royal Navy and the Strategic Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement', *JSS* 20: 2 (1997), 92-118.

⁹³ SHM, 1BB2 193, 'Note au sujet du projet d'accord naval entre le gouvernement britannique et le gouvernement allemande', 12 June 1935.

conclusion drawn was that the Admiralty had been seduced by worthless Nazi pledges of good faith and that the agreement had been signed 'without due consideration of the political dimensions to the problem'. The British had failed to tie the agreement to limitations on land and air rearmament. Germany had thus obtained official recognition of their right to disregard Versailles but had given up nothing substantial in return.⁹⁴ 'It appears', observed Decoux, 'that, presented with a veritable ultimatum by the Reich, the British momentarily lost their celebrated "self-control" and thus signed an accord that they considered the lesser of two evils.'⁹⁵

The naval agreement was a disaster for France because it undermined the two-power standard in Europe that had been the basis of French maritime strategy since the early 1920s. In the category of capital ships, in particular, the Marine would be placed in a clear position of inferiority. In addition to the two 35,000-tonne battleships laid down by Italy the previous year, naval intelligence indicated that the Germans were building, or would lay down in the near future, three capital ships of 26,000 tonnes or more. Estimating that Germany would build 55,000 tonnes worth of shipping per year, the naval staff reckoned that the combined German and Italian fleets would approach a total strength of one million tonnes by 1942.⁹⁶ A two-power standard was thus an impossible objective. The problem was that the naval high command was loath to acknowledge this reality. During the summer and autumn of 1935 staff memoranda continued to insist that 'France must reassume complete freedom in the realm of naval constructions' and that its maritime programme must increase in proportion to the ascent of German naval rearmament.⁹⁷

One interesting aspect of the naval staff's analysis of the situation is that it did not incorporate the strategic benefits that might accrue to

⁹⁴ SHM, 1BB2 193, 'Note sur l'accord naval anglo-allemand', 20 June 1935 and 1BB2 193, 'Suggestions britanniques faisant suite à l'accord naval anglo-allemand', 3 July 1935.

⁹⁵ In the original as 'le moindre mal': SHM, 1BB2 195-2, Decoux to de Rivoyre (French AN in Berlin), 21 June 1935. For a good account of the international ramifications of the agreement, see R. Salerno, 'Multi-lateral Strategy and Diplomacy: The Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Mediterranean Crisis, 1935-1936', *JSS* 17: 2 (1994), 39-78.

⁹⁶ SHM, 1BB2 193, 'Note au sujet du projet d'accord naval entre le gouvernement britannique et le gouvernement allemande', 12 June 1935; 'Note sur l'accord naval anglo-allemand', 20 June 1935; and 'Note' by the Section d'Études, 3 July 1935. See also *DDF*, 2ème série, xi, no. 176, François-Poncet report on German naval construction, 28 June 1935.

⁹⁷ See e.g. SHM, 1BB2 195-2, Decoux to de Rivoyre, 21 June 1935; 1BB2 193, 'Suggestions britanniques . . .', 3 July 1935; 'Mémento' (general staff study attached to note from Laval to Corbin), 29 Oct. 1935.

French maritime security as a result of the Franco-Italian rapprochement. This was understandable and perhaps even predictable. Italian enmity had constituted a boon for the French navy during the 1920s by providing the Marine high command with a potential threat which could be used to squeeze extra credits from parliament. 'If we do not maintain clear superiority over Italy,' Piétri's cabinet warned, 'we will find ourselves in an impossible position in the event of war.'⁹⁸ Consequently, even as the naval staff began to consider seriously the possibility of cooperation with the Italian navy, naval rearmament plans remained based on the hypothesis that France would face an Italo-German combination without British assistance.⁹⁹ This apparent contradiction was due, in part, to the rue Royale's desire to maintain a two-power standard. But it was also a product of deep misgivings about the utility of an alliance with the Fascist government. On 14 June, when the army and air force general staffs were on the verge of concluding a detailed military alliance aimed at containing German aggression in Europe, the naval Deuxième Bureau produced a perceptive summary of the political situation which predicted that Mussolini's 'lust for expansion' in Africa would provoke a Mediterranean crisis and possibly even a war between Britain and Italy.

Yet, despite the penetrating assessments drafted by staff officers, French naval planning was increasingly out of step with the evolution of French strategy and diplomacy. In November 1935, for example, the CSM approved a proposal to increase the objectives of the existing programme from 660,000 to 750,000 tonnes in order to preserve the two-power standard.¹⁰⁰ But by this time there was no chance that France would fight both Germany and Italy alone and without British support. The relative independence and prosperity that the Marine had enjoyed during the post-war years of German military weakness had come to an end. The problem was that the naval high command was reluctant to accept this reality and adjust its plans accordingly.

⁹⁸ SHM, 1BB2 208, 'Politique navale', 29 Mar. 1934. See also *DDF*, 1ère série, vi, no. 93, 'Procès-verbal de la séance de la Commission spéciale du 14 avril 1934'; *ibid.*, no. 96 Piétri to Barthou, 16 Apr. 1934; *ibid.*, no. 248, Piétri to Barthou, 27 May 1934; and *ibid.*, no. 284, Piétri to Barthou, 4 June 1934.

⁹⁹ SHM, 1BB2 193, 'Note', a 15-page survey of the strategic situation and procurement needs produced by the Section d'Études on 3 July 1935.

¹⁰⁰ SHM, 1BB2 180, 'Evolution de la situation politique en Europe', 14 June 1935 for assessments of the political situation. On the CSM and the two-power standard, see SHM, 1BB2 170-2, 'Les Armements navals français depuis la guerre', 23 June 1937.

V

The influence of intelligence on national policy varied from 1934 to 1935. Intelligence on German rearmament was central to the formulation of foreign and defence policy during the spring and early summer of 1934. From mid-1934 through to the spring of 1936, however, perceptions of the German menace were overshadowed by the vagaries of the unrelenting economic and financial crisis. Premier Pierre Laval, in particular, pursued an entente with Nazi Germany as a means of ensuring French security. Laval was openly sceptical of the value of the intelligence reporting and assessments produced by the intelligence services during this period functioned more as an obstacle to his designs than a cornerstone of his policies.

After the German withdrawal from Geneva in October 1933 French policy makers were faced with two realistic courses of action.¹⁰¹ One option would be to sign an accord recognizing Germany's right to rearm in exchange for Hitler's promise to limit the extent of the Reich's military build-up. Such a policy would require faith in Nazi pledges and would have to be based on some form of effective international control to monitor the military situation in Germany. It would also mean ignoring all intelligence appreciations of German intentions. In early March the Deuxième Bureau produced a survey of the military and political situation which warned that that the German government 'has never respected its signature and has twice in its recent history demonstrated mastery in the art of camouflaging its military forces'.¹⁰² Alternatively, France could break off negotiations on disarmament altogether and pursue a policy of Great Power alliances and rearmament. But a policy of firmness would require Great Power allies and an expensive rearmament programme. The choice was further complicated by the attitude of Great Britain. The MacDonald government in London urged Paris to agree to a reduction in its land and air forces and a limited increase in German military power. This proposal was rejected by the defence establishment because it offered nothing in the way of concrete guarantees for French security in exchange.¹⁰³ Yet

¹⁰¹ Excellent accounts of French policy at this stage are Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 378–414; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 87–99; and Young, *In Command of France*, 52–63.

¹⁰² SHAT, 7N 3558–1, 'Faut-il signer une convention?', 15 Feb. 1934. A somewhat truncated version of this document is published in the *DDF*, 1ère série, v, no. 465.

¹⁰³ The British proposal is in *DDF*, 1ère série, v, no. 296, 29 Feb. 1934. See also Dick Richardson, 'The Geneva Disarmament Conference, 1932–1934', in D. Richardson and

if France chose to take the advice of its military leadership and pursue a policy of 'security first', it risked losing the support of its most important potential ally.

The ensuing policy debate unfolded in the highly charged atmosphere created by the *événements* of February 1934. On 6 February the worst street violence since 1871 had shaken the parliamentary institutions of the Third Republic and forced the resignation of Daladier's second government. The ensuing crisis ushered into power a government of 'National Union' led by former President Gaston Doumergue and comprised of a collection of political heavyweights from the centre-right. The expectation was that the Doumergue government would work together with parliament to reform the parliamentary system, restore confidence in the Republic, and end the drift in both domestic and foreign policy.¹⁰⁴ And, from the outset, external affairs were a priority for the new government. The Premier installed his personal staff on the second floor of the foreign ministry rather than at the traditional Premier's offices at the Hôtel Matignon. Doumergue and his cabinet were almost uniformly suspicious of Germany. Indeed, the key defence and foreign policy portfolios were all occupied by prominent advocates of a policy of firmness towards Germany. Two of the three service ministers, Marshal Philippe Pétain and General Victor Denain, were serving officers while the third, minister of the Marine François Piétri, had long been a voluble advocate of a robust foreign policy and a powerful French navy. The foreign minister's portfolio went to Louis Barthou, whose credentials with the military had been firmly established by his sponsorship of the three-year service law as Premier in 1913. Barthou, Doumergue, Pétain, along with Deputy Premier André Tardieu had all written extensively about the dangers of German rearmament in the centre-right press.¹⁰⁵

All of this meant that intelligence assessments were ensured of an attentive audience. But the impact of intelligence on policy depends entirely on how it is used, and information obtained from the intelligence services was misused by military officials in 1934–5. Assessments of the situation inside Germany became politicized as part of the

G. Stone (eds.), *Decisions and Diplomacy: Essays in Twentieth Century International History* (London, 1995), 60–82.

¹⁰⁴ For analyses of the events of 6 Feb., see S. Bernstein, *Le 6 février 1934* (Paris, 1975) and M. Winock, *La Fièvre hexagonale* (Paris, 1995), 193–238. On the Doumergue government, see Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 74–98.

¹⁰⁵ R. Young, *Power and Pleasure: Louis Barthou and the Third French Republic* (Montreal, 1991), 174–9, and 208–21.

debates over defence policy. The credibility of Deuxième Bureau reports was thus compromised and intelligence became marginalized in the decision making process. The French response to the rebirth of German power was hamstrung as a result.

VI

The politicization of intelligence at this juncture happened primarily at the level of the army and air force high commands. The air ministry exaggerated the air threat from Germany as part of a campaign to secure approval for its air rearmament programme, Plan I. The chief architect of this tactic was air force chief of staff and air minister Denain. In late February 1934 Denain informed the cabinet that the German air force comprised 'an absolute minimum of 500 warplanes of the most recent type' and that the German aircraft industry was in a 'feverish' state of expansion.¹⁰⁶ Over the next few months, however, this relatively accurate summary of air intelligence reporting was displaced by estimates that had been inflated considerably. In a note prepared for the Premier in early May, the air staff warned that Germany could mobilize an air force of 728 first-line planes. More importantly, it also stressed that, in terms of quality, German bombers already possessed a 'serious advantage' over that of France owing to 'the mass production of modern heavy aircraft' under way in Germany. There was no mention of the difficulties the Germans encountered in engine design. Nor was there any overall assessment of the potential effectiveness of an air force that did not officially exist and was being created virtually from scratch under camouflage.¹⁰⁷

This was a conscious effort to alarm French politicians. According to one official within the air ministry at this stage, the deliberate exaggeration of the German air threat was part of a systematic effort to create a '*psychose de guerre*' in French government circles. Within the air ministry this was considered the 'only way' to secure the credits necessary for Plan I in 1934.¹⁰⁸ The most sensational example of the air ministry's

¹⁰⁶ DDF, 1ère série, v, no. 427, Denain to Barthou, 23 Feb. 1934.

¹⁰⁷ SHAA, 1B 3-4, 'Note sur les possibilités comparées des aviations française et étrangères', 8 May 1934.

¹⁰⁸ SHAA, 3D 493-3, 'Rapport du Contrôleur Métal', 18 Feb. 1938. See also Pierre Cot's testimony in the oral history archives: SHAA, Section d'Histoire Orale (SHO), no. 14: Interview de M. Pierre Cot, 14 Feb. 1977 and Facon, *L'Armée de l'air*, 70-3.

scare-mongering was undoubtedly Denain's prediction to the parliamentary air commission that France would be at war with Germany by 1935 or 1936 at the latest.¹⁰⁹ The tactic secured the desired credits. In January the ministry secured approval for the first air rearmament programme since 1918. Plan I envisaged spending 3.98 billion francs on the construction of 1,010 military aircraft over the next three years. Although under the auspices of Plan I the size of the Armée de l'Air would be reduced, French air power would be greatly enhanced as its huge fleet of antiquated wood and canvas biplanes would be replaced by a smaller force of modern prototypes. In July the ministry received approval for the immediate release of 1.45 billion francs to jump start this programme.¹¹⁰

But these credits were all but wasted. During the next three years the balance of power in the air would tip decisively in favour of Germany because of fundamental flaws in Plan I. There were two basic problems with this rearmament plan. One was the air ministry's commitment to multi-purpose aircraft prototypes. These were hybrids designed theoretically to perform the three basic functions of military aircraft: *bombardement*, *combat*, and *renseignement* (hence the prototype acronym BCR). The choice of the BCR was a compromise between the air ministry's desire to build a substantial bomber force and the army high command's demand that Armée de l'Air maintain a large contingent of reconnaissance aircraft. In practice, however, the BCRs proved inadequate in all three capacities and the entire experiment was abandoned in early 1936.¹¹¹

The second major flaw in Plan I was the air ministry's failure to develop a coherent industrial policy. A major renovation of France's archaic aircraft industry was required to pave the way for mass production. But the vast majority of the credits received by the ministry were devoted to ordering second-rate BCR prototypes that would be obsolete in a few years. Meanwhile, the aviation industry remained a disorganized morass of relatively tiny firms using outmoded production techniques. Not surprisingly, it proved unable to cope with the orders it received under the auspices of Plan I. Production bottlenecks

¹⁰⁹ See Facon, *L'Armée de l'air*, 71 and Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 185–96.

¹¹⁰ SHAA, 1B 1, 'Plan d'armement et d'équipement de l'armée de l'air', 26 Oct. See also Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 52–4; Boussard, *Aéronautique militaire au parlement*, 78–9; Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 184–99; and Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 513–15.

¹¹¹ On the BCR project, see Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 88–90, 196–9 and Young, 'Strategic Dream', 58–69.

created such chronic delays that barely half the aircraft ordered in 1934–5 were ever actually delivered to the air force.¹¹² The initial rearmament programme was therefore a disaster and, as a result, France lost crucial ground to Germany in the race to rearm in the air.

The flaws in French air policy derived, in large part, from a rudimentary understanding of the complexities of modern aircraft production. But the situation was greatly exacerbated by the alarmist atmosphere created by the ministry's misuse of intelligence. By exaggerating the immediacy of the German air menace, Denain placed his ministry under intense pressure to augment French air power in the short term. A more prudent and effective policy would have been to devote more resources to the reorganization, renovation, and expansion of France's dilapidated aircraft industry for the long term. As Patrick Fridenson has noted, the air ministry had 'placed the cart before the oxen.'¹¹³ The end result was that, while French factories struggled to produce machines that were destined to become obsolete almost as soon as they entered into service in 1935–6, the Reich was expanding its industrial plant in order to mass produce a new generation of aircraft in 1937. Germany had achieved a decisive advantage that would eventually translate into the crushing air superiority that was such a major factor in French policy during the Czechoslovak crisis of 1938.

Estimates of German land power were similarly politicized in the army high command's campaigns for more credits and against a disarmament convention. On the eve of his retirement in early 1935, Weygand launched his most determined effort to acquire more funds for the expansion and renovation of the French army. He began with the warning that

We can have no faith in the sincerity of M. Hitler's pacific declarations when it is clear that Germany is methodically proceeding with the reconstitution of a powerful military force. . . . In the near future [Germany] will possess forces that, when supported by its formidable war potential, will permit it to impose its will by the threat of force or, if necessary, by force of arms.

Weygand castigated the constant trimming of the defence budget of the early 1930s and warned that the French army had 'lost its value in

¹¹² E. Chadeau, *De Blériot à Dassault: Histoire de l'industrie aéronautique en France, 1900–1950* (Paris, 1987), 166–84; Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 183–217; Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 56–60; and H. Chapman, *State Capitalism and Working Class Radicalism in the French Aircraft Industry* (Berkeley, 1991), 35–42.

¹¹³ P. Fridenson and J. Lecuir, *La France et la Grande-Bretagne face aux problèmes aériens (1935–1940)* (Vincennes, 1976), 36.

relation to Germany'.¹¹⁴ In support of this pessimistic appraisal, Weygand's personal staff prepared what can only have been an intentionally exaggerated appreciation of German military power for the CSDN. This assessment advised France's civilian leadership that the Reichswehr constituted a '*masse d'attaque*' of twenty-one infantry divisions, four to five cavalry divisions, and one mechanized division. It added that Germany could mobilize more than forty divisions of *Grenzschutz* class reservists capable of undertaking immediate defensive operations within five days of a declaration of war. No reference was made to the lack of all types of equipment or to the dearth of properly trained officers identified in Deuxième Bureau assessments.¹¹⁵ In fact, when Gamelin observed during a meeting of the CSG that the Reichswehr lacked officers, heavy equipment, and trained reserves, he was ignored by the rest of his colleagues. Weygand merely responded that 'given its character as a militarized nation' Germany had less need of large numbers of officers and extensively trained reservists than did France.¹¹⁶

The war ministry's campaign of intimidation continued after the departure of Weygand. Pétain contributed by giving a series of alarmist exposés on the progress of German rearmament to the cabinet, to the Chamber army commission, and to the CSDN in 1934 and 1935.¹¹⁷ His successor, General Maurin, warned the army commission of the Chamber that the manufacture of all kinds of war *matériel* in Germany was proceeding at a pace 'more than three times that of armaments production in France'.¹¹⁸ Even the notoriously phlegmatic Gamelin was not above indulging in this game of inflating the strength of German rearmament for political purposes. He informed the British military attaché in Paris that Germany could put 100 divisions into the field after mobilization and would be capable of 'attacking in the west

¹¹⁴ SHAT, Fonds Weygand, 1K 130, 1, dr. 5, 'État de l'armée', 10 Feb. 1934.

¹¹⁵ SHAT, 1N 34, 'Rapport de présentation au Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale', 10 Apr. 1934.

¹¹⁶ SHAT, 1N 34, 'Séances d'études tenue par le Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre', 25 Apr. 1934.

¹¹⁷ MAÉ, PA-AP 89, Papiers Herriot, vol. 35, fos. 102–77; AAN, 15ème législature, Commission de l'armée, 6 June 1934; *DDF*, 1ère série, v, Pétain to Barthou, 20 Feb. 1934. In the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on 1 Mar. 1935 Pétain inflated the size of the regular German army to 600,000 and warned that 'as regards the instrument required to carry out a surprise attack, Germany is ready, or very nearly so'. For the views of the British embassy in Paris, see PRO, FO 371, 18800, C1751/227/17, 'Military Service in France', British embassy report, 4 Mar. 1935.

¹¹⁸ AAN, 15ème législature, Commission de l'armée, 22 Nov. 1934.

on a 250 kilometre front from Switzerland to Liège or from Thionville to Holland'.¹¹⁹

There is little doubt that the war ministry's distortion of the German threat was clearly an attempt to 'load the deck' against all arguments for an armaments convention. And the scare-mongering was also conducted on the public stage. During debates over the military budget for 1935 French parliamentarians were informed that the size of the Reichswehr had swollen to 600,000 troops (a level that it would not attain in fact until 1939) and that Germany could field a force of 1.4 million 'well-trained reserves'.¹²⁰ This was an absurd exaggeration of German rearmament clearly aimed at alarming popular opinion as well as political elites. Intelligence assessments of this period continued to advise that Germany would not be ready for a European war before 1938 at the earliest.¹²¹ The British embassy in Paris reported that 'I understand that [the *rapporteur* of the army budget] has deliberately made his references to German military preparedness as alarming as possible as he considers that unless the picture is painted in the darkest colours it will fail to command attention'.¹²² The hope was to frighten politicians into accepting Weygand's call to reinstate the two-year service law and expand the regular army. In private even Weygand admitted that the situation was 'safe for a considerable period of time without any great effort by France'. Gamelin agreed.¹²³ As with the case with air rearmament, this tactic was successful in the short term. The end result of this process was a rearmament programme adopted by the Doumergue government.¹²⁴ But, as we will see, the tactic proved counter-productive in the long run by further eroding the credibility of intelligence reports with the civilian leadership.

Under the able guidance of Piétri, the Marine again proved itself the most adept of the services at securing financial outlays from parliament. The fact that the Kriegsmarine did not pose an imminent maritime threat did not mean that intelligence on German naval

¹¹⁹ PRO, FO 371, 17653, C3827/85/17, 'French Defence Proposals', 14 June 1934 and C3958/85/17, Heywood report, 19 June 1934.

¹²⁰ *Journal Officiel*, Audition de M. Léon Archimbaud (*rapporteur* for the Chamber finance commission), 21 Nov. 1934, 2407-72. On attempts to manipulate public opinion, see Young, 'L'Attaque brusquée', 93-113.

¹²¹ SHAT, 7N 2520-5, 'Note envisageant les répercussions possibles du conflit italo-éthiopien', 9 Sept. 1935.

¹²² PRO, FO 371, 17653, C7890/85/17, 'French Army Estimates', 21 Nov. 1934.

¹²³ Bankwitz, *Weygand*, 54-5 and Young, 'L'Attaque brusquée', 105.

¹²⁴ Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 504-6.

rearmament was not a factor in the evolution of French naval policy. The German naval build-up and the subsequent Anglo-German naval accord were used in conjunction with construction undertaken by Italy to secure approval for a substantial building programme for the years 1934 and 1935. Somehow, during a period of strict financial austerity, the naval staff was successful in clinging to the strategic fiction of independence from Great Britain. In 1934–5 the ministry secured parliamentary approval for the construction of more than 100,000 tonnes of new ships, including three capital ships: the 26,500-tonne *Strasbourg* and two 35,000-tonne battleships, the *Richelieu* and the *Jean Bart*. The total cost of the *tranches* of 1934 and 1935 was more than 2.8 billion francs. Indeed, 37 per cent of all state expenditure on new weaponry went to naval rearmament at a time when the Reichswehr and the Luftwaffe were far more dangerous threats to French security.¹²⁵ A lack of intelligence on the ultimate objectives of German rearmament did not harm the naval staff's campaign for more credits and a bigger navy.

VII

The influence of intelligence on foreign policy making varied greatly depending on the government in power. Under the Doumergue government, with Barthou as foreign minister, intelligence was clearly influential. It played a key role in the decision to reject further disarmament negotiations with Germany. Under Barthou, the Quai d'Orsay remained committed to the idea of ensnaring the Reich in a system of multilateral pacts aimed at maintaining the territorial status quo in Europe. In contrast to the service ministries, the majority of opinion within the foreign ministry held that the best course of action would be to take the initiative by proposing a new armaments convention which would concede Germany's right to rearm but set strict limits and controls on the level of this rearmament. The chief proponents of this policy were Barthou, Léger, René Massigli, head of the ministry's League of Nations service, and François-Poncet. None of these four had much confidence in Hitler, but all were conscious of the need for British support and thus anxious that France would not be held responsible for the failure of disarmament talks. From Berlin, François-

¹²⁵ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 44–6, 54, 62–3, 306, and 310 and R. Chalmers Hood, *Royal Republicans: The French Naval Dynasties between the World Wars* (London, 1985), 128–37.

Poncet made the powerful argument that Germany intended to rearm whatever the case. It was better, therefore, to secure some kind of formal commitment from the Reich which might moderate this rearmament. In the event the Reich did not honour its commitments, world opinion would be far more likely to support France.¹²⁶

These arguments failed to persuade the Doumergue cabinet. A 'Special Commission' was convened to consider the disarmament question under the joint chairmanship of Tardieu and Herriot, who both opposed signing a convention with Germany. The commission served as a forum for military officials to provide outnumbered civilians with a series of exaggerated assessments of the German menace. Massigli, the Foreign ministry's representative on the commission, later complained that his objections were drowned out by the military with the collusion of Herriot and Tardieu.¹²⁷ Weygand defended the military's worst case perspective by asserting that '[h]aving the perilous honour of commanding France's armed forces in the event of war, I cannot underestimate either force or the potential of our adversary'. He demanded that the size of the German army be limited to 300,000 and that the effectives in the French army be increased to 651,000. The commission approved this recommendation, which had no hope of gaining acceptance either in Berlin or London.¹²⁸ Doumergue, whose native mistrust of Germany had only been intensified by the constant flow of intelligence on the situation across the Rhine that he had received since becoming Premier, welcomed this hard-line attitude. He advised Barthou that France 'must face [certain] realities'. German rearmament had 'rendered all discussion concerning guarantees and controls impossible'.¹²⁹ The majority of the cabinet agreed. In meetings held on 16 and 17 April, only colonial minister Pierre Laval argued for conciliation. Faced with such opposition, Barthou conceded.¹³⁰

The result was the 'April Note' which declared that an armaments convention would not be signed until Germany returned to the League

¹²⁶ François-Poncet, *Souvenirs*, 168–81; Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 562–7; Young, *Power and Pleasure*, 213–16; and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 92–8.

¹²⁷ Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 562–3. See also the dossier prepared by Weygand's staff in the Série N supplémentaire, 1N 10, dr. 2, 'Réunions de la Commission Spéciale du CSDN du 14 et du 17 Avril 1934'.

¹²⁸ *DDF*, 1ère série, vi, no. 93, 'Procès-verbal de la séance de la Commission spéciale', 14 Apr. 1934; *DDF*, 1ère série, vi, no. 108, 'MM. Herriot et Tardieu, Ministres D'État, à M. Doumergue, Président du Conseil', 16 Feb. 1934. See also Herriot, *Jadis*, ii, 409–13.

¹²⁹ *DDF*, 1ère série, vi, no. 97, 'Note du Président du Conseil', 16 Apr. 1934.

¹³⁰ Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 567–9.

of Nations and concluded with the well-known phrase that France would 'place in the forefront of its preoccupations the conditions of its own security'.¹³¹ Intelligence was central to the evolution of this policy. In the weeks preceding the 'April Note' the cabinet was 'ceaselessly bombarded' with evidence of German war preparations and this information had stiffened the resolve of a group of ministers that was already predisposed to a firm response to the Nazi challenge.¹³²

But, as René Massigli observed, the 'April Note' itself neither prevented German rearmament nor strengthened French security.¹³³ There were two central thrusts to the French pursuit of *sécurité* in the aftermath of 17 April. The first was an attempt to sponsor an eastern security arrangement aimed at containing German revisionism. The second was a series of negotiations leading to more traditional Great Power alliances with both Italy and the Soviet Union. With hopes for an 'eastern Locarno' dead, Barthou attempted to create a security system encircling the Reich. But the pact failed to materialize because only Czechoslovakia and the USSR would cooperate wholeheartedly with the French design. The failure of Barthou's shuttle diplomacy only underlined France's declining influence before the rebirth of German military power.¹³⁴

Projects for Great Power alliances with the USSR and Italy seemed to hold more promise. The unsuccessful coup staged by Austrian Nazis supported by Germany in July 1934 led to an exchange between Barthou and Mussolini which resulted in Laval's famous visit to Rome the following January and the Franco-Italian military accords of June 1935. The short-lived Franco-Italian alliance was unique in that it was based on detailed military planning for war against Germany

¹³¹ DDF, 1ère série, vi. no. 104, 'Communication du gouvernement française au gouvernement britannique', 17 Apr. 1934. For a detailed analysis of the authorship of the note, see Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 570–4.

¹³² Cited in Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand*, 69.

¹³³ MAÉ, Papiers Massigli, PA-AP 217, vol. 7, Massigli to Corbin, 31 May 1934.

¹³⁴ On negotiations for an eastern pact, see Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 99–104; Wandycz, *Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, 239–64 and 339–70; Jordan, *Popular Front and Central Europe*, 40–4; and Young, *In Command of France*, 59–75. On the failure of French policy towards Poland, see J. Laroche, *La Pologne de Pilsudski: Souvenirs d'une ambassade, 1926–1935* (Paris, 1953), 153–5; J. Beck, *Dernier rapport* (Neuchâtel, 1951), 50–7; towards Romania, see M. Thomas, 'To Arm an Ally: French Arms Sales to Romania, 1926–1940', *JSS* 19: 2 (1996), 231–59; and D. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers, 1933–1940* (Durham, NC, 1989), 35–51, 239–40; towards Yugoslavia, see Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 219–231. For British opposition, see Gaines Post, Jr., *Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defense, 1934–1937* (Ithaca, NY, 1993), 25–43.

rather than a formal political accord between the French and Italian governments. In fact, the only French plans for large-scale offensive action against Germany after 1934 were based on cooperation with Fascist Italy.¹³⁵ This plan to use Italy as a 'bridge' between the armies of France and her allies to the east was unrealistic. This should not, however, obscure the fact that the French army believed otherwise. Nor should the strategic importance of Italy to French planners be underestimated. The bases of a Franco-Soviet alliance were negotiated by Barthou and Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov during the spring and summer of 1934. The resulting agreement provided for Soviet entry into the League of Nations as a prelude to a mutual assistance pact. But Barthou was assassinated before a full-blown Franco-Soviet alliance was established. This left the crucial questions of the political and military limits to the pact to his successor Pierre Laval.¹³⁶

There remains considerable debate as to whether Barthou had revived Delcassé's policy of encircling Germany or whether his chief aim was an eventual Franco-German understanding. What is clear is that he was resolved to deal with Germany from a position of strength and was prepared to enter into an alliance with Soviet Russia in order to do so. Professor Duroselle judged that Barthou was the last French statesman with the courage and determination to stand up to German aggression and that his assassination in October 'marked the end of a great policy'.¹³⁷ Yet, for all of Barthou's energy and resolve, serious structural weaknesses in France's position remained. Despite the signature of the Franco-Soviet Pact, relations with the USSR remained characterized by intense mutual mistrust. The French defence establishment was viscerally anti-Bolshevist and profoundly suspicious of Soviet motives. The high command remained convinced that the USSR had no intention of aiding France in the event of war with Germany and was playing a double-game with talk of a military alliance. Consequently, no military corollary to the non-aggression pact was ever signed.¹³⁸ Similarly, the alliance with Italy was threatened from the

¹³⁵ On the question of Italy in French strategic planning, see the R. Young, 'French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933-1939', *HJ* 28: 1 (1985), 143-68 and Jordan, *Popular Front and Central Europe*, 60-9. On the diplomatic side, Shorrocks, *From Ally to Enemy*.

¹³⁶ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 104-12; Haslam, *Soviet Union*, 102-44.

¹³⁷ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 112.

¹³⁸ On the defence establishment and the USSR, see M. Carley, 'Prelude to Defeat: Franco-Soviet Relations, 1919-1939', *Historical Reflections*, 22 (1996), 159-88; P. Buffotot, 'The French High Command and the Franco-Soviet Alliance, 1933-1939', *JSS* 5 (1982), 46-59; Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 293-8; and Young, *In Command of France*, 143-9.

very beginning by Franco-Italian rivalry in the Mediterranean. Storm clouds were already on the horizon during the staff talks of June 1935 because Mussolini's ambitions to make the Mediterranean 'an Italian lake' conflicted with vital French (and British) interests. The Italian invasion of Abyssinia the following October, followed by Fascist aid to the Spanish rebels under Franco one year later, combined to place impossible strains on the new alliance.¹³⁹

Added to this was the fact that France could not count on either Great Britain or Belgium. The British government and bureaucracy remained deeply impatient with the French attitude towards Germany and Anglo-French relations had deteriorated steadily during this period. The strains between the two states came to a head in autumn 1935 during the Abyssinian crisis.¹⁴⁰ The evolving attitude of Belgium, moreover, threatened to undermine the principle of forward defence upon which French military strategy was based. While in Belgium, Barthou was informed that the Belgians would not fight for a demilitarized Rhineland and would not allow the French army early entry into the lowlands before their country was actually invaded by Germany. This was a serious blow to French military planning and posed a problem that the general staff was unable to resolve for the remainder of the decade.¹⁴¹

There were other, equally intractable, problems facing French policy makers. The foremost of these was the moribund state of the French economy. In early 1935 France reached the lowest point of the Great Depression. The index of industrial production had fallen to 76 (against a base of 100 in 1928) and exports had declined by more than 35 per cent since 1933. The overall contraction of the economy further reduced tax revenues and thus worsened the chronic financial crisis. The result was that, despite strenuous efforts to balance the budget with austerity measures, the national deficit for 1935 reached 10.5 billion francs.¹⁴² These economic difficulties exacerbated the country's great

¹³⁹ On the steady deterioration of Franco-Italian relations at this stage, see Shorrocks, *From Ally to Enemy*, 141–69; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 145–52; and E. Robertson, *Mussolini as Empire Builder: Europe and Africa, 1932–1936* (London, 1977), 164–77.

¹⁴⁰ On Anglo-French tension, see Nicholas Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations, 1934–1936* (London, 1984), *passim*; Martin Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement* (London, 1996), 16–18; and P. M. H. Bell, *Britain and France, 1900–1940* (London, 1996), 184–203.

¹⁴¹ DDF, 1ère série, vi, no. 141, 'Note du Ministre', 27 Mar. 1934. See also Young, *In Command of France*, 65–6; Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 173–209; and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 101–3.

¹⁴² Sauvy, *Histoire économique*, ii, 135–8; Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 100–1; and Berstein, *France des années trente*, 35–9.

ideological schism. Right and left were badly divided as to the best policy to end the Depression. The SFIO advocated an ambitious public spending programme aimed at increasing the purchasing power of the working class. Such a policy would necessitate a devaluation of the franc. The right, conversely, remained committed to a policy of deflation which would maintain the strength of the franc. At the centre, the Radical Party remained divided on economic and financial policy but in general inclined towards the more orthodox views of the right. It was disagreement over economic and financial policy that ultimately brought down the Doumergue government in November 1934 and Pierre-Étienne Flandin's subsequent coalition the following spring. Added into the mix was the threat which the anti-parliamentarian right-wing leagues presented to the republic. National unity in France reached its inter-war nadir in 1935 and this reality could not be ignored by civilian officials responsible for the making of foreign and defence policy.¹⁴³

Another major concern was the woeful state of the army and air force at this point. If Weygand exaggerated German military strength, he provided his civilian counterparts with a realistic appraisal of the crisis facing the French army. The cuts in the defence budget since 1932 had seriously compromised military effectiveness. Not only was the army reduced in size by 60,000 effectives, it also faced critical shortages of modern tanks, heavy artillery, anti-tank weaponry, communications equipment, and transport vehicles of all types. The newly-created air force was in similar condition. Although it was numerically large, it was made up of outdated aircraft and lacked a set doctrine. Of the three services, only the navy could view its situation with some satisfaction in 1934 thanks to the steady flow of credits under the auspices of the naval programme devised in 1922.¹⁴⁴

VIII

These constraints were never far from the forefront of Pierre Laval's calculations during his term as foreign minister from October 1934. After June 1935 Laval added the Premier's portfolio to his responsibilities. Laval was of a different generation to his predecessor Barthou.

¹⁴³ Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 78–91; Mouré, *Franc Poincaré*, 42–76; Berstein, *Crise du radicalisme*, 271–362; and Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 50–6.

¹⁴⁴ Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 595–7 and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 34–67.

A maverick politician who had made the transition from the SFIO to the right of the political spectrum during the 1920s, he had the reputation of a shrewd and anti-doctrinaire deal-maker. Like Barthou, Laval was an ardent patriot. But, as one of his biographers has stressed, Laval's patriotism was imbued with a 'peace mystique' and this set him apart.¹⁴⁵ There were distinct continuities between the approaches of the two foreign ministers. Both aimed at achieving European stability and sought to deal with Germany from a position of strength in order to achieve this objective. Yet Barthou remained deeply suspicious of German motives and sceptical of the possibilities for a lasting Franco-German understanding. He was prepared to return to a traditional policy of Great Power alliances, and therefore to the risk of another war, in order to preserve French security. Laval was not and this was the crucial difference between the two statesmen. As Fred Kupferman has perceptively observed, 'For [Barthou] war was a possibility, for Laval it was unthinkable.'¹⁴⁶ Contrasting perceptions of the German threat conditioned the respective attitudes of Barthou and Laval towards intelligence.

Laval paid relatively little attention to either the reports prepared by the intelligence services or the counsels of Gamelin and the high command. He was unable to accept the bleak assessments of Nazi foreign policy produced by the general staff. Indeed, in conversations with members of the general staff, he openly questioned the reliability of the service Deuxième Bureaux and scoffed at their 'continual exaggeration' of German military strength.¹⁴⁷ He attached greater value to diplomacy in general and to his own unique brand of personal diplomacy in particular. Peace through Franco-German conciliation remained the ultimate objective of his policy. He was therefore no enthusiast for a full-blown military alliance with the Soviets. As a result, French policy towards the USSR became more circumspect under his leadership. When the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact was signed (on 2 May 1935) it was full of contingencies and was to become operative only under the auspices of the League of Nations Covenant. Subsequent pressure from the Soviets for a corresponding military arrangement was resisted with determination by both the Quai d'Orsay and the war ministry.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Cited in Kupferman, *Laval*, 125–7 and J. P. Cointet, *Pierre Laval* (Paris, 1993), 134–71. See also G. Warner, *Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France* (London, 1968).

¹⁴⁶ Cited in Kupferman, *Laval*, 125.

¹⁴⁷ AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 2, dr. 6, 'Memento', 12 Oct. 1935.

¹⁴⁸ On the Franco-Soviet Pact, see Wandycz, *Twilight*, 357–99; Duroselle, *La Décadence*,

In the aftermath of the proclamation of German rearmament in March 1935, Laval appeared to adopt an attitude of firmness. At the HCM on 5 April he declared that the time had come to consider whether France should 'oppose any subsequent violations [of the Versailles Treaty] by force'. Significantly, however, he also raised the possibility of resuming conversations with Germany.¹⁴⁹ At the Stresa conference several days later the French delegation proposed that a severe protest be submitted to the League with the threat of sanctions. The British government, which was preparing for naval talks with the Germans, refused this course. The final result of the conference was a rather anodyne condemnation of German 'unilateral action'.¹⁵⁰ It was left to the French and Italian army and air staffs to formulate plans for a response to German aggression the following month in Rome.

For Laval, however, the short-lived military arrangement with Italy was useful mainly because it placed France in a strong position from which to embark upon talks with the Germans. In June of 1935 Laval took over as Premier after a prolonged ministerial crisis sparked by Flandin's inability to jump-start the French economy. In the ensuing months the hard-line veneer of French policy towards Germany gave way to a more conciliatory attitude. Assurances were given through official channels that the pact with Russia posed no threat to Germany and Laval met with Göring in Poland in mid-May to reiterate this. As tensions mounted with Italy over Ethiopia, Laval attempted to preempt rapprochement between Germany and Italy by offering to meet with Hitler personally. Fernand de Brinon was once again employed as an unofficial conduit to Berlin to approach Hitler about the possibility of a Franco-German summit. The German chancellor did not respond to this overture, however, and subsequent efforts by François-Poncet to initiate talks also failed.¹⁵¹ Two months later the Laval government fell over its economic policy.

The gulf between Laval's interpretation of the Nazi threat and the views of the services is even better illustrated by a look at rearmament

106–21 and 139–45; Haslam, *Soviet Union*, 32–51; and G. Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1995), 13–20.

¹⁴⁹ SHAT, 2N 19–2, 'Procès-verbal de la séance du HCM du 5 avril 1935'.

¹⁵⁰ Léon Noël, *Les Illusions de Stresa: L'Italie abandonnée à Hitler* (Paris, 1975), esp. 63–77 and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 136–8.

¹⁵¹ *DGFP*, Series C, iv, no. 384, Rintelen to Köster, 29 Oct. 1935. In this German record of the meeting of Brinon informed Hitler that Laval personally desired 'd'avoir l'occasion d'une conversation utile'. The Germans made no response to this overture. See also de Brinon, *Mémoires*, 28–33; Cointet, *Laval*, 174–5.

policy. The logical corollary to the 'April Note' of 1934 should have been an ambitious rearmament programme. Indeed, speaking out against the note, Laval had warned that such a course would lead inevitably to an arms race.¹⁵² Laval was right. Rearmament was essential if France hoped to deal with Germany from a position of strength. Only a modernized army and air force would provide French diplomacy with the credibility necessary to play power politics with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. But coming up with huge sums for rearmament was a formidable challenge for any government in 1934. First, the political will to rearm was insufficient. In general the right remained more likely to proclaim the dangers of the German menace while the left was only slowly divesting itself of the politics of pacifism and disarmament. In 1934 there remained clear limits to the importance of the German threat for national policy. Although the right was willing to denounce German treaty violations, it was unwilling to abandon deflation and monetary orthodoxy in order to finance French rearmament. The left, meanwhile, was more concerned with the internal threat posed by Fascism and did not see the need to arm France against Hitler in 1934–5.

And there were seductive arguments against spending large sums on rearmament. Despite the warnings of the intelligence services, war remained a horrible prospect rather than an inevitability for France's political leadership during the mid-1930s. Moreover, the likelihood of war in the future, even the not-too-distant future, had to be weighed against the exigencies of a depressed economy and an ongoing financial crisis. Under such circumstances it was tempting to argue against spending vast sums on weaponry that might become antiquated before it could be used. The Maginot fortifications played a role in this debate. Indeed, for most politicians, the rationale behind the huge expenditure on the Maginot Line was that the steel and concrete along the eastern frontier would keep the enemy at bay while France moved from a peacetime to a war economy. French industry could therefore begin mass producing the latest prototypes from the outbreak of war. This thinking, which was consistently opposed by the high command as unduly optimistic, only reinforced the trend towards cutting military budgets during the early and mid-1930s.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine (hereafter cited as BDIC), Papiers Lucien Lamoureux, microfilm 31, 'Souvenirs politiques, 1919–1940'.

¹⁵³ This dilemma is examined in AN, *Archives Daladier*, 496 AP 28, dr. 4, 'Le Problème militaire française', 1 June 1936. See also Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 117–26; Young, *France and the*

As a result, commitment to austerity, rather than the growing German threat, continued to be decisive within the centre-right majority governments of this period. Indeed, one of the first steps taken by the Doumergue cabinet when it assumed office was to trim the defence budget for 1934 by 20 per cent.¹⁵⁴ Some military spending was inevitable after 17 April. The purse strings were finally loosened in July when an 'extraordinary account' (*compte spécial*) of 3.12 billion francs was created for national defence. But this investment did not produce any new rearmament schemes. Most of these funds went towards the completion of the Maginot Line. The navy received extra funds for the construction of fuel installations and the purchase of a modest number of aircraft. The *compte spécial* did provide the air ministry with the initial funds for Plan I. But this programme had been conceived in October 1933 and first presented to parliament the previous January.¹⁵⁵ Through 1934 Weygand and Gamelin continued to press the government for a proper motorization and mechanization programme for the army. But Pétain was able to secure only 445 million francs from the cabinet. Hence the 'Pétain Programme', even when augmented by Pétain's successor at the war ministry, General Louis Maurin, was utterly insufficient to meet the needs of the army given the massive outlays committed to rearmament across the Rhine. The steps towards rearmament taken by the Doumergue and Flandin governments in late 1934 and early 1935 were truly only half-measures.¹⁵⁶

These hesitant first steps towards serious rearmament ground to a halt under the Laval government. The spending policies of the new regime were even more inflexibly deflationary than those of its predecessors. New Finance minister Marcel Régnier was an unwavering champion of 'sound finance' and a determined opponent of devaluation. Once again, the defence budget became a chief target for spending cuts. Even a cursory reading of the daily journal of war minister Jean Fabry during this period reveals the pressure the service ministries were under to reduce expenditure. First the funds of the *compte spéciale* for army modernization obtained by Pétain and Maurin were axed.

Origins, 106–9; and M. Alexander, 'In Defence of the Maginot Line: Security, Domestic Politics and the Depression in France', in Boyce (ed.), *French Foreign and Defence Policy*, 164–94.

¹⁵⁴ Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, 587; Young, *In Command of France*, 59.

¹⁵⁵ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 54 and Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 189–96. The funds for the *Strasbourg* battlecruiser were not part of the 'extraordinary account' but were taken instead from the yearly naval tranche for 1934 (there had been no tranche in 1933).

¹⁵⁶ Frank[enstein], *Hantise du déclin*, 34–35 and Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 199–220.

Thereafter a further 270 million francs were cut from the army's three-year re-equipment programme.¹⁵⁷ Laval's premiership marked a clear victory for austerity over defence spending in national policy. A comparison of German and French defence spending for 1936 reveals the impact of this development for the future balance of power in Europe. In 1936 France spent 26.5 per cent of state revenues on defence while Germany military expenditure accounted for 62.4 per cent of total state income.¹⁵⁸ The defence budget for 1936 was the end-product of a nine-year trend in French defence policy. Of the 7 billion francs earmarked for armaments expenditure between 1927 and 1935 barely 3.5 billion was actually spent. The result for the French armaments industry was 'stagnation and in some areas real decline' at a time when this industry was in desperate need of refurbishment in order to meet the challenge presented by ever-increasing German rearmament.¹⁵⁹ It was in 1935 that the gulf began to open up between France's strategic capabilities and its political commitments in Europe.

Laval intended to square this circle by negotiating a durable agreement with Germany. This would mean dismissing the views of the intelligence services and the high command. The opposing views of France's military and political leadership over how best to meet the Nazi challenge came to a head at a meeting of the HCM in late November 1935. Laval revealed his intention to reopen direct talks with the Reich. Arguing that '[w]e can never compete with Germany in an arms race', he informed the high command that he was willing to make major concessions over disarmament in order to secure an understanding with Hitler. Plans for accelerating the mechanization of the army were therefore to be put on hold. Gamelin, now commander-in-chief designate, was mortified. In an unofficial missive written that evening he denounced the direction Laval intended to steer French policy: 'Perhaps one day we will be able to arrive at an understanding

¹⁵⁷ SHAT, 5N 581-2, *Journal du marche du Ministre de la Guerre Jean Fabry* (covers the period from 7 June 1935 to 25 Jan. 1936). See in particular the entries for 15-19 and 21 June; 2, 3, 8, 29 July; 5 Aug.; 17 Aug.; 29 Oct.; 22, 25 Nov. 1935. The best discussions of austerity and defence policy during the Laval period are Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 56-79, as well as Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 55-63 and *Hantise du déclin*, 33-7.

¹⁵⁸ Figures for France from R. Frank[enstein], 'Réarmement français, finances publiques et conjoncture internationale, 1935-1939', *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire Moderne*, 28 (1981), 8-9 and for Germany from M. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge, 1982), 295-6.

¹⁵⁹ Figures from Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 62; quotation from Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 58.

with Germany; but only when our armament programme is completed and without abandoning our allies. Moreover, what must we give in exchange? Can we believe that Germany will be satisfied? It is likely to betray us'. He judged that Laval's policy was a betrayal of France's historic role and asked rhetorically, 'Is the country that saved the world in 1914 no longer worthy of its destiny?'¹⁶⁰ Many historians would argue that Laval's policy better reflected France's diminished military and economic position in 1935. Whatever the case, it is also clear that the continued reluctance of France's political leadership to invest in rearmament was having a demoralizing effect on the army high command. This trend would exacerbate the sense of inferiority that underpinned French perceptions of German military power in the months to come.

The record of the intelligence services during this period was mixed. French intelligence correctly identified the primacy of rearmament in Nazi policy and maintained that the German military build-up was in preparation for a policy of territorial expansion. The army Deuxième Bureau, in particular, was able to track the growth of the regular German army with impressive precision. Similarly, air intelligence was able to monitor the growth of the clandestine German air force, the construction of new airfields, and the establishment of new aviation factories. But in 1935 the more important task was estimating the future pace of German rearmament. And already at this stage it is possible to discern the trends of misperception and exaggeration that would characterize Deuxième Bureau assessments after 1935. The combination of a lack of information on German industrial activity and widely held stereotypes about the German national character led to wildly exaggerated estimates of potential German land and air strength. Particularly after the flow of information from 'L' dried up, Deuxième Bureau appreciations were increasingly vague on the actual state of activity within the armaments and aviation industries. This uncertainty would translate into serious exaggerations of the number of reservist divisions available for mobilization in the field army as well as the number of aircraft held in reserve by the Luftwaffe.

The impact of intelligence on the evolution of national policy was limited. The Deuxième Bureau thesis that Germany was preparing

¹⁶⁰ SHAT, 2N 19, 'Réflexions d'une mauvaise nuit au sortir d'un Haut Comité Militaire: déclaration grave de M. Laval', 22 Nov. 1935. See also Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 74-6.

for a war of conquest, and the mountain of detailed intelligence it provided on German rearmament in support of this interpretation, were central to the decision to reject negotiations with Germany for an armaments convention. But awareness of the German threat could not overcome the two prevailing national obsessions in 1934–5: the economic crisis and the great ideological divide between right and left. Robert Jervis has rightly judged that it is very difficult for intelligence to persuade politicians that their basic assumptions are flawed.¹⁶¹ This was surely the case in 1934 and 1935 in France. As Robert Frank has noted, the policy of rearmament advocated by the intelligence services was in ‘complete contradiction’ with the deflationary policies of the centre-right governments of Doumergue, Flandin, and Laval.¹⁶² The Nazi menace could prompt the government to use the rhetoric of firmness, it could inspire Barthou to reinvigorate French foreign policy, but it could not induce Doumergue, and especially his successors Flandin and Laval, to renounce deflation and to spend the funds necessary for the modernization and expansion of the French armaments and aircraft industries. The political and ideological costs that would result from such a volte-face were simply too high.

There is an illuminating parallel between armaments policy and the movement to reform the French political system in 1934. When Doumergue assumed office in February there was considerable support for both projects in French opinion. By the following autumn, however, support for rearmament and for political reform had dissipated and the national focus had shifted back to the politics of the Depression. In 1935 France remained a profoundly divided society, paralysed by the economic crisis. In this context, intelligence on the resurgence of German power induced more pessimism than resolution. France was incapable of a vigorous response to the Nazi challenge.

¹⁶¹ Jervis, ‘Strategic Intelligence for Effective Policy’, in W. Wark, D. Stafford, and A. Farson (eds.), *Security and Intelligence in a Changing World* (London, 1991), 171–2.

¹⁶² Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 55–63, 96–125 and *Hantise du déclin*, 33–7.

The Rhineland

THE ADVENT of open and apparently unlimited rearmament in Germany, combined with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia the following October, overturned the post-war balance of power once and for all. It also marked the beginning of a period of profound pessimism in French assessments of the strategic situation. From early 1935 onward the intelligence services produced consistently bleak appreciations of German military capabilities. The clear tendency to focus on the strengths of the German military machine and to downplay its vulnerabilities became more firmly entrenched than ever in intelligence appreciations. Behind this pessimism was a pervasive gloom within the military establishment caused by the civil-military conflicts of the Weygand era and by further cuts in expenditure made by the Laval government in 1935. The response of the high command was to continue to inflate the estimates of German military power formulated by the Deuxième Bureau when communicating them to civilians. The aim was to drive home the immediacy of the German threat. But the result of this political distortion was that, at key stages, civilian policy makers were presented with flawed assessments of the military balance. Intelligence on the recrudescence of German military power was used by the high command to justify its inflexible determination to adopt a defensive posture along the Franco-German frontier. It was also used to provide the essential underpinning for French policy in eastern Europe—a policy best described as retreat in advance. Intelligence therefore reinforced an existing predisposition among decision makers to adopt a cautious attitude when Hitler overturned the Locarno system by remilitarizing the Rhineland on 7 March 1936.

I

The year 1935 had brought important changes at the top of the Deuxième Bureau and the SR. In late March Lt. Colonel Maurice Gauché had become chief of army intelligence. Gauché was 44 years of age at this time—young for a senior officer of the French general staff. He was a career intelligence officer and, like all inter-war bureau chiefs, an expert on Germany.¹ Another graduate of St Cyr, Gauché had begun the First World War with an infantry regiment before being attached to the Deuxième Bureau of General Ferdinand Foch's Fourth Army general staff in 1915. In 1920 he headed the intelligence section of the French military mission to Poland under Weygand where he again distinguished himself in the operations which drove the Red Army back from the outskirts of Warsaw in 1919. In the aftermath of the Polish campaign Gauché was transferred to the Section Allemande of the Deuxième Bureau in Paris. His posting in Poland was to prove profitable, however. During this time he cultivated good relations with members of the Polish high command which were to prove useful during his tenure as head of the Deuxième Bureau. Cooperation between French and Polish military intelligence was vital in the attack on the German Enigma machine the following decade. In 1923 Gauché was assigned to France's occupation force in Germany, where he almost certainly played an important role in organizing the extensive information gathering network the French army established across the Rhine during the 1920s. After a successful passage through the prestigious École Supérieur de Guerre in 1926, he was reassigned to the Deuxième Bureau as head of the Section Allemande in 1930. Gauché was much respected within the general staff for his analytical powers and for an extraordinary capacity for detail. Weygand described him as having an 'extraordinarily powerful and subtle intellect', and as 'an officer of the very highest calibre'. Gamelin agreed, noting that 'this is an officer who must be pushed [promoted through the system]'.² British officials who had frequent dealings with France's intelligence chief found him 'an unexcitable type . . . unusually taciturn', who formulated 'extraordinarily accurate assessments'.³

¹ The following paragraph is based on information obtained from General Gauché's personal dossier: SHAT, 1280^G/4, État de Services du Général Maurice Gauché. Access to this dossier is restricted. See also AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP/38, dr. 3, Riom déposition of Bernard Norest. Norest was a member of Daladier's military cabinet. There are also scattered references to Gauché's career in Carré, 'Les Attachés militaires', 155–8.

² SHAT, 1280^G/4, État de Services du Général Maurice Gauché.

³ PRO, FO 371, 21668, C8975/65/18. See also the view of the British ambassador to

In June 1936 the leadership of the SR passed from Colonel Roux to Lt. Colonel Louis Rivet.⁴ Rivet had been with the secret service since 1919 and had also been a member of the illustrious Weygand mission to Warsaw. After the defeat of the Soviets he remained as second in command of the French military mission in Warsaw until it was withdrawn in 1926. Rivet then was placed in charge of the SR station at Belfort, the largest and most important of France's intelligence posts. In June of 1935 he moved to Paris to become deputy-chief of the SR before succeeding Roux. For the next five years Rivet directed French secret intelligence, earning the respect of his superiors and the lasting devotion of his subordinates. During this period the offices of the SR on the Avenue de Tourville became the 'Maison Rivet' and the daily entries in Rivet's diary constitute a precious source on the activities of French secret intelligence before the Second World War.⁵

Finally, if the events of March 1935 did not surprise the intelligence services, they did introduce a new phase in assessment of the German threat. The end of the clandestine phase of German rearmament brought a fundamental change in Nazi foreign policy. From late 1935 onward the armed forces were to serve as a tool of intimidation that, when combined with a foreign policy that paid lip service to disarmament and conciliation, would allow the regime to proceed with rearmament and territorial expansion without fear of foreign intervention. The upshot was that, after years of attempting to conceal the extent of rearmament, a sustained policy of deception was mounted which aimed at creating an exaggerated view of the power of the Wehrmacht in the eyes of foreign observers.⁶ This development produced important changes in the day to day operations of the army Deuxième Bureau. The 'plan de renseignements' formulated the following August stipulated that French intelligence had moved on to a 'war footing'. The operating assumption from this point forward was that

Paris, Sir Eric Phipps in the Churchill College Archives, Cambridge, Sir Eric Phipps Papers, 1/16 and Strong, *Men of Intelligence*, 36–7. For the opinion of the chief of Czechoslovak intelligence, see František Moravec, *Master of Spies* (London, 1975), 37.

⁴ SHAT, G^x, 4/1345, 'État de Services du Général Pierre Louis Rivet'.

⁵ Paillolle interview—14 Mar. 1993. For more on Rivet, see Paillolle's memoirs, *Services spéciaux and Notre espion*; Navarre, *Service de renseignements*; and Krop, *Secrets de l'espionnage français*, 388–9.

⁶ Whaley, 'Covert Rearmament in Germany', 20–3 and M. Mihalka, 'German Strategic Deception in the 1930s', Rand Corporation Note, N-1557-NA (Santa Monica, Calif., 1980). See also Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, 207–25; Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy and Preparations for War', 594–604; and Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', in *GSWW*, i/2, 421–2 and 480–93.

'war could break out with short notice' and that 'efforts to follow all military activity in Germany must take absolute priority'. New measures were introduced for monitoring troop movements and other military measures 'during periods of political tension' and the size of the Section Allemande was increased from seven officers to ten.⁷ Army intelligence was girding up for the war that had been anticipated since the guns had fallen silent in 1918.

II

French intelligence continued to overestimate German military capabilities through 1936. The major difficulty was never in estimating the size of the regular army and air force. Throughout the 1930s the army and air force Deuxième Bureaux continued to produce accurate breakdowns of the German order of battle. Nor is the entire record of French intelligence in this regard a litany of failure. French observers recognized that the rapid expansion after the spring of 1935 had left the German army critically short of experienced officers. They also perceived that great emphasis was being given to mechanizing large segments of the active army and that this would translate into a military doctrine that emphasized speed and mobility. But the rapid acceleration of the German rearmament, combined with the security measures imposed by the Nazi regime, made the task of evaluating German power ever more difficult. The intelligence services failed to identify the serious deficiencies in *matériel* at every level which made the mobilization of a large field army and a powerful air force all but impossible for the Wehrmacht in the mid-1930s.

The principal difficulty remained the paucity of reliable information about the rate of German weapons production. Neither the SGDN nor the Deuxième Bureau were able to provide the ministry of war with precise estimates of defence spending and armaments production in Germany. Gauché lamented that '[i]nformation relative to the volume of armaments production and to existing stocks of *matériel* is only fragmentary and does not permit an accurate evaluation of the industry as a whole'.⁸ The political directorate at the foreign ministry

⁷ SHAT, 7N 2530-2, 'Plan de renseignements et plan de recherches établi par le 2e Bureau pour le Plan D^{bis}', 28 Aug. 1935. See also the summary, 'Réunion des chefs de poste (janvier 1937)', in SHAT, ARR, dr. 236, 4 Feb. 1937.

⁸ SHAT, 7N 2643-3, 'Les Dépenses d'armement du Reich', 17 Sept. 1936.

complained about the unavailability of accurate estimates of armaments production.⁹ The only certainty in intelligence reports was that the scale of production was constantly being expanded as Germany moved towards industrial mobilization. But the relationship between this production and the outfitting of new formations was consistently vague.¹⁰ Assessments therefore continued to be based on the 'worst case' assumption that the armaments industry was able to meet the needs of the ever-expanding active army: 'given the present rhythm of production, the question of material does not seem to constitute a difficulty for the mobilization of the field army'.¹¹ This error remained the critical flaw in French assessments of German military effectiveness through to 1939.

The conviction that the Luftwaffe was the favoured service within the Wehrmacht remained a constant assumption in estimations of German air power. By 1936, in addition to his functions as air minister and Commander and Chief of the air force, Göring also controlled German economic policy. As minister responsible for raw materials and subsequently for the Four Year Plan, Göring bore ultimate responsibility for mobilizing the German economy to support the Nazi policy of unlimited rearmament. Poincaré's replacement, air force Colonel Hubert-Marie-Joseph de Geffrier, considered that Göring was the 'most powerful military figure in the Reich', whose 'position as second in command of the Party and constant relations with Hitler permit him to exercise a preponderant personal influence on the decisions of the Führer'.¹² This influence, combined with Göring's status as 'Economic Dictator', appeared to guarantee the Luftwaffe 'unlimited financial, matériel and human resources'.¹³ It was this conviction, rather than Göring's boasting, which underpinned the tendency to exaggerate German air strength before 1939.

Using newspapers, telephone manuals, and, most importantly, the aeroplane placed at their disposal by the German air ministry, de Geffrier and Stehlin in Berlin, with the aid of embassy secretary Roger Wassmer, were able to track the establishment and deployment of new

⁹ MAÉ, Papiers Massigli, vol. 10, 'Réarmement en Europe', 3 Nov. 1936.

¹⁰ See, among a host of discussions of this problem, 7N 2676, 'Note sur l'armement dans l'armée et considérations sur la mobilisation industrielle', 20 Apr. 1936; *ibid.*, 'Conférence sur le matériel dans l'armée allemande', Apr. 1936; and 7N 2680-2, *BdRs*, Mar.-Apr. 1937.

¹¹ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Note sur l'armement dans l'armée allemande', 20 Apr. 1936.

¹² SHAT, 7N 2601, de Geffrier to Paris, 14 Feb. 1938.

¹³ SHAT, 5N 579-2, air intelligence study on the Luftwaffe communicated to Winston Churchill by Premier Daladier on 11 May 1938.

Luftwaffe squadrons in considerable detail. Attaché reports were far and away the most important source for the Deuxième Bureau in Paris. Calculations of Luftwaffe first-line strength were made on the basis of twelve planes per squadron (nine regular and three immediately available reserve aircraft). After 1937 estimates were based on the assumption that another two to three aircraft per squadron existed in reserve depots throughout Germany. In addition, rough estimates were sometimes made of the size of the general reserve—which consisted of outdated planes considered incapable of participating in any offensive action.¹⁴ The Deuxième Bureau compiled remarkably accurate and detailed orders of battle for the German air force which provided the location and type of each squadron.

There were inherent difficulties, however, in any attempt to ascertain the composition of the Luftwaffe. The above method of estimating German first-line strength was defective because the Luftwaffe was activating new squadrons faster than the aircraft industry could supply them. This meant that, right up to the autumn of 1938, many of the aircraft in service in new squadrons were obsolescent Heinkel and Arado bi-plane fighters and Junker Ju.52 bombers.¹⁵ Because access to individual airfields was forbidden foreign observers, de Geffrier and Stehlin were unable to evaluate the combat readiness of individual units. Their reports failed to discern which squadrons were serviceable and which were skeleton units awaiting adequate trained personnel and *matériel*. Added to this were the more familiar difficulties inherent in determining what proportion of the aircraft in service were combat planes and what proportion were training aircraft. Once again, when faced with a dearth of precise data, French analysts adopted a worst case approach to assessment. Through to the outbreak of war, air intelligence reports consistently exaggerated both the number of serviceable aircraft and the proportion of modern aircraft in the German order of battle. While air intelligence estimates appear relatively detailed and precise, they were in reality very rough estimates which were to prove unreliable at crucial stages.

Part of the problem was that the rather crude approach employed by air intelligence for calculating production was further compromised by the design structure of the Reich's aircraft industry. After the break-neck increases in levels of production in 1934–5, the rate of aircraft

¹⁴ SHAA, 2B 58, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1937. See also Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 45–51, 95.

¹⁵ Overy, 'German Air Strength', 469–70.

manufacturing levelled off in 1936 and remained fairly constant at approximately 5,000–5,500 machines per year through 1938. After 1936 German industrial mobilization schemes were based on the over-capacity of the aero industry. Hence plant capacity and production tooling was designed to far exceed the peacetime availability of labour and raw materials. The labour force would be expanded upon the declaration of war. The German aircraft industry did not approach maximum production until well into 1943.¹⁶ French officials recognized this. One appreciation noted that the most striking feature of this industry was ‘the the abundance of machine tools’ and concluded that ‘even in the busiest factories the cadence of production corresponds only to one half of total productive capacity’.¹⁷ The real difficulty lay in determining to what extent raw material shortages would limit production. Here the assumption that Göring was able to provide the aircraft industry with whatever resources it required, combined with a growing sense of French inferiority in the air, led to serious miscalculations in rates of production in 1938 and 1939.

Air intelligence was much more effective in its evaluations of the quality of Luftwaffe personnel. From the outset, intelligence appreciations of the combat worthiness of the Luftwaffe stressed that its most glaring deficiency was a lack of trained pilots and air crew. The Versailles restrictions forbidding Germany from possessing an air force had reduced the air general staff to a clandestine and embryonic unit within the Reichswehr troops department. As a result the new air force was chronically short of officers and trained air crew. In order to keep track of the number of officers entering the air force, the Deuxième Bureau monitored the activity of the Luftwaffe training academies established in Germany from 1935 onward. Intelligence on the size and curriculum of these academies permitted an analysis of both the quantity of officers in training and quality of the instruction they were receiving.¹⁸ It was estimated that five such institutions were producing 750 officers per year in 1937 and 1938. These efforts to recruit and train personnel left French observers unimpressed. The lack of trained personnel, which was directly related to the frenetic growth of the air force,

¹⁶ On production levels, see Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe*, 157–8, 222–6. On the structure of the German aircraft industry, see the *United States Strategic Bombing Survey*, Report no. 3, 6 and Overy, *Goering*, 139–63.

¹⁷ SHAA, 2B 58, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1937.

¹⁸ The first of these was forwarded by Poincaré to Paris on 23 Apr. 1936: SHAT, 7N 2597, 23 Apr. 1936.

was a weakness that air intelligence reports would underline repeatedly in the years to come. Through to the outbreak of war the quality of instruction was judged to be incomplete at every level within the Luftwaffe and the quality of German air crew was, on the whole, still considered to be of a 'very deficient calibre'.¹⁹ This was an accurate assessment of the personnel difficulties of the Luftwaffe. Between March 1935 and the outbreak of war the size of the Luftwaffe officer corps increased thirteenfold. The effect of this rapid expansion was to compromise fundamentally the quality of air force personnel. According to one prominent historian of the rearmament of the Wehrmacht, a lack of experience and training deprived its officer corps of 'the coherence necessary for the performance of its military functions'.²⁰

Another important factor in miscalculations of German military effectiveness was the dismal state of both the French army and air force in terms of both material and morale. The cumulative effects of the spending cuts between 1932 and 1935 had left the French army desperately short of modern equipment. For example, it could count a mere 34 tanks of recent vintage and was even more critically lacking in anti-tank weaponry.²¹ To make matters worse, the French armaments industry was demonstrating itself incapable of handling even the meagre orders for equipment placed by the military in 1934 and 1935. Backlogs in production forced the military to push back its timetable for outfitting the army with new light tanks by nearly two years.²² The training of personnel in the use of modern equipment had suffered commensurately as the lack of both material and funds had forced the cancellation of large-scale field manoeuvres in 1935.²³ The German army, with its perceived emphasis on mechanization and motorization, looked all the more powerful against the backdrop of France's military weakness.

The Armée de l'Air was in a similar situation. By the spring of 1936 it was clear that the rearmament Plan I was an abject failure. The metropolitan air force possessed a first-line strength of 1,100 increasingly

¹⁹ Cited from SHAA, 2B 61, 'L'Armée de l'air allemande: January 1939'. See also 2B 57, *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1935 and 1er and 2ème trimestres 1936.

²⁰ Deist, 'Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', in *GSWW*, i/2, 486-7.

²¹ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 71-4, 311; Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 141-2 and 153-4; Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 56-79; and S. Schuker, 'France and the Remilitarisation of the Rhineland, 1936', *FHS* 14 (1986), 320.

²² Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, esp. 67-8.

²³ The above taken from Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 254-5 and Schuker, 'France and the Remilitarisation of the Rhineland', 321-2.

outdated aircraft. And prospects for the future were grim. The aircraft industry was in a state of disarray and remained unable to cope with the orders placed under the auspices of Plan I. Just as ominously, the BCR having proved a major disappointment, there was an acute shortage of modern prototypes ready to be mass produced. The annual report on the French air force prepared by the British air ministry judged that the aircraft in production in France were 'well behind the design of both Germany and Great Britain' and added that 'for some years to come [the French aircraft industry] will not be in a position to re-equip the French air force with really satisfactory types of aircraft'. The ramifications of Denain's mismanagement of French air policy were becoming all too apparent as France entered the crises of the late 1930s.²⁴

III

The strengths and weaknesses of the French system of intelligence gathering and analysis both surfaced when Germany remilitarized the Rhineland. At the level of analysis the *Deuxième Bureau* predicted the timing of the German coup with startling accuracy but significantly overestimated the capabilities of the German army. Higher up the policy making ladder, intelligence was misrepresented by Gamelin and minister of war General Louis Maurin in order to dissuade the French government from what Gamelin termed a 'madcap solution'. The end result was that civilian decision makers responsible for the instigation of war or peace were presented with a badly distorted view of the military situation.

The *Deuxième Bureau* provided ample notice of the move against the demilitarized zone. In fact, it was so accurate in providing advance warning that the most exhaustive history of German foreign policy during this period has made extensive use of published French documents predicting an imminent reoccupation.²⁵ On a general level the Rhineland coup came as no surprise to anyone. The general staff and

²⁴ PRO, FO 371, 18800, C6985/227/17, 'The French Air Force: Present Position in Regard to Expansion and Re-equipment', CID, Oct. 1935. On the state of the air force, see C. Christienne and P. Buffotot, 'L'Armée de l'Air française et la crise du 7 mars 1936', in *La France et l'Allemagne, 1932-1936* (Paris, 1980), 326-7 and Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 263-6.

²⁵ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, 239-63. On German policy, see also Z. Shore, 'Hitler, Intelligence and the Decision to Remilitarize the Rhine', *JCH* 34, 1 (1999), 5-18.

the Quai d'Orsay had been anticipating a German remilitarization since the early 1930s.²⁶ Intelligence rumours of an imminent reoccupation began to intensify in late 1935. Renondeau's reports at this stage were very perceptive. In June of 1935 he noted that the Rhineland constituted the major grievance of the army. He predicted that Hitler would wait 'until our international position is weakened and until he finds a favourable pretext'. He added that 'this may be a matter of months or a matter of years—but the question will be posed'.²⁷ When the invasion of Abyssinia forced France to choose between Italian and British goodwill in late 1935 he speculated that Hitler would take advantage of the disarray of the Stresa Front to move in the Rhineland. He also predicted correctly that the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact would be used as a pretext for remilitarization.²⁸

More precise information began to arrive in the weeks preceding the German coup. On 19 February an SR double agent reported that his German controller had predicted a period of 'extreme tension' and requested any information about French mobilization measures during the first two weeks of March.²⁹ On 2 March, the day that the military directive for the operation was issued in Berlin, the Deuxième Bureau advised the high command, the war ministry, and the foreign ministry, that France would be presented with a *fait accompli* in the demilitarized zone soon after the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact in the Chamber. The report in question judged that German forces could not be compelled to leave the zone without a fight. The Deuxième Bureau was right on both counts.³⁰

Assessments of the strength and effectiveness of the German army were not as astute. In February of 1936 army intelligence estimated that the German army comprised twenty-four infantry divisions, three

²⁶ See, among many others, SHAT, 7N 2520–4, 'Note au sujet de la zone rhénane demilitarisée', 31 July 1935; Schuker, 'France and the Remilitarisation of the Rhineland', 299–338; and Jordan, *Popular Front and Central Europe*, 56–65.

²⁷ SHAT, 7N 2596, Renondeau to Paris, 19 June 1935.

²⁸ SHAT, 7N 2596, Renondeau to Paris, 10 Dec. 1935.

²⁹ SHAT, ARR, 1106, dr. 722, 'Note', 26 Feb. 1936 and ARR, 502, dr. 236, 'L'Activité du poste au cours de l'année 1936', 8 Jan. 1937.

³⁰ SHAT, 7N 2512, 2 Mar. 1936. See also *DDF*, 2ème série, i, nos. 175, 180, 188, 200, 242, 287, 288, and 320; Gamelin's written deposition for the Riom Trial entitled 'La Politique étrangère de la France 1930–1939, au point de vue militaire', which is in *Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques* (cited hereafter as *FNSP*), Archives Léon Blum, 3 BL 3, dr. 1; and Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau*, 41–5. For the precise timing of Hitler's decision, see Shore, 'Hitler', 16–17. On German plans to stand and fight in the demilitarised zone, see D. C. Watt, 'German Plans for the Reoccupation of the Rhineland: A Note', *JCH* 1 (1966), 193–9.

armoured divisions, two cavalry divisions, and an alpine brigade—over 500,000 soldiers in all. To these forces the Deuxième Bureau added 30,000 Schutzpolizei (militarized police) inside the demilitarized zone, 40,000 members of the SS, and 200,000 men serving in the Arbeitsdienst (National Labour Service).³¹ German armour was not considered a grave threat at this stage. Only one of the three tank divisions created had been completely outfitted and the lone tank in service in the German army was a five-ton light tank considered by French observers to be little more than an armoured car. The same appreciation stressed that the German army, still in the throes of a expansion and reorganization, was critically short of trained officers. Nor were reservist divisions expected to play a significant role in the event of hostilities. The training of the Ersatzreserven remained in its preliminary stages.³² This assessment was accurate regarding the regular army. And the inclusion of the militarized police and the SS as mobilizable military units was justified. But the assumption that National Labour Service constituted a military force, and that equipment existed to arm these men for a modern war, was entirely wrong.³³ This mistake was not an intentional exaggeration but was rather a product of the healthy respect the intelligence community bore the German military tradition.

Purposeful distortion did occur, however, when this intelligence was passed on from military officials to civilian decision makers. In fact, the exaggeration of German strength began weeks before the remilitarization even took place. A note warning of an imminent German move into the Rhineland prepared for the HCM by Gamelin's staff communicated the above figures but made no mention whatsoever of the organizational and material inadequacies outlined in the Deuxième Bureau assessment.³⁴ In meetings with civil and defence leaders after the coup, Gamelin advised that a French military advance into the Rhineland would require full mobilization and result in a war of attrition. He further predicted that Germany could mobilize 120 divisions against France. While he admitted that German training and equipment were not yet up to standard, Gamelin also emphasized that, in

³¹ SHAT, 7N 2506, *BdR*, Jan.–Feb. 1936.

³² See also Castellan, *Le Réarmement clandestin*, 93, 116, 135–6.

³³ B. Mueller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer 1933–1945: Entwicklung des organisatorischen Aufbaus* (Darmstadt, 1954), i. 24–5.

³⁴ SHAT, 2N 19–3, 'Note pour le Haut Comité Militaire', 28 Jan. 1936. See also J. Defrasne, 'L'Événement de 7 mars 1936', in *Les Relations franco-allemands, 1933–1939* (Paris, 1976), 247–76.

the long war that would inevitably follow any French military riposte, Germany would enjoy several decisive advantages. He warned that the Reich possessed 'a war potential that is far superior to ours' and that its defence industry was 'entirely mobilized'.³⁵ All of this was a crude exaggeration of intelligence estimates. The picture was further distorted by war minister Maurin who, in conversations with his cabinet colleagues, arbitrarily grouped Schutzpolizei, SS, and Arbeitsdienst contingents into a homogeneous force of fifteen divisions and estimated that Germany would soon have over one million regular soldiers.³⁶ There were no grounds for either assumption.

These deliberate misrepresentations of the situation are yet another example of political interference in the intelligence process. Once again, the general staff, which controlled the search for secret intelligence on the German army, distorted intelligence to serve its own agenda. Gamelin and Maurin manipulated information in order to justify the army's opposition to any offensive into western Germany and, equally importantly, to apply pressure on civilian leaders to increase defence expenditures. The military had long since ruled out operations in the Rhineland and viewed its remilitarization as a sort of absolution for this policy. Months in advance of the reoccupation Gamelin had informed the HCM that once the Rhineland was remilitarized, occupied, and fortified, Germany would be 'free from any fear of an offensive from us' and hence 'completely at liberty to settle the fate of the Little Entente powers'.³⁷ Hence a warlike response to Hitler's *fait accompli* was out of the question. The army was in the difficult position of having to avoid giving the impression that it was not ready while at the same time cautioning civilian leaders of the risks involved in rash solutions.³⁸

Another motive for exaggerating German military potential was the familiar desire to drive home the precariousness of France's military situation and the need for massive increases in defence spending.

³⁵ DDF, 2ème série, i, no. 334, 'Compte-rendu: réunion chez le général Gamelin', 8 Mar. 1936; 2ème série, ii, no. 23, 'Réunion à la Présidence du Conseil', 5 Apr. 1936; Young, *In Command of France*, 119–22; and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 166–8. For Gamelin's account of the 'crisis', see *Servir*, ii, 202–16.

³⁶ DDF, 2ème série, i, no. 392, 'Note de l'État-Major de l'armée', 11 Mar. 1936 and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 259.

³⁷ DDF, 2ème série, i, no. 83, 'Compte-rendu de séance du Haut Comité Militaire', 18 Jan. 1936.

³⁸ AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, 'Rapports', 10 Mar. and 4 Apr. 1936. See also Schuker, 'France and the Remilitarisation of the Rhineland', 327–9 and J. T. Emmerson, *The Rhineland Crisis, 7 March 1936: A Study in Multilateral Diplomacy* (London, 1977), 104–17.

Significantly, the note communicated to the HCM cited above was accompanied by requests for an 800 million franc increase in the military outlay for 1936 (doubling the projected expenditure on rearmament for that year).³⁹ The priority for the French military in early 1936 was to use the consternation generated by the anticipated German reoccupation to impress on civilian leaders the need for a large-scale rearmament programme which would permit France to confront Germany from a position of strength.⁴⁰ Gamelin maximized this opportunity by exaggerating the power of the German army.

There are striking parallels between the way in which army and air intelligence was used in the period following the German reoccupation. In early 1936 the air force *Deuxième Bureau* provided air Chief of Staff General Bernard Pujos with an accurate picture of the state of the recently created *Luftwaffe* and the potential for expansion of German air power. In communications with his superiors Pujos, like Gamelin and Maurin in the case of the German army, exaggerated the German air menace and insisted that no action could be undertaken without the full mobilization of the French air force.

After the *Luftwaffe*'s existence was proclaimed publicly the following March, the *Deuxième Bureau* had estimated that the newly constituted force already comprised nearly 1,000 aircraft.⁴¹ Citing a 'most reliable' source, Poincaré reported that military aviation consumed twice as much fuel as *Lufthansa* during the first half of 1935.⁴² In early 1936 air intelligence indicated that the *Luftwaffe* comprised forty-nine squadrons and 750 first-line planes. It added that an additional nine squadrons would be constituted by the following June.⁴³ The quality of this *matériel* was considered second rate. The engines of German military aircraft were judged 'notoriously inferior to recent foreign designs'.⁴⁴ Intelligence reports made clear, however, that the situation for the future was grim. Information provided on the expansion of the

³⁹ SHAT, 2N 19-3, 'Note pour le Haut Comité Militaire', 28 Jan. 1936.

⁴⁰ See e.g. General Schweisguth's record of Gamelin's views expressed to a meeting of the French High Command in AN, *Papiers Schweisguth*, 351 AP 3, 'Memento', 15 Jan. 1936. See also a note prepared by Army Chief of Staff General Louis Colson which stressed the importance of using the threat to the Rhineland as leverage to obtain massive increases in defence spending and closer military ties with Britain in SHAT, 1N 36-3, 24 Jan. 1936.

⁴¹ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1937.

⁴² SHAT, 7N 2596, 'Consommation d'essence en Allemagne, nombre d'appareils, nombre de pilotes', 23 July 1935.

⁴³ SHAA, 2B 58, *BdR*, 1er trimestre 1936. See also Christienne and Buffotot, 'L'Armée de l'Air française', 326-7 and Buffotot, 'Le Réarmement aérien allemand', 276-8.

⁴⁴ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1935.

aircraft industry indicated that around 250 aeroplanes, 80 per cent of which were military aircraft, were being produced each month in Germany. It was estimated that upon mobilization this industry was capable of manufacturing 600–700 warplanes per month.⁴⁵ The Deuxième Bureau warned the general staff and air minister in late 1935 that '[t]he effort devoted to increasing industrial capacity and the construction of new airfields and aerodromes in Germany demonstrates clearly that the Reich intends to construct the most powerful air force in Europe'.⁴⁶

This proved to be an fairly accurate picture of the state of German air power. In March of 1936 the Luftwaffe counted eighty squadrons and nearly 900 aircraft but was incapable of mounting effective operations of any kind against France.⁴⁷ The figure provided for aircraft production was essentially accurate, although it is doubtful that the German aeronautical industry could have expanded its production to 700 planes per month in wartime.⁴⁸ The key error made in this assessment, however, was the assumption that 80 per cent of planes produced in Germany were military aircraft. In fact, through 1938 over 60 per cent of all aircraft produced in Germany were non-combat machines destined for civilian aviation or for training schools.⁴⁹ These errors notwithstanding, air intelligence fulfilled its responsibilities at this juncture: French air intelligence provided decision makers with reasonably accurate information on both the state of the Luftwaffe and of the future threat which German productive capability could pose to French security.

The influence of this intelligence on decision making during the Rhineland 'crisis' was no greater than the assessments provided by the army Deuxième Bureau. Despite outward appearances, in fact, the use of intelligence by General Pujo and the air high command was very similar to the way Generals Gamelin and Maurin used military intelligence. In studies done before the German remilitarization, the air force general staff framed a far more energetic proposal for a riposte than its army counterpart. At a meeting of the HCM on 5 April 1935, for example, the air force had envisaged engaging half of its bombing force in

⁴⁵ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdRs*, 1er and 2ème trimestres 1936.

⁴⁶ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 3ème trimestre 1935.

⁴⁷ K. H. Völker, *Die Deutsche Luftwaffe* (Stuttgart, 1967), 197–8.

⁴⁸ Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe*, 144–5, 159, 231 (figure cited from p. 231). See also R. Wagenführ, *Die deutsche Industrie im Krieg 1939–1945* (Berlin, 1963), 74 and Deist, 'The Re-armament of the Wehrmacht', in *GSWW*, i/2, 498–9.

⁴⁹ Overy, 'German Air Strength', 466–7.

major operations against the Rhineland and the Ruhr industrial basin ten hours after the treaty of Locarno was violated.⁵⁰ The following March, however, the position of the air force was much different. The air staff warned that any operation mounted against Germany would provoke a significant German response and estimated that the Luftwaffe could send 400 bombers against Paris and Lyon.⁵¹ In a meeting with Premier Albert Sarraut, Pujo stressed the vulnerability of Paris and advised that no action could be undertaken without the total mobilization of the air force.⁵² This was a considerable distortion of the image of German air power provided by the Deuxième Bureau. It appears that the air force high command, like the army, was already looking ahead. When the Chiefs of Staff met on 4 April to discuss the Franco-German military balance Pujo noted that France possessed 'a temporary superiority in the air' but stressed that recent intelligence on German aircraft production was 'very alarming'.⁵³ Like Gamelin, Pujo warned of the consequences of German industrial superiority in a long war to Sarraut and the rest of the cabinet.⁵⁴ Such advice was hardly a ringing endorsement of a policy of firmness.

Perceptions of the naval situation were also an important factor in French policy at this juncture. The Marine leadership adopted a cautious attitude.⁵⁵ Although there was no purposeful distortion of the German naval threat, Marine officials certainly emphasized the negative aspects of the strategic situation. In early March 1936 naval intelligence produced a study of German maritime power. It reported that the Kriegsmarine comprised two pocket battleships, one older capital ship, four light cruisers, twelve light destroyers, and six small submarines unable to operate on the high seas. In addition, however, another pocket battleship and twelve submarines were about to be commissioned for service. This fleet was clearly no match for a French navy that consisted of three fully renovated battleships, one aircraft carrier, seven heavy cruisers, four medium cruisers, twenty-five excellent destroyers, and

⁵⁰ SHAT, 2N 19, État-Major de l'Armée de l'Air [ÉMAA] to HCM, 19 Apr. 1935.

⁵¹ SHAA, 2B 3, 'Note sur la répercussion aérienne d'une opération militaire terrestre à objectif limité', 11 Mar. 1936.

⁵² Christienne and Buffotot, 'L'Armée de l'Air française', 328-9; Gamelin, *Servir*, ii. 206-7; and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 174-5.

⁵³ AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, dr. 2, 'Memento', 4 Apr. 1936.

⁵⁴ Christienne and Buffotot, 'L'Armée de l'Air française', 329-30 and Gamelin, *Servir*, ii. 201.

⁵⁵ Two informative accounts are P. Masson, 'La Marine française et la crise de mars 1936', in *La France et l'Allemagne, 1932-1936*, 333-7 and Perrett, 'French Naval Policy', 254-79.

fifty submarines. But the German pocket battleships possessed advantages in important categories over their French counterparts. They were faster than the older *Lorraine* class battleships and more heavily armed than French heavy cruisers. Indeed the Marine would not possess an adequate response to this threat until the arrival of the *Dunkerque* later that year and the *Strasbourg* in 1937.⁵⁶ Moreover, the international situation dictated that Italy must be counted a potential enemy. As a result of Italian aggression in eastern Africa, the French naval staff had reluctantly entered into planning for joint operations with the Royal Navy against Italy in the Mediterranean. The Italian navy, which was deployed exclusively in the Mediterranean, was far more formidable, enjoying a quantitative superiority over the French fleet in terms of light cruisers and submarines and rough parity in terms of capital ships.⁵⁷ Moreover, in the event of war, Italian submarines would threaten all communications with French North Africa.

In consultations with the Sarraut government in the aftermath of the reoccupation, Marine officials counselled against any unilateral action and were pessimistic about the prospects of combined naval operations. The cabinet inquired as to the possibility of 'coercing' Germany to reverse its policy though naval sanctions that might include seizure of German shipping or even the occupation of Helgoland in the North Sea. The naval staff rejected the latter suggestion out of hand and warned that seizing German merchant ships would result in war.⁵⁸ Piétri reinforced this judgement by declaring that the navy was ready to act against Germany, but he warned that this would require the full mobilization of the fleet. The rue Royale also emphasized that France could expect no help from Great Britain as the British home and Mediterranean fleets were concentrated against the Italian navy.⁵⁹ The British were utterly opposed to military sanctions in any case. Decoux observed bitterly from London that '[t]he British cabinet wishes, above all, to appease Germany, despite us and even against us if necessary'.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ SHM, 1BB2 94, 'Activité de la flotte allemande', 1 Mar. 1936. Figures for the French fleet from Masson, 'La Marine française et la crise de 1936', 334.

⁵⁷ SHM, 1BB2 95, 'Tableaux comparatifs des marines principales', Jan. 1936.

⁵⁸ SHM, 1BB2 182, 'Mémento des mesures de coercion maritime possibles en cas de sanctions militaires contre l'Allemagne', 12 Mar. 1936; *DDF*, 2ème série, 1, no. 390, Flandin to Piétri, 11 Mar. 1936; no. 391, Durand-Viel to Admiral Robert (French staff representative in London), 11 Mar. 1936; and Masson, 'La Marine française et la crise de 1936', 336-7.

⁵⁹ SHM, 1BB2 91, *BdR*, 4-17 Mar. 1936; 1BB2 182, 'Mémento des mesures de coercion . . .', 12 Mar. 1936; *DDF*, 2ème série, 1, no. 406, Piétri to Sarraut, 12 Mar. 1936.

⁶⁰ SHM, 1BB2 195-3, Decoux to Admiral Abrial, 19 Mar. 1936.

In sum, Marine officials opposed any attempt to use 'gunboat diplomacy' to change German policy in the Rhineland. To discourage the civilian leadership from embarking on such an 'adventure', the naval staff played down the clear superiority France retained over Germany at sea. It emphasized instead the danger that naval sanctions would be the start of a general war and the fact that France could not count on British support. This position was therefore little different from the advice given the government by the army and air force high commands.

It is difficult to disagree with historians who have argued that the German reoccupation of the Rhineland was not so much a crisis as an event long anticipated.⁶¹ A more accurate assessment of the military situation would not have changed the French response. Military officials based their advice on projections of the future dimensions of German power, rather than the reports they received from their intelligence services. Moreover, in the deliberations which took place in Paris after 7 March, intelligence on the German army was less important than an acute awareness of the limitations of French power. With the country embarking upon the most bitter and divisive election campaign of the inter-war period, the franc on the verge of collapse and the certainty of virtual diplomatic isolation, there was never any real prospect that France would mobilize and invade Germany. Reinforcing all of these considerations was the memory of the strains which the occupation of the Ruhr had placed on the French economy during the mid-1920s and the approbation which this policy had earned for France both in London and in Washington. The unfounded amplification of German military power by the war and air ministries, therefore, served only to reaffirm the conviction, shared by the Quai d'Orsay and the ministry of finance, that France at this juncture could not act on its own.

⁶¹ Young, *In Command of France*, 120–5; Schuker, 'France and the Remilitarisation of the Rhineland', 337–8; and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 75–7. See also R. Davis, 'Le Débat sur l' "apaisement" britannique et français dans les années 1930: Les Crises d'Éthiopie et de Rhénanie', *RHMC* 45 (1998), 822–36.

Intelligence and the Rearmament Programmes of 1936

THE AFTERMATH of the Rhineland brought major changes to French policy towards Germany. In May 1936 France elected its first socialist government. Predictably, the regime of new Premier Léon Blum was more suspicious of Germany than the Laval government had been. Just as significantly, it was also less committed to financial austerity than any French government since 1936. This conjunction was a favourable one for the defence budget and therefore gave added importance to intelligence assessments of German military power. Intelligence was central to the formulation of the ambitious land and air rearmament programmes adopted by the Popular Front government in late 1936. At the same time, however, the familiar flaws in the assessment process continued to distort perceptions of the threat from across the Rhine. Although the Deuxième Bureaux continued to provide fairly accurate assessments of Hitler's long-term intentions, their effectiveness in evaluating German military power declined further as the image of German power provided to decision makers was increasingly exaggerated. Moreover, the politicization of intelligence by military and civilian officials continued to hamper the policy making process as decision makers persisted in seeking justification for predetermined policies in intelligence reports.

I

The parliamentary elections of May 1936 brought to power the Popular Front coalition of Socialists, Radicals, and Communists under the leadership of Léon Blum. Blum remains an icon in the history of French socialism. His politics were those of the left, but of the tolerant and liberal variety, more humanist than doctrinaire. And his perspective

on international politics was an unlikely marriage of the revolutionary patriotism of 1792 with Marxist internationalism.¹ The inherent contradictions in this world-view led more often to indecision than resolve in the formulation of foreign policy. Blum played an active role in the making of external policy during his premiership. He took no portfolio but maintained a close working relationship with his foreign minister Yvon Delbos—a reliable and hard-working official from the centre of the Radical Party. Although Blum had been a prominent proponent of both pacifism and disarmament through the first half of the 1930s, he entered office in 1936 convinced of the necessity for France to rearm in order to negotiate with the Fascist leadership of Germany from a position of strength.² The service ministry posts in the Popular Front government went to Édouard Daladier, Pierre Cot, and Alphonse Gasnier Duparc—all Radicals committed to rearmament. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Blum's foreign policy was based on the assumption of irreconcilable Franco-German enmity. In fact, the first policy initiative of the Popular Front government was to extend an offer of talks to Berlin which culminated in a visit to Paris by finance minister Hjalmar Schacht. France would rearm, but the goal of this rearmament was deterrence rather than deadly serious preparation for war.

In the summer of 1936 domestic politics wrought a transformation in attitudes towards foreign and defence policy across the left–right divide. When Blum's government came to power, it was met by a wave of paralysing strikes and the country was plunged into the most intense period of social unrest since the days of the Paris Commune. Parallels were drawn with events in Spain and much of the right began to fear imminent revolution in France. This fear of Bolshevism competed with the traditional anti-Germanism of the right. Some elements of right-wing opinion, including former Premiers Flandin and Laval, openly favoured a full partnership with Italy and an understanding with Germany as a means of containing the spread of communism. To further complicate the French response to Hitler, anti-Fascism had generated

¹ J. Joll, *Intellectuals in Politics* (London, 1960), 20–7; *id.*, 'The Front Populaire after Thirty Years', in W. Laqueur and G. Mosse (eds.), *The Left-Wing Intellectuals between the Wars: 1919–1939* (New York, 1966), 27–42; and esp. J. Colton, *Léon Blum: Humanist in Politics* (New York, 1966).

² Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 297, 300; J. Dreifort, *Yvon Delbos at the Quai d'Orsay: French Foreign Policy during the Popular Front* (Lawrence, Kan., 1973), 21–32 and Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, 97–8.

extensive support for defence expenditure from the traditionally pacifist left. By mid-1935 increased spending on national defence had become an official plank in the SFIO party platform. At the same time, the PCF, responding to instructions from Moscow, completely reversed its policy and began voting for military spending in the Chamber. Nor was the Blum government handicapped by its predecessor's fixation with preserving the value of the franc. The result would be the ambitious rearmament programme undertaken by the Popular Front government after 1936.³

Édouard Daladier's second term of service at the ministry of war differed markedly from his first. It was Daladier's willingness, as leader of the Radicals, to cooperate with the Communist Party which had made the Popular Front coalition possible.⁴ The decision to assign Daladier the newly created ministry of war and national defence was fortuitous. Although he had been the central political figure involved in the intense dispute with Weygand over effectives, Daladier came to the defence ministry committed to rearmament. His military record and determination to restore French military power eventually earned the respect of the officer corps, a respect which was further reinforced by mounting criticisms from the left that the defence minister was more concerned with rearmament than social justice. Moreover, Daladier's working relationship with General Gamelin was generally excellent. Gamelin and Daladier had worked together closely during the Weygand era. In the long months which followed the advent of the Popular Front, their relationship would constitute 'the central human element in French defence policy.'⁵

Daladier's role was particularly important because, on 6 June, the new government reformed the defence establishment by creating a ministry of national defence. As minister of national defence and war, Daladier was charged with coordinating the policies of the three service ministries. He also chaired meetings of the newly constituted Comité Permanent de la Défense Nationale (CPDN), which replaced the old Haut Comité Militaire, as part of the same reforms. Daladier

³ The above paragraph is taken primarily from Micaud, *French Right*, 109–32; Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 130–42; J. Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy* (Cambridge, 1988), 184–222; J.-M. Mayeur, *La Vie politique sous la Troisième République* (Paris, 1984), 346–54; and Mouré, *Managing the Franc Poincaré*, 237–72.

⁴ Bernstein, *Crise du radicalisme*, 358–65; Du Réau, *Daladier*, 140–9; and Jackson, *Defending Democracy*, 38–41.

⁵ Cited in and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 83. See also Du Réau, *Daladier*, 167.

was therefore responsible for overseeing the implementation of the huge rearmament effort undertaken by the Popular Front after 1936.⁶

Intelligence on the situation in Germany played a key role in defence policy. Indeed, Daladier's disregard for intelligence in 1933 was surprising given the fact that he had spent the final eighteen months of the First World War as an intelligence officer. By the time he returned to the rue St Dominique in 1936 he had come to appreciate the importance of intelligence in the decision making process. His private papers for the period from 1936 to 1940 are replete with military and air intelligence reports on the situation in Germany in particular. Daladier routinely provided the parliamentary army and national defence commissions with detailed appreciations of the state of German military power. Until he acquired the added responsibilities of Premier to his portfolio in April of 1938, Daladier read military attaché reports personally and received daily briefings from his civilian and military staff at the ministry of defence. The Daladier team would remain more or less intact on the rue St Dominique for the next forty-five months.

II

Intelligence appreciations of German intentions and capabilities figured importantly in the formulation of the ambitious rearmament programme put together by the defence ministry during the summer of 1936. In the aftermath of the remilitarization of the Rhineland, Colonel Gauché had prepared an important overview of the strategic situation which was circulated to the CSG, to the general staff, and to the minister of defence. In this memorandum Gauché stressed that Hitler's intentions had not altered fundamentally since the writing of *Mein Kampf*. The overriding goal of German policy was to secure the resources of eastern Europe as a base with which to dominate the continent. Gauché warned that should Germany gain control of the agriculture and raw materials of the Balkans it would become strong enough to break the Maginot Line, defeat France, and successfully complete the 'Germanization of Europe'. Gauché concluded that it was essential to unite the disparate interests of Italy, the Little Entente,

⁶ On these reforms, see Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 27–9; Du Réau, *Daladier*, 30–3 and esp. Young, *In Command of France*, 160–6.

and Poland to the common cause of resisting German expansion. He also judged that Soviet neutrality would be necessary to permit Poland to concentrate its strength against Germany. 'We must realize', he concluded, 'that until we are able to accomplish these objectives, Germany will retain the upper hand.'⁷ This was a clear and accurate appraisal of Hitler's intentions from France's chief intelligence figure and leading German expert.

The confident prediction that Germany would turn eastward was accompanied by a bleak assessment of the military balance between France and Germany. In May of 1936 the SAE concluded that the pace of rearmament in Germany would only increase. The remilitarization of the Rhineland had 'definitely removed the last constraint to the unlimited rearmament of Germany's military forces'.⁸ French intelligence continued to assume that German industry could produce war material as fast as the German army could train officers and soldiers. German industry was estimated to be operating at 76 per cent of its maximum capacity with some factories working day and night. The Deuxième Bureau also noted that all defence-related industries were working a minimum 56-hour week and compared this to the 40-hour work week which the Popular Front had legislated as a measure of the rate of German rearmament.⁹ The Section Allemande judged that '[t]he industrial power of the Reich has permitted [the army] to sustain a material effort parallel to the augmentation of effectives and sufficient to provide the new army with *abundant, modern, and powerful* armaments and equipment.'¹⁰ Several months later, in a wild overestimation of German armaments production, the Deuxième Bureau reckoned that the output of the defence industry actually exceeded the demands of the Reichswehr.¹¹ This erroneous view of the capabilities of the German armaments industry hinged on a failure to make the necessary connection between evidence of raw material shortages and the effects these shortages would have on the pace of German rearmament. The Deuxième Bureau considered correctly that rearmament would be given first priority, that Germany had indeed chosen 'guns' over

⁷ In the original as '... l'Allemagne restera maîtresse du jeu'. SHAT, 7N 2521-6, 'Note sur les conséquences à tirer de la renonciation par l'Allemagne du traité de Locarno', 8 Apr. 1936.

⁸ SHAT, 7N 2680-2, *BdR*, 'Allemagne: Forces militaires', Mar.-Apr. 1937.

⁹ SHAT, 7N 2680-2, *BdR*, Nov.-Dec. 1936.

¹⁰ SHAT, 7N 2672, 'Note sur l'armée allemande', 12 May 1936. Emphasis in original.

¹¹ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur le matériel dans l'armée allemande', and 'L'Industrie allemande et le réarmement', Apr. 1936.

'butter'. It did not perceive that, despite this choice, the German armaments industry lacked both the raw materials and the productive capacity to keep pace with the unprecedented expansion of the regular German army. This was a crucial mistake because it distorted intelligence projections of the future configuration of the Reichswehr. Consequently, the Deuxième Bureau reinforced the misleading impression of a burgeoning military juggernaut across the Rhine which would weigh so heavily on French policy in the months to come.

In his evaluations of the combat readiness of the Wehrmacht, Renondeau described German troops as 'remarkably well-trained, robust, and animated by an excellent morale'.¹² The level of training in the army was rated superior to that of any other force in the world.¹³ Evaluations of the German material indicated that the Wehrmacht had surpassed, or was on the verge of surpassing, the French army in all categories with the exception of heavy artillery. An estimated ten German infantry divisions would be fully motorized by the summer of 1937. Although the majority of tanks which made up the three Panzer divisions were six-tonne light tanks which were very fast but vulnerable to modern anti-tank weaponry, intelligence reports predicted that over half of these machines would be replaced entirely by heavier and more powerfully armed twenty-tonne models by mid-1937. German anti-tank weaponry was considered far in advance of that in service in the French army. The only area where the French army retained a clear advantage over the German was that of heavy artillery where little technical progress had been made since the Great War.¹⁴

Assessment of German military planning continued to centre on the conviction that Germany would seek to avoid another long war in which France and Britain would be able to make maximum use of the resources of their respective empires. In an overview for Gamelin and Daladier, Gauché emphasized that the Reich lacked the natural resources to wage a long war. German aggression, therefore, would aim at a series of 'swift decisive campaigns'. There was no contradiction between this view and the conclusion that Germany was arming in depth in preparation for a long war. The First World War had demonstrated beyond any doubt the necessity of preparing the whole

¹² SHAT, 7N 2601, 'Degré d'entraînement de l'infanterie allemande', 17 Jan. 1938.

¹³ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Note sur l'armée allemande', 12 May 1936.

¹⁴ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 28, dr. 4, 'La Motorisation dans l'armée allemande', SAE report, 22 June 1936; SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Note sur l'armement dans l'armée allemande', 20 Apr. 1936; 7N 2676, *BdR*, 'Les Forces militaires allemandes', Mar.-Apr. 1937.

of the nation's resources for war and the Section Allemande possessed an abundance of evidence which suggested that the Germans had taken this lesson to heart.¹⁵

There was no doubt within either the intelligence community or the high command that the Wehrmacht was first and foremost an offensive weapon designed to serve Hitler's policy of expansion. But intelligence observers also recognized that German military doctrine remained in the experimental stage in 1936.¹⁶ Renondeau considered that an outspoken proponent of armoured warfare named General Heinz Guderian would play an important role in the evolution of a new German war doctrine and prepared a series of studies on Guderian's theories for the Deuxième Bureau.¹⁷ These, combined with the perceived emphasis on armour and mechanization led the Deuxième Bureau to conclude that the German general staff was developing a military doctrine predicated on the importance of speed, mobility, and air support.¹⁸ A study of German armoured doctrine prepared in the spring of 1936 predicted that, rather than being dispersed among infantry units as in the French case, German armour would be deployed en masse in order to achieve a breakthrough which would then be exploited by motorized units.¹⁹ The introduction of two-year service in August was interpreted accurately as an essential step in the construction of a powerful regular force capable of smashing an opponent in a short campaign.²⁰ These perceived trends strengthened the impression that Germany was arming for aggressive purposes and reinforced the conviction that German decision makers feared the consequences of a long war. One of the great dilemmas which emerged in French assessment of German military power was the obvious tension between the conviction that Germany would be forced to try for a 'knock-out blow' in the early

¹⁵ SHAT, 7N 2521-6, 'Note sur les conséquences à tirer au point de vue militaire de la renonciation par l'Allemagne du traité de Locarno', 8 Apr. 1936.

¹⁶ SHAT, 7N 2629-3, 'Les Manœuvres allemandes en 1936', Jan.-Feb. 1937. On German military doctrine, see among many others M. Cooper, *The German Army 1933-1939: Its Political and Military Failure* (London, 1978), 244-309; Habeck, 'Imagining War', 350-88; and J. P. Harris, 'The Myth of Blitzkrieg', *War in History*, 2: 3 (1995), 344-9.

¹⁷ SHAT, 7N 2597, 'Emploi des unités blindées', 27 Jan. 1937; 7N 2598, 'Les Formations blindées et leur coopération', 21 Oct. 1936; and 7N 2600, 'Emploi des chars', 22 Dec. 1937.

¹⁸ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 28, 'La Motorisation dans l'armée allemande', 22 June 1936.

¹⁹ SHAT, 7N 2597, 'Emploi des unités blindées', 27 Jan. 1936; 'Corps blindé', 12 May 1936; 7N 2598, 'Les Formations blindées et leur coopération avec les autres armes', 21 Oct. 1936.

²⁰ SHAT, 7N 3434-1, 'Comparaison de la valeur défensive et offensive des armées française et allemande', 27 Aug. 1936—forwarded to Daladier by his *cabinet militaire*.

stages of a future war and real concern over the long-term consequences of France's demographic inferiority. Looming behind the evolving exterior of the German regular army were masses of potential soldiery that far outstripped those of France and this harsh reality was underlined repeatedly in assessments of the balance of power.²¹ The assumption that German industry could equip as many troops as its army could train sharpened the immediacy of the demographic imbalance between France and Germany. The grim reality was that Germany had mobilized 240 divisions during the Great War while the French general staff estimated that France would hit the *mur des effectifs* at 110 divisions, after which no more large units could be mobilized without crippling the war effort. The Deuxième Bureau estimated that Germany could mobilize up to 13,500,000 men of military age in a long war. This estimate corresponds nearly exactly to the total number of soldiers mobilized by Germany from 1939 to 1945.²² French military planners were therefore caught between the hypothesis of a short war which they felt less and less capable of winning and the certainty of Germany's immense demographic superiority in a *guerre de longue durée*.

In sum, the Deuxième Bureau concluded that, whatever its deficiencies, the regular German army had achieved clear superiority over the French army by late 1936. One major weakness the Deuxième Bureau identified in the Wehrmacht was an acute shortage of quality officers. By late 1936 the ratio of officers to men in the German regular army had fallen to 1.7 per cent when the desired ratio was 7 per cent.²³ Intelligence appreciations underlined this deficiency as the chief German weakness. The Deuxième Bureau observed the measures taken to rectify this situation, the fourfold expansion of the number of officer training academies and reductions in the duration of officer training from two years to ten months, with care and stressed consistently the inevitable dilution of quality in the officer corps which would result.²⁴ Yet, although intelligence reports routinely mentioned the dearth of quality officers in the German army, the Deuxième Bureau failed to analyse the implications of this deficiency on the combat worthiness of the Wehrmacht as a whole. This potentially important qualitative

²¹ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Le Problème de la natalité en Allemagne, en France et en Europe', 3 Aug. 1936; 7N 2513, 'Note au sujet de la natalité et du potentiel de guerre du Reich', 24 Aug. 1936; and 2N 223-4, 'Population—effectifs et défense nationale', 1 Dec. 1936.

²² R. A. C. Parker, *Struggle for Survival: A History of the Second World War* (Oxford, 1989), 132.

²³ Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 407, 425-6, 430.

²⁴ SHAT, 7N 2598, Renondeau to Paris, 6 Oct., 7 Dec. 1936; 7N 2599, 4, 27 Jan. 1937; and 7N 2600, Renondeau to Paris, 13 Sept. 1937.

factor was obscured by the Bureau's fixation with German quantitative superiority. The quantitative factor, moreover, was based on the unfounded assumption that German industry could support the constitution of reservist units on a massive scale. The result was a significant overestimation of the effectiveness of the existing Reichswehr and future size of the German field army.

In early June of 1936 military intelligence produced another overview which played an important role in shaping the French response to the Nazi threat in the years which followed. This appreciation predicted that the German field army would comprise thirty-four regular divisions, four armoured divisions, and seventeen infantry divisions by early 1937. This, however, was correctly judged to be only a stage in the rearmament of the Wehrmacht. Germany was expected to devote increasing resources to outfitting reservist formations. By the early 1938, it further estimated, the German army would constitute thirty-six active divisions, six armoured divisions, and thirty-six reservist divisions.²⁵ The operations bureau of the general staff used this projection as the basis of a lengthy position paper which it prepared for incoming minister of war Daladier. Constructing a hypothesis of a Franco-German war in 1938 in which Poland, Austria, and Italy would remain neutral, the Troisième Bureau estimated that Germany would be able to deploy twenty-nine infantry and four armoured divisions supported by the Luftwaffe as early as the fifth day of a projected conflict. Significantly, moreover, there was no mention of the qualitative deficiencies of the German officer corps or the German army's desperate lack of heavy artillery.²⁶

The most immediate impact of these appreciations on the making of defence policy was in the formulation of the rearmament programmes of 1936. In early June the CSG, basing its conclusions on the inflated picture of German military power produced by the Deuxième Bureau, advised Daladier that German military power had surpassed that of France and that the gap would continue to grow in the foreseeable future. Taking up a favourite theme, Gamelin judged that France could not hope to construct an army which was the equal of the Wehrmacht in terms of numbers. He argued that defence spending should instead focus on the modernization and mechanization of the standing

²⁵ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Les Possibilités allemandes', 3 June 1936.

²⁶ SHAT, 7N 3434-1, 'Le Problème militaire française', June 1936. This important assessment appears in Daladier's papers at the Archives Nationale under AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 28, dr. 4, 'Le Problème militaire français', 1 June 1936.

army.²⁷ He also warned Daladier that, although France was capable of withstanding a German *attaque brusquée* for the moment, German rearmament would overturn this state of affairs if the necessary commitment to rearmament was not forthcoming.²⁸

This analysis of the strategic situation was fundamental to rearmament planning. Daladier began immediately to lobby for a major armaments programme using intelligence on German rearmament as his principle ammunition. On 1 July he appeared before the powerful Chamber army commission citing detailed intelligence on the progress of German military build-up and stressing the need for an 'intensive' rearmament programme. He warned that Germany was building a powerful offensive tool designed to serve Hitler's expansionist ambitions. He advised the members of the commission that 'at the moment we are capable of turning back an invasion of our territory', but he predicted that the military balance would worsen considerably in the months to come. Among the information he provided to the commission was the Deuxième Bureau's estimate that the strength of the German regular army would increase to 800,000 men by the end of 1936.²⁹

At the same time Daladier set the wheels of planning in motion for large-scale land rearmament. Intelligence reports served as the frame of reference from which this programme was eventually formulated. Upon assuming his responsibilities on the rue St Dominique, Daladier directed the high command to prepare a proposed programme of rearmament to be realized over four years. Gamelin and Colson responded with proposals for an 11.3 billion franc refurbishment programme. Daladier deemed this proposal insufficient and suggested instead a figure of 14 billion francs.³⁰ Never in the history of the Third Republic had a politician deemed the proposals put forward by the military for defence spending inadequate. The contrast between Daladier's attitude at this juncture and his position in 1933 is striking.

The importance of intelligence in this transformation and in Daladier's lobbying was fundamental. Daladier warned the Chamber army commission of the 'unlimited territorial and racist ambitions'

²⁷ SHAT, 1N 36, *Procès-verbal* of a meeting of the CSG of 4 June 1936 and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 249–78.

²⁸ DDF, 2ème série, ii, no. 357, Gamelin to Daladier, 25 June 1936.

²⁹ AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème législature, Carton 15, Daladier audition, 1 July 1936.

³⁰ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 72–4 and Du Réau, *Daladier*, 182–3. Gamelin subsequently argued that he had proposed a 20-billion franc programme (*Servir*, ii, 244–6) but this contention has been rejected authoritatively by Frankenstein.

of the Nazi regime. To meet this threat, he prescribed Gamelin's formula of a rearmament programme that would emphasize modernization and mechanization over increased effectiveness.³¹ Daladier adopted a similar approach with Premier Blum, stressing the deteriorating military situation and the need to rearm in order to negotiate with Germany from a position of strength. The Deuxième Bureau provided further grist for Daladier's mill when it estimated that Germany had invested the equivalent of 78 billion Reichsmarks on defence expenditure from 1933 to 1935.³² In a 'moving interview' with the Premier, Daladier argued that a complete modernization of the French military machine was the best way to meet the Nazi threat.³³ Lobbying for the support of finance minister Vincent Auriol, Daladier observed flatly that the rearmament programme he envisioned could not be financed exclusively by taxation or by the issue of government bonds. The government would have to reverse its electoral policy and devalue the franc. Aware of the political costs of this measure but convinced of the absolute necessity of rearmament, Daladier finally entreated the finance minister to 'devalue, and I will accept the responsibility'.³⁴ With the support of Blum, Auriol, and the Chamber army commission, Daladier secured cabinet and then parliamentary approval of the largest peacetime rearmament programme in French history. The total amount ultimately devoted to the acquisition of new material would rise by September of 1939 from the initial projection of 14.3 billion to over 63 billion francs.³⁵ Behind the ambitious dimensions of this programme, and the urgency with which Daladier pursued its approval, was the ominous picture of German military power produced by the Deuxième Bureau.

The intelligence provided by the Deuxième Bureau did not, however, prompt a major reassessment of French military doctrine. On the contrary, an awareness of the German emphasis on armour and mobility only intensified the fixation with *l'inviolabilité du territoire* in French strategic planning. General Gamelin's view, as expressed to Daladier at this juncture, was that '[n]ow more than ever, the premier mission of

³¹ AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème Législature, Carton 15, Daladier auditions, 1 July and 4 Nov. 1936.

³² AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 7, dr. 3, sdr. a, 'Dépenses militaires en Allemagne', Sept. 1936. See also SHAT, 7N 2643-3, 'Les Dépenses d'armement du Reich de 1933 à 1935', 4 Sept. 1936.

³³ Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (cited hereafter as FNSP), Archives Léon Blum, 3BL, dr. 7, Blum testimony at Riom.

³⁴ FNSP, Fonds Vincent Auriol, 2 AU 2, dr. 2.

³⁵ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 74, 91.

the French military is to ensure the integrity of the national territory'. The crucial stage of a future war, he judged, would be the *couverture* stage of French mobilization.³⁶ The *cabinet militaire* of the ministry concurred in a subsequent memorandum which concluded that given the 'feverish military preparation in Germany, the offensive character of which is beyond question' France must have 'an army capable, above all, of guaranteeing the inviolability of our national territory'.³⁷ In sum, the French response to the German threat reflected, above all, the defensive priorities of a state without territorial aspirations. It found expression in Daladier's observation at the first ever meeting of the CPDN in June 1936 that France's 'initially defensive policy' was the 'fundamental fact' which shaped French strategic planning.³⁸

Debate over the creation of a professional armoured corps provides a good case study of the French response to the military recrudescence across the Rhine. During the summer of 1936 Colonel Charles de Gaulle and his political collaborator Paul Reynaud, a political maverick of the centre-right, launched their second campaign for profound structural changes in the organization of the army. De Gaulle had prophesied that modern armoured units were capable of rupturing the prepared defensive positions which constituted the barrier behind which French strategists planned to mobilize the nation's resources. He advocated the creation of a heavily armoured mechanized force made up of professional soldiers which would restore to French military doctrine the flexibility which it lacked.³⁹ Although the period of stock-taking during the summer of 1936 provided Reynaud and de Gaulle with an opportunity to resume their campaign for a professional army, their efforts were to no avail. The very notion of a professional corps was in direct opposition to the tradition (so dear to the French left) of the nation in arms, and appeared to contradict the defensive aims of French policy. The political controversy which the idea created was ultimately detrimental to the modernization of the French army.⁴⁰ The

³⁶ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 28, dr. 4, Gamelin to Daladier, 10 July 1936.

³⁷ AN, *Archives Daladier*, 496 AP 28, dr. 5, 'Note relative à la politique générale du Département de la Défense Nationale et la Guerre', 11 Dec. 1936.

³⁸ *DDF*, 2ème série, ii, no. 369, *Procès-verbal* of the CPDN, 26 June 1936.

³⁹ *Le Fil de l'épée* (Paris, 1932) and *Vers l'armée de métier* (Paris, 1934). See also R. Doughty, 'De Gaulle's Concept of a Mobile Professional Army: Genesis of French Defeat?', in L. Matthews and D. Brown (eds.), *The Parameters of War* (London, 1987), 243–56 and B. Bond and M. Alexander, 'Liddell Hart and de Gaulle: Prophets of Limited Liability and Mobile Defence', in P. Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, 1986), 598–623.

⁴⁰ Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 37–42.

general staff rejected the proposals of de Gaulle and Reynaud. The central argument raised in opposition was that the creation of an armoured strike force capable of strategic success against Nazi Germany was a project of immense proportions requiring a complete revision of French strategy away from emphasis on the inviolability of the frontier to a war of movement. Such revolutionary changes were politically impossible and would render France vulnerable to an *attaque brusquée* which might disrupt the entire mobilization process.⁴¹ The ministry of defence concurred. Its position reaffirmed the strategic conception advocated by the general staff and ended the debate over a professional army: 'It is only after we have withstood the initial shock, against which our political and moral situation demands that we prepare, that we can envisage an offensive or a counter-offensive.'⁴² This passage summarizes a crucial difference between the strategic situations of France and Germany, a difference which is too often overlooked. Germany had no reason to fear a surprise offensive on its western frontier. The 'political and moral situation' inside France precluded such an attack. This was a restatement of the 'fundamental fact' which Daladier had alluded to at the CPDN meeting in June.

It would be inaccurate, however, to conclude that French doctrinal planning was impervious to intelligence on the development of the Wehrmacht. Intelligence on German armour and mechanization was a central consideration in debates within the CSG. Information on German war doctrine and the constitution of the Reichswehr was central to the decision to build three light mechanized divisions and one heavy armoured one and to motorize ten of the twenty regular infantry divisions by 1939. 'The Germans have conceived the Panzer division, which is a tool of sudden attack followed by deep exploitation,' Gamelin noted before the CSG in October of 1936. France had no need for such a tool but had to make sure it possessed the means to prevent a major rupture of the *front continu*.⁴³ Thus, the large mechanized formations were intended to function as a second echelon of defence. They were to seal off any breakthroughs in the continuous front by '*opérations de colmatage*' during the initial phase of the anticipated conflict.⁴⁴

⁴¹ MAÉ, Papiers 1940, Fonds Daladier, 'Note au sujet de l'armée de métier', 21 July 1936.

⁴² AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 28, dr. 5, 'Note relative à la politique générale du Département de la Défense Nationale et de la Guerre', 11 Dec. 1936.

⁴³ SHAT, Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224-8, dr. 3, 'Séance d'étude du CSG', 14 Oct. 1936.

⁴⁴ AN, Archives Daladier, 'Le Problème militaire français', study prepared by the operations bureau of the French army, 1 June 1936. See also Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 110-24,

The manual of military doctrine produced by the army general staff in 1936 is another example of the French response to developments in motorization and mechanization. The *Instruction sur l'emploi tactique des grandes unités* recognized that technology would greatly accelerate the rhythm of battle. Speed and mobility would be critical factors in modern combat and victory could be achieved only by major offensive operations. Nevertheless, French doctrine remained faithful to the principles of the methodical battle. It reaffirmed the importance of concentrated firepower and of the prudent and systematic use of forces, both of which were lessons from the Great War.⁴⁵ Yet the comprehensive knowledge of the development of armour and motorization by the Wehrmacht provided by the Deuxième Bureau was neither ignored nor rejected. It was instead integrated into the defensive superstructure of military planning. It lost much of its effect, however, because it was interpreted within the fundamentally immutable confines of French tactical, operational, and strategic thinking.

III

Pierre Cot's second term of service as air minister was the most tumultuous period in French aviation history.⁴⁶ Cot was only 40 years of age when he became minister of aviation in the Blum government. He was an outspoken and dynamic figure in the French Radical Party and the most prominent of the *jeunes turcs*. During his first term at the air ministry, he had been a driving force in securing independence for the French air force. He had also begun the process of establishing an independent doctrine which emphasized long-range 'strategic' bombing rather than the ground support role the air force had traditionally fulfilled within the French strategic conception.⁴⁷ He arrived on the Boulevard Victor in June of 1936 with plans to revolutionize French air

200–2; Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 139–59, 190–3; Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, 98–115; Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 190–3; and esp. Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler*, 114–70.

⁴⁵ France, Ministère de la Guerre, *Instructions sur l'emploi tactique des grandes unités* (Paris, 1936).

⁴⁶ A biography of Pierre Cot is in preparation by Sabine Jansen of the Institut des Études des Sciences Politiques in Paris. The following description is taken from Berstein, *Crise du radicalisme*, 114–18. See also Cot's *Armée de l'Air* (Paris, 1939) and *Procès de la République*, 2 vols. (New York, 1944).

⁴⁷ On this question, see above all Facon, *L'Armée de l'air*, 42–62 and Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 152–82, 263–5, 370–80.

power. At this point, moreover, Cot was a Radical only in name. His passionate commitment to nationalizing the French aircraft industry and the ardency with which he personally crusaded for a Franco-Soviet military alliance exceeded any of his socialist contemporaries. The explanation for the tone of Cot's views might well lie in his ties to the Soviet Union.

In 1948 cryptanalysts within the United States Army Security Agency succeeded in breaking the cipher of the NKGB (Soviet Intelligence, successor to the NKVD and forerunner to the KGB). This permitted American intelligence to decrypt and read the huge volume of Soviet intelligence traffic sent between the Washington Embassy and Moscow during and immediately after the war. One of the revelations of the 'Venona decrypts' was that the NKVD/NKGB resident in New York had been in constant liaison with a French national living in the United States between 1941 and 1943. This French national, code-named 'Daedalus', was Pierre Cot.⁴⁸ Whether Cot was a full-blown Soviet agent during his tenure as air minister remains a matter of intense debate.⁴⁹ Cot's official links to the USSR can be dated to his nine-day voyage to the USSR during his first term as air minister in September 1933. Cot returned trumpeting the importance of Soviet industrial potential and the value for France of a military agreement with the USSR.⁵⁰ It is clear, however, that Soviet military intelligence had penetrated the French air ministry. During this period a Soviet operative was running a group of moles within Cot's civilian cabinet which included André Labarthe, one of the air minister's chief advisers.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See the Venona decrypts relating the recruitment of Cot by the NKGB resident in New York, V. S. Pravdin in PRO, HW 15/17, 'Sergej and Pierre Cot', 26 June 1942 and 'Reference to Signing on of Pierre Cot and Allocation to him of Cover-name "Daedalus"', 1 July 1942. These documents can also be consulted at the website of the United States National Security Agency, www.nsa.gov:8080/docs/venona/docs. See also Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 307–8 and 370 and H. Klehr, *American Communism* (New Haven, 1995), 234–7.

⁴⁹ Principal participants include T. Wolton, *Le Grande Recrutement* (Paris, 1993) and S. Courtois, *Remarques sur un rapport* (Paris, 1996), who argue that Cot was indeed a Soviet agent at this time. The team of historians that formed a commission of inquiry, S. Berstein, R. Frank, S. Jansen, and N. Werth, reject this claim in the *Rapport de la commission d'historiens constituée pour examiner la nature des relations de Pierre Cot avec les autorités soviétiques* (Paris, 1995). See also the debate between Courtois and Berstein in *L'Histoire*, 189 (1995) and Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 370, 635.

⁵⁰ The enthusiastic report filed by the air minister is in *DDF*, 1ère série, iv, no. 308, 14 Oct. 1933. See also Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 77–8 and Berstein et al., *Rapport de la commission*, 9–13.

⁵¹ Wolton, *Le Grand Recrutement*, 199–210; Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 370–1; P. Wright, *Spycatcher* (New York, 1987), 239–41; and Central Intelligence Agency, *The Role*

Cot's term of service as air minister should be reinterpreted in light of this information. French air policy under Cot centred on three predominant objectives: to negotiate a military corollary to the 1935 Mutual Assistance Pact with the USSR; to nationalize, renovate, and decentralize the antiquated French aircraft industry; and to impose the air force's vision of the future of warfare on the existing military establishment. The ultimate goal was to create a long-range bombing force designed to fight a coalition war with Britain and the Soviet Union against Germany and Italy. Both the air ministry and the *Armée de l'Air* were thrown into considerable upheaval with the arrival of Cot, who immediately installed his own team of advisers in key positions. General Jean-Henri Jauneaud, probably the most strident proponent of 'strategic bombing' in inter-war France, became chief of his *cabinet militaire*. Jean Moulin, a future hero of the resistance, was appointed director of Cot's civilian cabinet. Many of the air force officers allied themselves to Cot in order to further the interests of their service. Those who did not, primarily the more conservative senior commanders, were forced to retire. In this way General Pujos, who had proved reluctant to press the case for independent long-range bombing, was replaced by a confidant of Cot, General Philippe Féquant. By the middle of 1937 seven of the nine senior generals on the CSA had been purged by the Cot regime. The ministry also completely revised the organization of the air force in order to preserve its integrity as an independent force in the event of a conflict.⁵²

There is no question that Cot was sincere in his efforts to restore French air power. If he was indeed a Soviet agent during this period, his policies were in keeping with Soviet experimentation with collective security. However, the policies of the Cot ministry were politically highly explosive. They encountered determined opposition in many quarters of the defence and foreign policy establishment. The ministry of defence, in particular, was fundamentally opposed to a military alliance with the USSR. And conservative politicians, particularly

Kapelle: The History of Soviet Intelligence and Espionage Networks in Western Europe 1936-1945 (New York, 1968), 99-100.

⁵² On French air policy under Cot, see Facon, *L'Armée de l'air*, 12-78; Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 273-395; P. Armengaud, *Batailles politiques et militaires sur l'Europe: Témoignages 1932-1940* (Paris, 1948), 30-40; R. Krauskopf, 'French Air Power Policy, 1919-1939', Ph.D. diss. (Georgetown University, 1965); Boussard, *L'Aéronautique militaire au parlement*, 95-139; Claude Paillat, *Dossiers secrets de la France contemporaine*, iii. *La Guerre à l'horizon* (Paris, 1984), 288-93; J. Gunsburg, *Divided and Conquered: The French High Command and the Defeat of the West, 1940* (Westport, Conn., 1979), 44-8; and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 146-7, 151-60.

within the influential Senate air commission opposed the massive state intervention in the industrial sector advocated by Cot. And the air ministry's ambitions to secure an independent 'strategic' role for air power in French military planning were resisted stubbornly by the army high command and led to a stand-off which culminated in destructive mutual indifference. The effect of all of this was to create a siege mentality within the ministry. The political environment at the Boulevard Victor was fundamental to the evolution of French air policy during this crucial period. The political battles Cot waged during this period supplanted the German menace as the chief preoccupation of his ministry. The result was that intelligence on German air power again became politicized for use by Cot in these struggles. And Cot was an ideologue whose intense commitment to the various programmes sponsored by his ministry was every bit as doctrinaire as that of the army to the concept of the methodical battle and the *guerre de longue durée*.⁵³ Intelligence was thus used to support predetermined policies. The resulting distortion and misperception had woeful consequences for French security.

In May of 1936 the air Deuxième Bureau reported that German air rearmament had been proceeding at a much faster pace than had been anticipated. The programme of ninety-three squadrons was judged to be only a stage in this rearmament which had already been surpassed. A second stage in the arming of the Luftwaffe had already been undertaken. Recent intelligence reported the existence of 103 Luftwaffe squadrons and construction on forty-six new military airfields. The report added, however, that the air force lacked trained personnel for these new units and that the quality of the material in service was 'extremely uneven'.⁵⁴ An intelligence bulletin issued on 1 June estimated correctly that the Luftwaffe would be fully constituted by the middle of 1938 and would then comprise a force of 200 squadrons and 3,000 first-line aircraft. It estimated that the Reich's aviation industry was producing 250 aircraft per month. It also predicted that this figure could be increased to 700 warplanes per month after mobilization. It warned, moreover, that these figures were increasing constantly. The report included a lengthy discussion of the possibilities of the prototype Dornier Do 17 medium bomber being developed by German

⁵³ For Cot's views on the strategic possibilities of air power and the vital necessity of nationalization, see *L'Armée de l'air* and Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 53-7 and 370-80.

⁵⁴ SHAT, 7N 2512, *RH*, 16-22 May 1936.

engineers. It noted that this bomber would be faster than any current French fighter and would be suitable for night or day bombing of Paris.⁵⁵

The situation was thus alarming. All the more so considering the badly fragmented and artisanal state of the French aircraft industry in 1936. The latest generation of aircraft was constructed of metal rather than wood and canvass. This meant that the entire aircraft industry required retooling and modernization. This process had proceeded at an excruciatingly slow pace among the myriad of independent French airframe manufacturers. Industrialists were unwilling to invest the requisite capital. Nor had the government invested the necessary sums to ensure that plant was modernized.⁵⁶ This state of affairs was particularly critical given the progress achieved in Germany during the early 1930s. The Nazi government had begun the renovation and expansion of the aircraft industry upon its assumption of power. The size of the German aeronautical industry increased fiftyfold from 1933 to the end of 1935. As the *Deuxième Bureau* noted, starting from scratch had in many ways benefited German air rearmament because it meant that the Reich's aircraft industry was equipped with the most modern machine tools and production techniques.⁵⁷

Comparison with the situation in France reveals the extent of the problem facing the air ministry. Plan I had planned for the expansion of the *Armée de l'Air* to a force of 1,010 modern aircraft by the end of 1935. But, as has been noted above, no effort was made to modernize and expand the industry before large sums of credits were injected into the system in the form of orders for aircraft. The result was that the machines ordered under Plan I were being delivered at the end of 1937.⁵⁸ Thus air intelligence revealed beyond any doubt that Germany had gained a crucial head start on France in laying the foundations for air rearmament. The air ministry used this information to obtain credits for the expansion of the existing rearmament programme and

⁵⁵ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1936. The Do 17 was to prove to be one of the mainstays of the German air force right through to the end of the Second World War.

⁵⁶ Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 61–2, 102 and Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 239–45.

⁵⁷ SHAA, 2B 58, *BdR*, 1er trimestre 1936. On the expansion of the German aircraft industry between 1933 and 1936, see Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe*, 78–9, 93 and Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 488–9.

⁵⁸ Christienne and Buffotot, 'L'Armée de l'air française', 216–17. In early 1936 the air ministry prepared a 'Plan Quinquennal' designed to expand the size of the air force to 1,257 first-line planes and renovate all material in five years. This project, which was approved by the CSA in Aug., was superseded by the rearmament plan of the Cot ministry.

to reorganize the aircraft industry. In June of 1936 the air force general staff prepared a long memorandum for the new minister which warned that the acceleration of German rearmament and the break with Italy over Abyssinia had 'completely modified' the situation. The memo stressed that

According to the latest intelligence received, Germany now possesses a first line fleet of nearly 1,500 aircraft, not including transport aircraft. Moreover, the reoccupation of the Rhineland has permitted the Germans to build air bases perilously close to our frontier. Paris is no longer more than an hour's flight from German airfields.

Plan I was therefore judged 'manifestly insufficient'. Alluding to intelligence on plans to expand the Luftwaffe, the note concluded that while France maintained an important place among existing air forces it had 'already been clearly surpassed in the domain of projects and preparations'.⁵⁹

Cot echoed these warnings in meetings of the CPDN in June and July. On 26 June he warned the CPDN that Germany would have an air force of 3,000 first-line aircraft by mid-1938. He urged that '[a] massive effort to augment our air force is imperative'. Such an effort, he added, could only be achieved by a complete reorganization and modernization of France's aircraft industry.⁶⁰ One month later he further informed the members of the CPDN that '[i]f we possess at the moment a slight margin of superiority in relation to Germany, from 1937 the situation will be reversed and by 1938 German air power will be double our own'.⁶¹ In a personal letter to Premier Blum the air minister stressed that the present balance between the French and German air forces was illusory. 'The rupture of this equilibrium', he warned, 'is about to commence.'⁶²

Cot received a mandate to nationalize much of the French aircraft industry on 11 August 1936. The ministry's programme was a radical solution to a critical problem. Eighty per cent of the airframe industry was nationalized into five state-controlled corporations directed by

⁵⁹ SHAA, 2B 11, EMAA note of 16 June 1936. See also SHAA, Archives Guy La Chambre, Z12961, 'Evolution du réarmement aérien de l'Allemagne et les résultats obtenus depuis le 7 mars', 26 May 1936 and 'État actuel de l'aviation militaire allemande', 28 May 1936.

⁶⁰ DDF, 2ème série, ii, no. 369, *Procès-verbal* of the first meeting of the CPDN on 26 June 1936.

⁶¹ DDF, 2ème série, iii, no. 67, *Procès-verbal* of the second meeting of the CPDN, 29 July 1936.

⁶² Cot letter to Blum of 26 July 1936 cited in Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 263.

private industrialists.⁶³ The industry was also dispersed from its concentration in the north of France and near Paris to areas beyond the reach of German bombers. These moves consolidated the airframe industry into a less unwieldy structure. In addition, the government also undertook, with limited success, to purchase controlling interests in the healthier and more efficient motor-producing sector of the industry. In sum, the nationalization policy of the Cot regime laid the foundations for the impressive performance of the aircraft industry in late 1938 and 1939. Nationalization provided definition to a hitherto hopelessly fragmented sector of the economy and made it easier for the government to invest more efficiently and systematically in expanding industrial plant in the future. The objective of this programme was to increase production of military aircraft in France to 1,800 aircraft per year by the end of 1937.⁶⁴

But nationalization transferred power away from industrialists and into the corridors of the air and finance ministries of the Popular Front government. The result was that from the outset the nationalization policy encountered bitter opposition. Many of the industrialists whose businesses were affected by these measures were established figures with powerful contacts in parliament. There was also predictable resistance from conservative elements of all stripes who were ideologically opposed to the scale of state intervention which Cot's policy involved. This opposition crystallized in the Senate air commission—a powerful and conservative body whose membership included former air minister André Laurent-Eynac and wealthy industrialist Baron Amaury de la Grange—which from the outset was profoundly sceptical of the merits of nationalization and fundamentally opposed to the 40-hour work week which was imposed over the entire industry.⁶⁵ At the outset, resistance to Cot's policies was relatively circumscribed. In the summer of 1936 the aircraft industry was in such a state of decline that there was widespread support for radical measures. The problem was that nationalization could not produce quick results. The reorganization and decentralization of 80 per cent of the airframe industry would take

⁶³ On nationalization, see Chadeau, *De Blériot à Dassault*; Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 103–11; and Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 255–71.

⁶⁴ AAN, Commission de l'aéronautique, 16ème législature, Carton 3, Cot audition, 2 Dec. 1936.

⁶⁵ Boussard, *Aéronautique militaire au parlement*, 130–6. On the attitudes of industrialists to the Popular Front labour legislation, see R. Vinen, *The Politics of French Business* (Cambridge, 1992), 26–67.

time and production was to fall off before it recovered and began to increase. The time-lag which ensued would provide Cot's opponents with an opportunity to threaten his position.

The rearmament programme created by the air ministry to replace the failed Plan I envisaged the creation of a first-line force of 1,554 aircraft and 1,297 reserves by the end of 1939.⁶⁶ In keeping with Cot's determination to build a long-distance strike force, bombers comprised 45 per cent of the first-line force created by Plan II. This rearmament plan was considerably less ambitious than the expansive programme that the French knew had been undertaken in Germany. As Cot explained to the Chamber aeronautical commission, however, 1,500 aeroplanes was the absolute maximum figure that the French aircraft industry could cope with.⁶⁷ Ultimately, however, the utility of Plan II was compromised more by the quality than the quantity of the aircraft it produced. In 1936 the air ministry was faced with a crisis of modern prototypes. During the early 1930s insufficient resources had been devoted to developing a limited number of workable aircraft designs for mass production. Consequently, there was a dearth of newly-developed prototypes when the air ministry made its orders for Plan II. With the exception of a handful of Morane fighters, the aircraft produced under the auspices of this programme were outdated the moment they came off the assembly line. German superiority in the air would be both quantitative and qualitative for the foreseeable future.⁶⁸

Cot exploited intelligence in an entirely different way in his campaign for a close military relationship with the Soviet Union. To drive home the need for closer ties he repeatedly reminded parliamentary representatives, the membership of the CPDN, and the foreign ministry that, given the Reich's superior industrial base, France could not hope to win an arms race with Germany. He argued consistently that the best assurance of French security was to resurrect the pre-1914 Franco-Russian military alliance. Before the CPDN in June, for example, Cot warned that

Germany is moving towards a [first-line] force of 3,000 aircraft; for our part, even with an enormous effort, it would be difficult for us to surpass one-third

⁶⁶ On Plan II, see Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 80–2 and Christienne and Buffotot, 'L'Armée de l'air française', 217–19.

⁶⁷ AAN, Commission de l'aéronautique, 16ème législature, Carton 3, Cot audition, 2 Dec. 1936.

⁶⁸ Christienne and Buffotot, 'L'Armée de l'air française', 216–17.

of this number. It is thus indispensable to study a true policy of industrial collaboration with our eventual allies, Britain, the USSR, and the Little Entente.⁶⁹

Cot's line of argument was not without merit. At this point Britain remained unwilling to make any military commitment to France. The Soviets, conversely, were pressing for staff conversations. During the next meeting of the CPDN the air minister again stressed the necessity of building an aerial coalition. He warned that by the time France completed its rearmament programme and had a first-line force of 1,500 aircraft the Luftwaffe would comprise 2,500 to 3,000 planes. 'And one must also consider', he added, 'that the figure of 1,500 planes represents for us a ceiling. Even if we possessed unlimited credits, it would be impossible to go beyond this number given our limited industrial capacity.' 'On our own,' he concluded, 'we cannot match Germany. It is thus imperative that we search for allies.' Cot then noted that the situation in Britain was 'hardly brilliant' and that France could not expect significant aerial assistance from this quarter. He went on to stress the industrial potential of the Soviet Union and concluded that '[i]n the present circumstances, industrial cooperation with the USSR is more and more important [to French security]'.⁷⁰

In sum, to serve his crusade for a Soviet military accord, Cot trotted out the familiar bogey of a German industrial juggernaut arming for war. The defeatism implicit in Cot's statements to the CPDN, which seem altogether inconsistent with his contemporaneous reputation as a dynamic figure brimming with confidence over the future of French air power, can only be understood in the context of his burning desire for a Franco-Soviet military relationship. Cot was more than willing to manipulate firmly entrenched perceptions of German industrial superiority to achieve his objective. In a note to Delbos, for example, Cot stressed the fact that German industrial power dwarfed that of France and argued that '[t]his vital realisation . . . must dictate our policy'. He urged Delbos to consider an exchange of air missions with the Soviets, Czechs, and Romanians.⁷¹ To the Chamber aeronautical commission, the air minister stressed the growth of the German aircraft industry. He also advised that

⁶⁹ DDF, 2ème série, ii, no. 369, *Procès-verbal* of the first meeting of the CPDN on 26 June 1936.

⁷⁰ DDF, 2ème série, iii, no. 67, *Procès-verbal* of the second meeting of the CPDN, 29 July 1936. See also Cot's testimony before the post-war parliamentary inquest in *Les Événements*, i. 263–99.

⁷¹ FNSP, Archives Cot, PC 3, dr. 4, sdr b, Cot to Delbos, 27 July 1936.

No matter how many credits are put at the disposal of the air ministry and no matter how much time we are permitted to redress the current situation, we cannot hope to possess an aircraft industry as powerful as that of Germany. The reason for this impossibility is very simple: in round figures the industrial potential of Germany is more than twice that of France.

Cot concluded that France could only redress this imbalance by forging a military accord with the Soviet Union.⁷²

This was undue pessimism. In the above exposition of the situation in the air Cot referred to a fully constituted Luftwaffe of 3,000 first-line planes as an inevitability. No mention was made of the financial and raw material impediments to rearmament. As it turned out, the French aviation industry ultimately proved capable of competing with that of the Reich. On the eve of war, in fact, more fighter aircraft were being produced in France than in Germany.⁷³ Once again intelligence was distorted, politicized, to suit the needs of the air ministry.

Clamouring for a military alliance with the Russians earned Cot the enmity of the rest of the defence establishment. The defence ministry remained profoundly suspicious of Soviet motives through to the spring of 1939. Daladier and the high command were convinced that the USSR had neither the capability nor the intention to undertake military operations in Europe in the foreseeable future. They suspected instead that the Soviets desired to foment a war between France and Germany which 'would leave the USSR the arbiter of a drained and exhausted Europe'.⁷⁴ The general staff's view of the value of a Russian alliance was shared by the senior permanent official at the foreign ministry. Secretary general Léger felt that the chief value of the existing pact was insurance against a revival of the Treaty of Rapallo. And both Léger and Delbos expressed concern that a military accord with the Soviets would estrange Britain and provide Germany with a pretext to claim that France was practising a policy of encirclement.⁷⁵ The more

⁷² AAN, Commission de l'aéronautique, 16ème législature, Carton 3, Cot audition, 2 Dec. 1936.

⁷³ R. Frank[enstein], 'A propos des aspects financiers du réarmement français, 1935-1939', *RHDGM* 26 (1976), 3, 16.

⁷⁴ The attitude of the French High Command towards the Soviet Union is distilled in the report of Deputy Chief of Staff Victor Schweisguth on Soviet military manoeuvres in the autumn of 1936. For Schweisguth's report, see *DDF*, 2e série, viii, no. 343. See also Vaisse, 'La Perception de la puissance soviétique', 19-25; P. Buffotot 'The French High Command and the Franco-Soviet Alliance, 1933-1939', *JSS* 5 (1982), 46-59; Young, *In Command of France*, 146-7; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 140-1; Jordan, *Popular Front*, 259-79; and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 293-302.

⁷⁵ AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP, dr. 4, 'Mémento', account of an interview between

energetically and persistently the air minister campaigned for military ties with the Soviets, the more disenchanted his colleagues in the foreign and defence ministries became. Cot exacerbated matters as the government's voluble advocate of French military assistance for the Spanish Republicans. The army high command, Daladier, Delbos, most of the government, and the vast majority of parliamentarians were fundamentally opposed to intervention in Spain.⁷⁶

The antagonism Cot provoked by his challenges to the defence establishment during these first six months was paralleled by disputes within the aircraft industry over nationalization. Cot's proposals received an extremely negative review in meetings of the Senate air commission in July. The commission first expressed dissatisfaction over the state of aircraft production in France on 1 October and demanded an audience with the air minister to discuss the situation.⁷⁷ Cot did not meet with the Senate commission until November and the first meeting was acrimonious. Cot's approach to nationalization was vigorously criticized by various members as both doctrinaire and short-sighted. The application of the 40-hour work week was roundly condemned as a catastrophic measure which would cripple production. These criticisms were echoed simultaneously in attacks on Cot and his policy in the right-wing patriotic press.⁷⁸

In response to these attacks the air ministry went on the defensive. On 1 October a representative from the air ministry assured the Senate commission that the aircraft industry was producing over 100 military aircraft per month.⁷⁹ Before the Chamber aeronautical commission in December, Cot was optimistic. He claimed that aircraft production rates had increased by 25 per cent since the implementation of his nationalization scheme and that production would increase by 30 to 40 per cent in the coming year. He added that the size of the air force had

Léger and Schweisguth, 31 Oct. 1936. See also a note from Delbos to Cot in *DDF*, 2ème série, iii, no. 279, 23 Sept. 1936.

⁷⁶ The Communists and a small minority of both the Socialists and the Radicals opposed the policy of non-intervention. On this question, see P. Renouvin, 'La Politique extérieure de la première gouvernement de Léon Blum', *Léon Blum: Chef du gouvernement* (Paris, 1967), 329–53; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 303–5, 315–21; and Jackson, *Popular Front*, 201–9.

⁷⁷ AS, Commission de l'air, volume entitled 'Séances du 7 mai 1936 au 12 octobre 1939', meetings of 18, 24 July and 1 Oct. 1936.

⁷⁸ AS, Commission de l'air, 'Séances du 7 mai 1936 au 12 octobre 1939', Cot audition, 7 Nov. 1936 (annex). On opposition to Cot's policies, see Boussard, *Aéronautique militaire au parlement*, 113–17.

⁷⁹ AS, Commission de l'air, 'Séances du 7 mai 1936 au 12 octobre 1939', 1 Oct. 1936.

also been increased by 30 per cent.⁸⁰ These figures were exaggerations. While it is impossible to provide precise monthly production figures, it is clear from recent research that production in the French aircraft industry had begun to tail off markedly that autumn. For example, only forty-two aircraft were delivered to the air force in November of 1936 and this figure further declined to thirty-one and twenty-seven aircraft respectively in January and February of the following year. Claims that the air force had increased dramatically in size were also misleading. The rate at which aircraft were introduced into service was clearly slower for the period from July to December of 1936 (the period to which Cot referred) than it had been from January to June of the same year.⁸¹

Having completely reorganized the aircraft industry, Cot was forced to demonstrate that his policies had not paralysed production and compromised French security. The arcane world of aircraft production estimates permitted the air ministry to present all manner of figures which the average politician or layman would interpret as evidence that the industry was healthy and growing. This task would become increasingly difficult in the months to come as the consequences of Cot's willingness to distort intelligence and mislead officials in pursuit of his political objectives became impossible for the air ministry to obscure.

IV

In 1936 French naval policy was caught up in a bitter paradox. It was during this period that the dimensions of the German naval threat finally began to take shape. Naval intelligence rightly warned that the new building programme undertaken by the Reich would pose a major threat to French security in the medium term. At the same time, however, German land and air rearmament was an immediate threat. As a result, French strategic policy shifted to a more overt reliance on Great Britain and funds dried up for the Marine.

Intelligence on the German naval rearmament appears to have continued to come primarily from open sources and assessments therefore continued to be based to a significant degree on speculation. The

⁸⁰ AAN, Commission de l'aéronautique, 16ème législature, Carton 3, Cot audition, 2 Dec. 1936.

⁸¹ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 316 and J. Truelle, 'La Production aéronautique militaire française jusqu'en juin 1940', *RHDGM* (Jan. 1969), 75–110.

Deuxième Bureau summary of German naval planning in October 1936 predicted that the Reich's naval programme aimed at a fully modernized fleet approaching 400,000 tonnes by the beginning of the next decade. This fleet would include two 35,000-tonne capital ships, two more displacing 26,000 tonnes (*Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*); three Panzerschiffe, two aircraft carriers, ten heavy and medium cruisers, twenty-six destroyers, twelve torpedo boats, and fifty submarines. It also predicted that fourteen of the new submarines would be 1,000-tonne long-range prototypes whose principal task would be to disrupt French shipping in the Atlantic. German shipbuilding capacity was estimated at approximately 100,000 tonnes per year and the study judged that the programme would be completed by the summer of 1941 'at the latest'.⁸² This fleet was thought to mark only the first phase of a larger programme to 'restore Germany to the first rank among continental naval powers'. Germany would not respect the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. At the same time, however, delays were reported, particularly in the construction of cruisers and destroyers.⁸³

The chief flaws in assessment remained a lack of reliable technical intelligence. Data on German shipbuilding and detailed information on future planning remained scarce. Despite the reports of delays in construction, the rate of German shipbuilding was exaggerated. By 1936 shortages of labour and especially raw materials were proving a serious handicap to the German naval staff's building programme. The lack of accurate intelligence on German ship specifications meant that French observers continued to underestimate both displacement and armament of the *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst*. Naval intelligence also remained unaware that the capital ships laid down in 1935 and thereafter were 40,000 tonnes and over and therefore violated the qualitative limitations of the existing treaty regime.⁸⁴

This picture of the future Franco-German maritime balance was central to the shift in French naval policy that occurred in 1936. In June Marine staff memoranda for the first time began to acknowledge that a two-power standard was no longer realistic. From this point onward naval planning aimed instead at insuring a decisive superiority over either Germany or Italy. Yet the prospects for even this more modest

⁸² SHM, 1BB2 91-2, *BdR*, 14-28 Oct. 1936. See also 1BB2 94, 'Activité de la flotte allemande', Mar. 1936 and 1BB2 91, *BdR*, 12-26 May 1936.

⁸³ SHM, 1BB2, *BdRs*, 12-26 May and 26 May-9 June 1936.

⁸⁴ Dülffer, *Hitler und die Marine*, 311-15, 425-46, and 568-70; Salewski, 'Marineleitung, und politische Führung', 146-57; and Deist, 'Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 464-72.

objective appeared increasingly bleak. A Deuxième Bureau study prepared in the autumn calculated that the Italian fleet would reach rough parity with the Marine in January 1939. The Italians, it was estimated, would have a clear superiority in capital ships as the two battleships laid down in 1934 were expected to enter into service in 1938 while the *Richelieu* and *Jean Bart* would not be ready until 1940 and 1941, respectively.⁸⁵ This assessment of future Italian naval strength was overblown. As with German estimates, the pace of Italian construction was exaggerated. In the summer of 1936 severe shortages of raw materials (caused primarily by the sanctions imposed by the League of Nations) forced a slowdown of all armaments production. And this situation worsened in the following months as intervention in the Spanish Civil War placed further strains on limited Italian resources.⁸⁶ French naval appreciations did not incorporate these formidable constraints on Italy's naval programme. At the same time British power was played down. Resisting the pronounced drift of French foreign policy towards more overt reliance on Britain, the Section d'Études characterized British naval strength as 'weak' and judged that 'it will be several years before Britain can re-establish its military position in relation to its Great Power responsibilities'. It also warned that the 'powerful Italian fleet' would play a 'capital' role in a Franco-German conflict. The central conclusion, which had been implicit in the navy's position during the Rhineland crisis, was that France could not face an Italo-German coalition on its own and must attempt to secure Italian neutrality.⁸⁷ Not only had the two-power standard been relinquished, worst case thinking had taken root within the Marine staff.

The summer of 1936 therefore marked the debut of a new phase in naval planning and another bid for more credits for naval rearmament. The rearmament plan drawn up by the Section d'Études in late 1936 called for the expansion and acceleration of the existing naval programme. It envisaged the laying down of 150,221 tonnes of new warships over the next three years. This contingent would include two more 35,000-tonne battleships, two aircraft carriers, two 8,000-tonne medium cruisers, and a range of smaller vessels. The aim of the

⁸⁵ SHM, 1BB2 91-2, *BdR*, 14-28 Oct. 1936.

⁸⁶ Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, 19-21, 30-2; B. Sullivan, 'A Fleet in Being: The Rise and Fall of Italian Sea Power, 1861-1943', *IHR* 10: 1 (1988), 119-24.

⁸⁷ SHM, 1BB2 184, 'Note: Position de l'Italie dans la politique européenne', 6 July 1936. This note also stresses that Italian neutrality was not worth reopening the question of parity however.

'three-year programme' was to provide the Marine with 660,000 tonnes of modern warships by the end of 1941. The long-term aim was to bring this figure to 850,000 tonnes by 1946. Newly appointed Naval chief of staff Admiral François Darlan claimed that this programme was an 'absolute minimum' necessary to permit France to conserve its place as the strongest continental maritime power. He also emphasized that it signified 'the abandonment' of the 'traditional' two-power standard.⁸⁸

Yet the Marine failed to obtain the funding for its programme. In Popular Front defence policy clear priority was given to land and air rearmament. Although the three-year programme was approved by both the CSM and CPDN, minister of the marine Gasnier Duparc failed to secure its approval at the cabinet level. The programme fell victim to the 'pause' on government spending decreed by the Blum government in early 1937.⁸⁹ The naval staff blamed Duparc for having failed in his duty to represent the interests of the navy to the government. The reality, however, was that the Marine had lost the privileged status that it had enjoyed in defence spending since the mid-1920s. The spectacular pace of German rearmament on land and in the air presented civil and military authorities with a threat that could not be ignored and the Blum government rightly gave priority to the rearmament of the army and the air force. Its decision was made easier, moreover, by Britain's decision to expand its naval programme and to lay down 231,000 tonnes of new construction in 1937 and 1938. Given the Popular Front's commitment to greater cooperation with Great Britain, the priority given to land and air rearmament was both sensible and necessary.⁹⁰

Intelligence was central to the evolution of national policy in 1936. As Robert Frank has conclusively demonstrated, the Popular Front gave priority to defence over domestic policy when it came to power.⁹¹

⁸⁸ SHM, 1BB2 180, 'La Marine française et le réarmement sur mer des puissances européennes', 16 Mar. 1937; 1BB2 170, 'Situation des flottes européennes continentales au 1er janvier 1937'; 1BB2 170-1, 'Programme de constructions', 26 Apr. 1937. On the evolution of the 'three-year programme', see 1BB2 170-2, 'Les Armements navals français depuis la guerre', 23 June 1937.

⁸⁹ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 77-85; H. Coutau-Bégarie and C. Huan, *Darlan* (Paris, 1989), 131-4; and Masson, 'Réarmement et Marine française', 74-5.

⁹⁰ On Anglo-French relations under the Popular Front, see Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, esp. 54-78.

⁹¹ 'Le Front populaire a-t-il perdu la guerre?', *L'Histoire*, 58 (1983), 58-66 and *Hantise du déclin*, 36-58.

Intelligence estimates of the recrudescence of German military strength, combined with the threat of a European conflict breaking out over the civil war in Spain, were central to the decisions taken by the Blum government in 1936. If the image of German land and air power painted by the intelligence services was somewhat overblown, this did not have a negative effect on policy making in the short term. Significantly, however, the three dominant trends in assessment of the German threat since the early 1930s, the addiction to worst case thinking, the tendency to interpret information to suit predetermined policies, and the politicization of intelligence estimates, all remained central to French 'net assessment'. In the case of the army, the progress of German rearmament was exaggerated to secure funding for rearmament and to justify the strategic conception of a long war in which the strategic initiative would be surrendered to Germany. In the case of air policy, Pierre Cot used intelligence to obtain credits for Plan II and to strengthen his case for a military alliance with the USSR. Naval intelligence similarly exaggerated the pace of the German naval build-up but the ministry of the marine was unsuccessful in squeezing more funding out of the government. Yet, if intelligence was central to the evolution of the first serious land and air rearmament programmes of the inter-war period, the tendency towards exaggeration and politicization would create serious problems in the months to come.

Paralysis

JEAN-BAPTISTE Duroselle described 1937 as a '*pâle année*' in the history of French foreign policy between the wars.¹ From December 1936 to March of 1938 France took no major initiatives while the international situation continued to deteriorate. Caught between an economic crisis which showed few signs of improving and clear evidence of Germany's ever-expanding rearmament programmes, the governments of Léon Blum, and his especially successor Camille Chautemps, gave priority to domestic over external policy. The struggle to maintain the franc and reinvigorate the economy therefore took precedence over rearmament and preparation for a possible war with Germany. Austerity measures were introduced which curbed government spending, halted social reform, and limited the expansion of the armed forces. France remained an introspective nation and the corollary to this introspection was a sort of paralysis in external policy. The foreign policy of Yvon Delbos, who remained at the Quai d'Orsay in the Chautemps government after the fall of Blum in June of 1937, was essentially devoid of energetic initiatives.

Intelligence was a contributing, though not decisive, factor in this paralysis. In 1937 perceptions of the German threat evolved dramatically from deep concern over the future ramifications of Nazi rearmament to the conviction that Germany had established decisive superiority over France both on the ground and in the air. And these perceptions were all the more influential because they took shape against a background of agonizing delays in French rearmament. The result was an often crushing sense of inferiority that constituted a powerful voice of restraint for the makers of policy. Restraint in this context translated into inaction.

¹ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 314–15.

I

In January 1937 Rivet summoned the chiefs of the large SR stations at Lille, Metz, Belfort, Marseilles, and Algiers, as well as the heads of certain smaller posts abroad, to Paris for a two-day conference on the state of secret intelligence. The report drafted by SR Centrale at the conclusion of this conference concluded that, over the past twelve months, the SR had 'performed as well as we could have hoped, given the general situation and the draconian measures taken abroad and particularly in Germany against the investigations of our services'.² But the reports filed by the various station chiefs reveal the range of difficulties the SR faced in delivering secret intelligence to the Deuxième Bureau for analysis in the mid-1930s.

All of the posts in France complained of a lack of personnel and funds. The creation of the new post at Bayonne had been at the expense of experienced SR officers from the Metz and Marseilles stations and both were undermanned. The Belfort head of station echoed the views of the other chiefs when he stressed the ill effects of the devaluation of the franc and requested that the monthly budget of the post be increased to 115,000 francs.³ More importantly, the changes in the European political situation in 1936 had raised important new difficulties. Belgium's policy of neutrality compromised both official and unofficial collaboration with Belgian intelligence, making it more difficult for the Lille station to recruit informants in north-eastern Germany.⁴ All of the stations along the Franco-German border stressed the increased difficulty in traversing the frontier as a result of Nazi security and immigration measures. The Belfort chief concluded that '[t]he atmosphere in Germany is that of a nation in a state of war'. With the destruction of all opposition parties, the complete control the national socialists exercised over the press and the constant surveillance of foreigners, the Hitler state had imposed 'a remarkably ferocious and efficient regime of oppression'. This made it much more difficult to recruit agents and to communicate with informants inside Germany. Meanwhile, restrictions on travel to and from the Reich greatly reduced the number of French citizens who could serve as honourable

² SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'Réunion des chefs de poste (janvier 1937)', 4 Feb. 1937.

³ SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'Activité du poste au cours de l'année 1936', 13 Jan. 1937. The other station reports are in the same dossier.

⁴ SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'Rapport sur l'activité du B.E.N.E. en 1936', 6 Jan. 1937.

correspondents. The 'only favourable new factor', the Belfort report observed, was the presence of large Wehrmacht garrisons near to the Franco-German frontier as a result of the remilitarization of the Rhineland. This would 'facilitate the search for and recruitment of well placed agents'.⁵

A unanimous complaint from all of the posts was a lack of cooperation between the SR and the foreign ministry. Lt. Colonel Henri Kühnmunch, chief of the Metz station, observed that it was 'profoundly regrettable' that the SR station was obliged to depend entirely on its own sources for information on the military situation inside Germany 'when research could be carried out without risk and at relatively little cost from our consulates'. He continued that the remilitarization of the Rhineland provided a pretext 'to overcome the jealous independence of the our diplomatic agents across the Rhine and to coordinate the search and the transmission of intelligence, whether it is for civil or military use'.⁶ In response, SR Centrale admitted that cooperation with the Quai d'Orsay was 'defective' and that this was 'a fact that we have long sought to rectify'. It lamented the fact that no progress had been made.⁷ The foreign ministry's appreciation for intelligence left much to be desired in early 1937.

Despite the increased obstacles to intelligence gathering, the Deuxième Bureau was able to produce relatively astute appreciations of German intentions throughout 1937. It warned that war might erupt in Europe either through an escalation of the Spanish conflict or as a result of German aggression directed against Austria and Czechoslovakia. In a perceptive summary of German intentions prepared in June 1937, intelligence chief Gauché observed that 'the dynamism of the German race' had been invigorated by 'the Hitler mystique'.⁸ The Nazi leadership had mobilized this dynamism for a 'racial struggle against slavism' that would take the form of a *Drang nach Osten* whose central objectives were 'Bohemia and an *Anschluss*'. Gauché also noted that it might also be necessary for Germany to put the French army out of commission before embarking on its racial crusade. Once again French intelligence demonstrated a remarkable grasp of the long-term objectives of Hitler's policy. But the danger of imminent war was

⁵ SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'Activité du poste au cours de l'année 1936', 13 Jan. 1937.

⁶ SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 236, 'L'Activité du poste [BRÉM] au cours de l'année 1936', 8 Jan. 1937.

⁷ SHAT, ARR, 502, dr. 236, 'Réunion des chefs de poste (janvier 1937)', 4 Feb. 1938.

⁸ SHAT, 7N 2522-1, 'La Situation politique et militaire de l'Europe', 4 June 1937.

somewhat exaggerated. As early as January of 1937, referring directly to the danger of the escalation of the Spanish Civil War, another overview from Gauché had stressed that Europe was ‘profoundly divided by two fundamentally hostile ideologies’ and that ‘the possibility of war this year must be taken seriously’.⁹

In reality, the German military had no plans for undertaking offensive operations anywhere in Europe. The Deuxième Bureau’s analysis was based on a misreading of the military balance in Europe which was, in turn, a product of an overblown impression of German capabilities. In early 1937 the Deuxième Bureau reported that in 1936 the Wehrmacht had devoted its main effort to constituting the thirty-six division active army which Hitler had decreed in March of 1935. It predicted that 1937 would be devoted to training reservist formations for the German field army and projected that the size of the German army after mobilization would reach thirty-eight active infantry and SS divisions, four armoured divisions, fifteen to twenty reserve, and twenty-four Landwehr divisions by the end of the year. Significantly, it predicted that all of these formations would be sufficiently armed to take part in full-scale military operations.¹⁰ Once again, anxieties over German demographic and industrial superiority led to key misperceptions and miscalculations.

The most glaring error in appreciations remained the reflex tendency to overestimate the number of reservist formations which could be mobilized and the conclusion that these divisions would be capable of participating in combat from the outset of hostilities. The reality was that in 1937 the German armaments industry continued to be utterly incapable of equipping significant numbers of reserve divisions with sufficient modern material. In fact, right up to the autumn of 1938 the German army remained unable to field a significant number of reserve divisions.¹¹ But there was a larger than usual gulf between perception and reality at this stage. This was owing to Hitler’s decree of 24 August 1936 introducing compulsory two-year military service (France had already taken this measure to compensate for the effects of the ‘lean years’). This move sharpened anxieties over the Franco-German demographic imbalance. The tactic of increasing the length of service

⁹ SHAT, 7N 2522-1, ‘Note au sujet de la possibilité d’un conflit en Europe’, Jan. 1937.

¹⁰ SHAT, 7N 2676, ‘Note sur la réorganisation de l’armée allemande mobilisée’, 18 Jan. 1937; 7N 2676, *BdR*, ‘Les Forces militaires en Allemagne’, Mar.–Apr. 1937.

¹¹ See Williamson Murray’s useful discussion of the constraints which economic and raw material difficulties placed on Germany’s rearmament effort in *Path to Ruin*, 12–27.

in European armies was a familiar one and had played a major role in the arms race leading to war in 1914.¹² In contrast to 1914, however, France was without an eastern counterweight to German demographic superiority. Thus, concern over the ramifications of Hitler's decree was all the more acute. The Deuxième Bureau produced a report on the ramifications of this measure which reached both Gamelin and Daladier the following day. It estimated that two-year service would increase the size of the regular German army from 550,000 to 790,000 effectives by the end of 1937. Although the ratio of officers to men would decrease even further, the overall quality of the German military machine, particularly of reservist divisions, was expected to improve as soldiers would spend an extra year with the regular army before being released into the general reserve.¹³ Another study summed up the situation in the bleakest terms: 'at a time when France is faced with a true manpower crisis, the principal difficulty for the German high command is an overabundance of effectives. This, without a doubt, is one of the key factors in the respective military situations of France and the Reich.'¹⁴ Demographic inferiority was an ever-present consideration, an inescapable reality central to the pessimism that characterized French assessments of the military balance.

In the realm of perception, the transformation of demographic superiority into undisputed military superiority began in late 1936 when the Deuxième Bureau reported that the German field army was in the throes of a profound reorganization. In preparation for total war, the training of Ersatz reservists was being intensified, skeleton general staffs were being created in advance of mobilization and lightly armed battalions of Grenzschutz were being transformed into Landwehr divisions.¹⁵ The latter were considered 'instruments of combat with a mobility and armament comparable to that of active and reservists divisions'. Their role, according to the Deuxième Bureau, would be to assume defensive responsibilities along the German frontier.¹⁶ The

¹² On this question, see Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War* and Herrmann, *Arming of Europe*.

¹³ SHAT, 7N 3434-1, 'Note sur l'augmentation de la durée du service militaire en Allemagne et sa répercussion possible sur l'organisation générale de l'armée allemande', 25 Aug. 1936.

¹⁴ SHAT, 7N 2513, 'Note au sujet de la natalité et du potentiel de guerre du Reich', 24 July 1936.

¹⁵ SHAT, 7N 2513, *RH*, 8-14 and 15-21 Dec. 1936.

¹⁶ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Note sur la réorganisation de l'armée allemande mobilisée' and 'Les Divisions de Landwehr', 18 Jan. 1937.

participation of Landwehr units in the manoeuvres of the second army corps in November of 1936 appeared to confirm the assumption that these formations would play an active role in a possible conflict.¹⁷

Again, a failure to make the connection between reports of endemic raw material shortages and the output of the German armaments industries resulted in flawed estimates of German land strength. French intelligence did not lack information on the dearth of vital raw materials in Germany. Intelligence on the worsening raw material situation flowed into the offices of the Deuxième Bureau weekly from the SR, from Renondeau, and from the Quai d'Orsay. Virtually every weekly intelligence summary produced by the SAE during the first six months of 1937 made reference to this issue.¹⁸ A lengthy SAE report prepared in April judged that '[t]he National Socialist leadership has not resolved the raw material problem, which is the weak link in the formidable industrial machine which they command'.¹⁹ Renondeau, however, appears to have been the only official willing to speculate on the effects that the raw material situation would have on German rearmament. In a report prepared in April he submitted that '[t]he effects of these shortages on production of material and munitions will certainly slow down the reorganization programme of the army'. He added, however that 'to evaluate these effects is difficult—one can only affirm that it will be appreciable'.²⁰

Those responsible for synthesis in Paris, however, were unwilling, and probably psychologically unable, to revise the image of the German army as an emerging juggernaut whose growth was fuelled by an armaments industry of indeterminate but imposing power. The sole analysis of the ramifications of iron ore shortages on German rearmament in the available Deuxième Bureau documentation concludes that rearmament would receive priority above all other considerations in the distribution of raw materials.²¹ In sum, the Deuxième Bureau failed to analyse the relationship between raw material shortages and the rearmament of the Wehrmacht right up to the outbreak of war. This failure led to very inaccurate estimations of industrial output.

¹⁷ SHAT, 7N 2513, *RH*, 15–21 Dec. 1936.

¹⁸ The *RHs* for 1937 can be consulted in SHAT, 7N 2414.

¹⁹ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur le matériel dans l'armée allemande: L'Industrie allemande et le réarmement', Apr. 1937.

²⁰ SHAT, 7N 2599, 'Retards dans les fabrications de matériel', 7 Apr. 1937.

²¹ See e.g. SHAT, 7N 2680–2, *BdR*, Mar.–Apr. 1937; 7N 2644–1, 'L'Approvisionnement de l'Allemagne en matières premières', 29 Nov. 1937 and 'Allemagne: ravitaillement en minéral de fer', 25 Jan. 1937.

Military intelligence considered that Rheinmetall produced enough artillery pieces in 1937 to outfit seventeen infantry divisions (precisely the same estimate produced by the British Industrial Intelligence Centre).²² These errors were compounded by a failure to penetrate the monolithic façade of the Hitler state to detect the confusion and competition of interests within German industry which hamstrung Nazi efforts to subordinate the economy to the needs of rearmament. In April of 1937, for example, the Section Allemande concluded that virtually all of German heavy industry had been mobilized either directly or indirectly in the service of the military.²³ The result was that French intelligence remained wedded to the belief that there existed a German field army which was outfitted with modern equipment and ready to take to the field at short notice.

Air intelligence painted an even more alarming picture of the situation in the air. During the course of 1937 it reported that Germany was making great strides in the construction of the Luftwaffe. In January Poincaré estimated that the size of the German air force had grown to 137 squadrons and over 1,600 first-line and ready-reserve aircraft. German air power had eclipsed that of France in numerical terms.²⁴ Poincaré underlined, however, that the Luftwaffe had grown too quickly and that it was experiencing 'growing pains' at every level. Air crew and pilots were insufficiently trained and the majority of senior officers were former army officers with little experience in the air force. Nor was the quality of the material in service up to standard. 'To our knowledge', the air attaché reported, 'not one squadron is as yet entirely equipped with modern material'. The fighters in service were Heinkel 51 and Arado 68 bi-planes which were inferior in every sense to British, Russian, and French aircraft of the same class. The French air force preserved a clear qualitative edge at this stage.

But the first air intelligence bulletin of 1937 warned that this qualitative advantage would be short-lived.²⁵ It related that, having achieved numerical parity with the French and the British, the German air ministry was preparing a massive renovation programme which would be implemented beginning in the spring of 1937. This programme

²² Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau au travail*, 137. The British estimate is from Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 85.

²³ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur le matériel dans l'armée allemande: L'Industrie allemande et le réarmement', Apr. 1937.

²⁴ SHAT, 7N 2599, 'Considérations sur le développement de l'armée de l'air allemande en 1936', 13 Jan. 1937.

²⁵ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1937.

would provide the Luftwaffe with a new generation of modern aircraft. Information also arrived concerning new engine prototypes which indicated that German engineering had managed to overcome its problems in designing aircraft motors. The Daimler Benz DB 600 and the Jumo 210, both under mass production by 1937, were considered equal to any motor produced in the world.²⁶ In terms of both quality and quantity, the balance of power in the air was about to shift dramatically.

In June the Deuxième Bureau reported that the Luftwaffe had increased by another 22 per cent and that aircraft production had increased by 50 per cent to 360 aircraft per month. The aircraft being introduced, moreover, were part of the renovation programme and therefore ultra-modern. It also added that '[g]iven the existing factory floor space and machine tools, this figure represents only about one-third of maximum possible production'. According to this report, production would continue to expand as the air ministry was going to great lengths to recruit and train workers for the aviation industry. It was predicted that by the end of the year German air strength would total 230 squadrons and 2,670 first-line aircraft with 66 per cent reserves.²⁷ Qualitative problems persisted however. The same report judged that the air force was 'still searching for its definitive structure' and 'appears as yet incapable of participating in large-scale operations'. It projected that 'the hard work and enthusiasm demonstrated by air personnel at every level' would redress these deficiencies in the space of a year.

In sum, air intelligence painted a truly frightening picture of the future balance of power in the air. Contrary to what has often been asserted, this picture was fairly accurate in both its estimates of first-line strength in June of 1937 and its projections for the end of the year.²⁸ In fact, estimates of aeroplane production were low by almost 100 aircraft per month. Where the Deuxième Bureau erred was in continuing to overestimate the percentage of fighting machines produced as opposed to trainers and non-military planes. In 1937 less than half the aircraft produced by the German aviation industry were combat planes

²⁶ SHAA, 2B 62, 'La Rénovation de l'armée de l'air allemande', 7 July 1937. See also Buffotot, 'Le Réarmement aérien allemand', 256.

²⁷ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1937 and 2B 62, 'La Rénovation de l'armée de l'air allemande', 7 July 1937.

²⁸ See e.g. Buffotot, 'Le Réarmement aérien allemand', 263–7—which concludes erroneously that air intelligence overestimated the size of the Luftwaffe by fifty squadrons.

(fighters, bombers, dive bombers, and reconnaissance aircraft).²⁹ This meant that the rate at which new aircraft were introduced into squadrons was actually much slower and that the proportion of modern aircraft in these squadrons was significantly smaller than French intelligence supposed. It also meant that the true number of reserve aircraft was much lower than the Deuxième Bureau was inclined to believe. These mistakes would assume greater significance in the year to come when the Deuxième Bureau came to the conclusion that the Luftwaffe was ready to take part in military operations.

Naval intelligence estimates continued to stress the impact of German naval rearmament on the future maritime balance. A study prepared by the Marine Deuxième Bureau in early 1937 painted an alarming picture of France's strategic position. It predicted that by January 1939 the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* would come into service and the German navy would possess five modern capital ships displacing a total of 82,000 tonnes. At this point the only wholly modern capital ships in the French fleet would be the 26,500-tonne *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg*.³⁰ Perhaps even more ominous, however, was that fact that the German and Italian construction programmes for 1936 and 1937 were considerably larger than those of France. The naval Deuxième Bureau estimated that Germany alone would begin construction of 170,000 tonnes in warships in the coming two years as compared to the 77,000 tonnes the French planned to lay down during the same period. In addition, the French navy would lose 139,067 tonnes of overage warships over the next six years as compared to 26,000 tonnes for the Italian navy and only 800 tonnes for the Kriegsmarine. The Section d'Études therefore concluded that, if the French building programme was not expanded, both the German and Italian fleets would both reach essential parity with the Marine by mid-1943.³¹

And by 1937 there was no doubt that the German fleet was being built specifically for use against France. The first substantial study of German naval thinking had been prepared back in 1932. At this stage the capabilities of the German fleet restricted Kriegsmarine planning to the Baltic Sea. But naval intelligence anticipated that Germany would build eight Panzerschiffe and that the eventual priority of this

²⁹ Overy, 'German Air Strength', 468.

³⁰ SHM, 1BB2 94, 'Étude sur l'activité de la flotte allemande', Jan. 1937; 1BB2 91, *BdRs*, 13 Jan. to 3 Feb. and 25 Feb. to 18 Mar. 1937.

³¹ SHM, 1BB2 170-2, 'Situation des flottes européennes au 1er janvier 1937'; 1BB2 170-2, 'L'Évolution probable des flottes italienne et allemande de 1937 à 1943', 26 Apr. 1937.

fleet would be to attack the lines of communication between France and its African possessions.³² This perception was reinforced in another lengthy assessment of German naval strategy prepared at the end of 1936 which judged that the German naval strategy of 1914–18 had been ‘completely abandoned’ and that Kriegsmarine planners were ‘devoted to the search for ways and means to break out of the narrow seas that confined the German fleet during the Great War’. The German approach to naval construction reflected this thinking. Marine intelligence argued that, in building a fleet of large ships with long range that sacrificed firepower for speed and protection, the German navy was preparing for a *guerre de course* in the Atlantic. It also noted that the German naval staff followed the question of submarine warfare ‘with interest’ and considered that ‘despite its weaknesses, the submarine remains an arm that forces the enemy to take precautions and this justifies its existence’. France was the clear adversary in this strategy. Naval intelligence assumed that the French Marine ‘serves as a guide for [German] construction plans, which are certainly directed against us’.³³

The broader outlines of naval assessment were correct. But it is clear that naval intelligence continued to lack good sources of information on the situation in Germany. Estimates of the pace of German shipbuilding were exaggerated. Here a combination of scarce intelligence, worst case thinking, and politicized estimates once again lay behind errors in assessment. The Deuxième Bureau may have lacked precise data on German naval construction, but there was plenty of evidence of raw material shortages and this was reported in intelligence bulletins.³⁴ Yet, as in the case of land rearmament, the effect of these shortages was not factored into estimates of present and future German construction. The Section d’Études calculated that Germany would build 100,000 tonnes in new warships per year between 1937 and 1939 and 70,000 tonnes each year thereafter.³⁵ This was a rate of production well beyond the capacities of German shipyards. There was doubtless an element of caution in this analysis. But it is important to

³² SHM, 1BB2 93, ‘Idées militaires et conceptions stratégiques dans la Marine allemande’, Nov. 1932.

³³ SHM, 1BB2 94, ‘Étude sur les idées stratégiques et tactiques de la Marine allemande’, Dec. 1936.

³⁴ SHM, 1BB2 91, *BdRs*, 2–23, June, 14–28 Oct., 13 Nov. 1936; 18 Mar. to 15 Apr., 8 Nov. to 9 Dec. 1937.

³⁵ SHM, 1BB2 170–1, ‘Programme des constructions’, 27 Apr. 1937, forwarded by Gasnier-Duparc to Delbos.

remember that estimates were formulated within the context of an intense campaign by the Marine to secure funding for the 'three-year programme'. This imperative must also have influenced the thinking of naval analysts and contributed to their unduly pessimistic view of German building capacity.

The assessment of German naval thinking was also flawed. The assumption that the Kriegsmarine intended to attack French shipping in the Atlantic was essentially correct. But the Deuxième Bureau appears to have been unaware of the debate taking place in Berlin during this period over the future configuration of the German navy. One view was that Germany should build a complete battle fleet. Another possibility was to construct a cruiser fleet around a core of Panzerschiffe whose chief aim would be commerce raiding. A third line of argument, advocated by Admiral Karl Dönitz, was to concentrate on submarine construction in order to wage war most effectively in the short term. The situation was further complicated as Hitler came to play an increasingly active role in naval policy, insisting that priority be given to the construction of big battleships.³⁶ Because this debate was not resolved until well after the outbreak of war, it would be unreasonable to fault French intelligence for a failure to understand German policy. British analysts also underrated the importance attached to submarines by elements within the German naval staff.³⁷ Yet more information on the state of German naval thinking would have been useful in alerting planners to the potential danger that German submarines might pose in the event of war.

II

Intelligence on the political and economic situation inside Germany remained open to interpretation. Throughout 1937 sources continued to report increasing economic difficulties in the Reich. The subordination of economic life to the exigencies of rearmament had undermined Germany's financial situation and lowered the standard of living within the Reich. The SAE considered that the sacrifices imposed on the state in the name of rearmament were steadily increasing and that

³⁶ J. Dülffer, 'Determinants of German Naval Policy, 1920-1939', in Deist (ed.), *German Military in the Age of Total War*, 155-6, 165-7 and Herwig, 'Innovation Ignored', 228-41.

³⁷ Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 146-7 and Maiolo, *Royal Navy*, 67, 73-81.

'Germany has adopted unprecedented measures to push its rearmament; it has sacrificed its exports and it has imposed wartime restrictions on domestic consumption'.³⁸ The SGDN considered, moreover, that the policy of self-sufficiency in agriculture had 'failed completely'.³⁹ It was clear that the working class made the most sacrifices for rearmament. Another study reported that 'the worker is badly paid, undernourished, and forced to submit to an iron discipline'. To some observers, these conditions pointed to an imminent change in Nazi policy. In April, for example, the French commercial attaché in Berlin predicted that a looming economic crisis would force Germany to abandon the course of unlimited rearmament.⁴⁰

This information again raised the possibility of using political and economic inducements to lure Germany back into the world economy. The prospects of such talks seemed particularly good in the light of persistent evidence of widespread raw material shortages, especially of iron ore. Stocks of iron ore were estimated to be sufficient for four months at existing levels of consumption.⁴¹ Officials within the Quai d'Orsay and the SGDN suggested that the moment was opportune for direct negotiations. Military observers, however, remained characteristically sceptical. Both Renondeau and the Deuxième Bureau rejected the possibility that Germany might feel compelled to bargain in good faith. Renondeau correctly judged that the overriding priority of Hitler's policy was rearmament and that 'all other considerations will be subordinated to this single-minded obsession'.⁴² The SAE judged that the strain on the German economy would more likely push Hitler to try to use 'armed conflict' as way of resolving Germany's 'insoluble internal tensions' than convince him to place a brake on Germany's frenetic rearmament effort.⁴³ Another study by the Section Allemande concluded that, rather than manifesting a willingness to scale back rearmament, the Nazi regime had begun the preliminary mobilization

³⁸ SHAT, 7N 2600, 'Economie et réarmement', 22 Sept. 1937.

³⁹ SHAT, 1N 152-6, 'Le Plan de Quatre Ans et l'agriculture', 25 Mar. 1937.

⁴⁰ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 1er trimestre 1937 and SHAT, 7N 2599, commercial attaché report, 21 Apr. 1937.

⁴¹ SHAT, 7N 2514, *RHs*, 12-18 Jan., 26-31 Jan., 1-14 Feb., and 1-8 Mar. 1937; 7N 2599, 'Retards dans les fabrications de matériel', 7 Apr. 1937 and the commercial attaché report of 21 Apr. 1937 in the same carton; 7N 2644, 'Allemagne: Ravitaillement en minéral de fer', 25 Jan. 1937. For the British perspective see Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 177-8 and Salmon, 'British Plans for Economic Warfare against Germany, 1937-1939: The Problem of Swedish Iron Ore', 53-71.

⁴² SHAT, 7N 2599, 'Les Buts de la politique allemande', 12 May 1937.

⁴³ SHAT, 7N 2522-1, 'Note au sujet . . .', Jan. 1937; 7N 2514, *RH*, 24-31 May 1937.

of the German economy for war: 'In effect, from the industrial point of view, the considerable requirements of arming peacetime effectives, producing equipment for reservist divisions, and of constituting stocks of raw materials have already had the effect of forcing the industry onto what is essentially a war footing.'⁴⁴ Renondeau considered that Germany had established a 'rearmament economy', and that the influence of Dr Schacht and all those in favour of increasing production of exportable goods had been completely undermined.⁴⁵ Air intelligence agreed with this assessment. According to the SAE-AIR the German economy had been forged into an instrument of Nazi policy 'in preparation for the war deemed inevitable by the leaders of the Third Reich'.⁴⁶

The key question then became: how much hardship was the German populace willing to endure before it once again posed a threat to the regime as it had in 1918? The response to this question would permit not only a judgement on the strength of the Nazi regime but also a forecast on the likelihood of war, given the assumption was that Hitler would be more likely to make war than to abandon his programme of expansion. Observers in both Paris and Berlin considered that any threat to the regime was a long way off. Assumptions about the German national character again played a central role in assessments. The SGDN stressed the native weakness of the German population in the face of repression: 'It is clear that a totalitarian state possesses considerable advantages in imposing its policies on the populace. This is especially true in a country like Germany, whose citizens are known for their willingness to accept rules and restrictions.'⁴⁷ Renondeau observed that public expressions of dissatisfaction remained very rare: 'The Germans seem to be able to support privation of foodstuffs and other staples of life which would outrage a more sensible and independent minded people. Thus one must not imagine that Hitler's government is teetering merely because Germany is caught up in enormous economic difficulties.'⁴⁸ Air intelligence concurred. Its first intelligence bulletin of 1937 noted that 'discontent is general, people grumble but do not protest. . . . It would be a mistake to imagine that the Nazi government is tottering in the grips of these enormous economic

⁴⁴ SHAT, 7N 2680-2, *BdR*, Mar.-Apr. 1937.

⁴⁵ SHAT, 7N 2600, 'Économie et réarmement', 22 Sept. 1937.

⁴⁶ SHAA, 2B 58, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1937.

⁴⁷ SHAT, 2N 152-6, 'La Capacité de production agricole de l'Allemagne', 18 Aug. 1937.

⁴⁸ SHAT, 7N 2600, 'Économie et réarmement', 22 Sept. 1937.

difficulties'.⁴⁹ Intelligence reports indicated no short- or medium-term threats to Hitler's government and the most recent research on Nazi Germany indicates that this was an accurate assessment.

The concluding paragraph of a report on the question of German rearmament prepared in the spring of 1937 captures the dilemma facing French observers in their efforts to interpret the ramifications of the German economic situation:

The National Socialist leadership has not resolved the raw material problem, which is the weak link in the formidable industrial machine which it commands. In its effort to adapt this machine during peacetime to the needs of war [the Nazi government] has compromised all aspects of economic life in Germany. If the raw material problem remains intractable the entire complex mechanism of the Hitlerian economy will seize. What will happen then? Germany will be forced to decide between two alternatives: either renounce its economic system, which is based exclusively on increasing its war potential, and so renounce its policy of European hegemony; or, and this must be considered the more likely alternative, smash by violence the obstacles to prosperity. This is the dilemma facing the Third Reich. For those observing this drama, it is agonizing.⁵⁰

The scenario was similar to pedestrians watching a motorist plunge recklessly down a crowded street in a large and powerful automobile. Should the driver skid out of control, the damage to the international community would be inestimable. And both soldiers and statesmen realized that France was acutely unprepared to deal with the consequences of such a development.

III

It is essential to remember that the above estimates of the situation in Germany were interpreted within the context of French impotence. In 1937 France's armaments and aviation industries proved utterly unable to cope with the demands of the 1936 rearmament programmes. Neither industry possessed the infrastructure—the floor space and machine tooling—to meet the increased demands of these programmes. In the case of army rearmament the general staff was slow to

⁴⁹ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 1er trimestre 1937. See also Buffotot, 'Le Réarmement aérien allemand', 251–3.

⁵⁰ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur le matériel dans l'armée allemande: L'Industrie allemande et le réarmement', Apr. 1937. See also Young, 'Reason and Madness'.

produce specifications and to make modifications to prototypes, the process of expanding the volume of industrial plants was slow and industrialists proved less than enthusiastic about making the switch from civilian to military production. In addition, labour relations constituted another obstacle to be overcome. The result was that the armaments industry was swamped by the orders placed under the new rearmament programme. By the middle of 1937 debilitating backlogs in production began to set the programme way behind schedule. Lack of necessary heavy equipment forced the cancellation of large-scale manoeuvres in 1937. These delays compromised combat worthiness and undermined morale in the French officer corps.⁵¹

The situation of aircraft production was even worse. Under the air ministry's nationalization and decentralization policies the French aircraft industry was essentially torn apart and reconstructed in 1937. Many factories were completely disassembled and moved, primarily to the south and west of France, where they were re-established from scratch. Production techniques had to be revolutionized, plant had to be modernized, and skilled labour often had to be recruited and trained in different regions.⁵² These processes were time-consuming and in the short term curtailed aircraft production. In 1937 and during the first half of 1938 aircraft production virtually collapsed in France. An excruciating time lag emerged between the investment of government credits and the anticipated expanded production. Even the modest objectives of Plan II proved well beyond the capabilities of French industry. In June of that year the air force received a mere thirty-three aircraft from French industry. At the same time the Deuxième Bureau reported that Germany was producing a minimum of three hundred military aircraft per month.⁵³

The effects of this crisis in production on the Armée de l'Air were debilitating. Morale plummeted, the quality of personnel suffered from lack of training experience with modern material, and the air force high command adopted a deeply pessimistic perspective on the international situation.⁵⁴ The views of the high command were stifled,

⁵¹ Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 111–27; Dutailly, 'Programmes d'armement et structures modernes', 109–23; and Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 222–56.

⁵² Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 127–9; Chadeau, *Blériot à Dassault*, 217–23; Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 102–45; and Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 345–56.

⁵³ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 317 and note 26 above.

⁵⁴ On morale in the Armée de l'Air, see the excellent study of F. Pernot, 'L'Armée de l'air face aux crises des années trente: Une étude du moral', *RHA* 4 (1990), 116–127 and Krauskopf, 'French Air Power Policy', 230. On the state of the French air force in 1937–1938, see

however, by the heavily politicized environment within the air ministry. After a brief honeymoon, most of the air staff had become disenchanted with the politics and leadership style of Pierre Cot. This point of view was strengthened greatly by the foundering aircraft industry. Cot had insulated himself from the disapproval of these senior officials by surrounding himself with trusted military collaborators such as chief of staff Féquant and General Jauneaud who served as buffers between the minister and the air force general staff. Air staff officers began to refer to Féquant derisively as Cot's 'straw-man'. To avoid dealing with the criticisms of the very men he had promoted, Cot rarely convened the Conseil Supérieur de l'Air.⁵⁵ The result was that senior air force generals did not have the opportunity to communicate their views directly to civilian officials. A number of these officials responded by writing anonymous articles criticizing the policies of the air ministry in assorted *revues*. In August of 1937 Féquant was forced to issue a stern warning to senior air force officers to cease these activities and to maintain the tradition of *la grande muette*.⁵⁶ The gulf in understanding and perspective between the air ministry and senior air force officers persisted and worsened throughout the remainder of 1937.

The situation remained unchanged until the first few weeks of 1938 when a cabinet crisis forced Chautemps to form a new government. Cot was replaced as air minister by Guy La Chambre. La Chambre was another young Radical and close collaborator of Daladier. At this juncture General Joseph Vuillemin, Commander of the First Air Corps, took the extraordinary measure of circumventing the existing command structure and writing directly to La Chambre about the 'extreme gravity of the situation'. Vuillemin outlined the dismal state of the French air force: *matériel* in service was outdated, reserve aircraft were virtually non-existent, and morale had reached an all-time low. He concluded by forecasting that, given the growing strength of the Luftwaffe, 'I am convinced that, if a conflict erupts this year, our air force would be annihilated in a matter of days'.⁵⁷

If the situation on the ground was less desperate, the French army

P. Facon, 'Le Haut Commandement aérien français et le problème du réarmement, 1938-1939', *RHA* 3 (1989), 91-101 and Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 418-23.

⁵⁵ Krauskopf, 'French Air Power Policy', 230-1 and Gunsburg, *Divided and Conquered*, 45-6.

⁵⁶ Armengaud, *Batailles politiques*, 36; Krauskopf, 'French Air Power Policy', 237.

⁵⁷ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12964, Vuillemin to La Chambre, 15 Jan. 1938.

was anything but bellicose in 1937. The effect of intelligence assessments on the army general staff was to confirm and even to reinforce those assumptions about German military potential upon which French foreign policy and military planning were based. The result was a strengthening of the caution and defensive orientation which the high command had evinced since the early 1930s. There were no fundamental alterations in French military planning.

The notion that Germany could only be defeated in a *guerre d'usure* was more firmly entrenched than ever. Gamelin's observations before the CSG confirm this and reveal the extent to which the inevitability of a Franco-German war had taken hold in the mind of the future commander-in-chief: 'A conflict with Germany will mean a long struggle. Everything will depend on our ability to hold the frontier and to profit from our national resources and those of our allies.'⁵⁸ This view was echoed in an overview of the military situation by Gauché that speculated on the possibilities of a German offensive in the west.⁵⁹ He stressed that mechanisms of the Hitler state would allow the Nazi government to take a swift decision for war, to camouflage the initial stages of its mobilization, and to put the German nation on a war-footing more quickly and effectively than was possible in France. Gauché judged that France's imperatives must be to ensure its ability to turn back the initial onslaught and to secure allies for the long struggle which would ensue. He concluded, therefore, that the engagement of the United Kingdom must be the '*point capitale*' of the French strategic conception. There was wide-ranging consensus on this point. In February of 1937 the CPDN decided to assume a British alliance in case of a war with Germany.⁶⁰

To summarize, French self-perception was integral to the process of 'net assessment' during this period. It was at least as important as intelligence on German military power in shaping perceptions of the strategic situation. Inflated appreciations of the military situation in Germany interacted with an acute sense of France's vulnerability in an ongoing dynamic which would distort perceptions of the military balance well into the autumn of 1938.

⁵⁸ SHAT, Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224-9, 'Projets pour la séance prochaine', 9 Nov. 1937.

⁵⁹ SHAT, 7N 2522-1, 'La Situation politique et militaire de l'Europe', 4 June 1937.

⁶⁰ SHAT, 2N 24, *Procès-verbal* of the CPDN of 15 Feb. 1937.

IV

The conviction that the European balance of power had tilted in favour of Germany underpinned analyses of the international situation. In early 1937 Gauché outlined two possible scenarios for Franco-German relations.⁶¹ In the first scenario, Germany's expansionist drive would be delayed to give the German army time to continue with the expansion and reorganization programmes of 1935 and 1936. General Renondeau was a guarded proponent of this thesis. He stressed repeatedly that the German army was not ready for a general European war and estimated that the programme announced to the world in 1935 would not be achieved completely until the spring of 1938 at the earliest.⁶² In a remarkably perceptive assessment forwarded to Paris in March of 1937, Renondeau judged Germany would devote the next twelve to fourteen months to preparing its army and air force for war. He projected that by the autumn of 1938 the Wehrmacht would be ready and that Germany would embark on a new phase in its policy. The Reich would 'change its tone and its attitude completely'. The first priority of this policy would be to 'settle the fate of Czechoslovakia'.⁶³ The Section Allemande concurred with Renondeau and judged the army 'absolutely opposed to any international conflict in 1937'.⁶⁴ It did not, however, rule out the possibility of a general war. The difficulties inherent in reading the Führer's intentions, in understanding the implications of Germany's economic problems, combined with the moribund pace of French rearmament, precluded such a categorical judgement.

The second possibility which Gauché envisaged was that Hitler's 'taste for risks' might well force Europe over the brink before anyone felt ready to make war. According to Gauché, although the Wehrmacht of 1937 was incapable of breaking through France's Maginot defences or forcing its way through Belgium, it did constitute a 'first rate offensive force' for use against one of its smaller neighbours in central Europe.⁶⁵ Although he had a slightly more accurate view of the readiness of the German army, Renondeau was unwilling to dismiss the possibility of war. He judged that Germany could make war against

⁶¹ SHAT, 7N 2522-1, 'Note au sujet de la possibilité d'un conflit en Europe', Jan. 1937.

⁶² SHAT, 7N 2597, Renondeau to Paris, 28 Apr.; 7N 2598, 2 Dec. 1936; 7N 2599, Renondeau to Paris, 27 Jan. 1937.

⁶³ SHAT, 7N 2599, Renondeau to Paris, 3 Mar. 1937.

⁶⁴ SHAT, 7N 2514, *RH*, 1-14 Feb. 1937.

⁶⁵ SHAT, 7N 2522-1, 'Note au sujet de la possibilité d'un conflit en Europe', Jan. 1937.

France with prospects of success provided 'it achieves surprise and is not forced to fight a long war'.⁶⁶ Moreover, in Renondeau's view the German army was at this point 'capable of winning a limited war against Czechoslovakia or Poland easily should England remain neutral and France passive'.⁶⁷

Anxieties concerning the possibility of war at a juncture when France was manifestly unprepared were heightened by intelligence which indicated that the Germans were seriously contemplating a move against Czechoslovakia. In early January the SR obtained a copy of the major exercise conducted by the German general staff in 1936. This document, almost certainly provided by Paul Thümmel, was based on the theme of an invasion of Czechoslovakia with defensive operations along the Franco-German frontier.⁶⁸ Renondeau simultaneously reported an increased '*psychose de guerre*' in German public opinion and the Section Allemande concluded that '[m]ore and more, the idea of an imminent and inevitable war has taken hold at every level of German society'.⁶⁹ This information only strengthened anxiety that a conflict was possible.

At the heart of this uncertainty was the impossible task of determining to what degree the readiness of the Wehrmacht mattered in Hitler's calculations. Renondeau observed that the decision for war rested with the Führer. 'Hitler', he judged, 'is several steps ahead of the high command—forcing it to assume responsibilities for which it does not feel ready'.⁷⁰ He also warned that the Germans might not wait until their army had reached its maximum effectiveness to make war. The central criterion would be the relative strength of Germany's chief enemy, and that enemy was France. At this point Renondeau's clear distaste for domestic French politics influenced his reading of the situation: 'Internal struggles', he observed, 'might sharply diminish the military power of France; at least this is a common assumption in Germany'.⁷¹ Hitler might well be 'encouraged by our inaction during the past few years' and 'convinced that France is sliding inexorably towards a state of internal disintegration which will render us unable to act'. This

⁶⁶ SHAT, 7N 2599, Personal letter from Renondeau to Gamelin, 14 Jan. 1937 and 'Conditions d'une guerre prochaine entre l'Allemagne et la France', 27 Jan. 1937.

⁶⁷ SHAT, 7N 2598, Renondeau report, 2 Dec. 1936.

⁶⁸ AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, 5 Jan. 1937.

⁶⁹ SHAT, 7N 2599, personal letter from Renondeau to Gamelin, 14 Jan. 1937. For the conclusions of the German desk, see 7N 2514, *RH*, 26–31 Jan. 1937.

⁷⁰ SHAT, 7N 2597, Renondeau to Paris, 16 Mar. 1936.

⁷¹ SHAT, 7N 2598, Renondeau to Paris, 2 Dec. 1936.

impression, Renondeau considered, would only strengthen the position of radicals like Ribbentrop and Himmler and thus increase the chances of Nazi adventurism.⁷²

This was an impressive, if not completely accurate, reading of the situation. Yet, despite the claims of intelligence veterans and memoirists, French leaders were not provided with a 'timetable' for German aggression in 1937. Paul Paillole has claimed that Hans-Thilo Schmidt [Asché] provided French embassy press secretary Dejean with a detailed summary of the proceedings of an important conference which took place in Berlin on 5 November 1937. This was the celebrated Hossbach conference where Hitler outlined his plans for European expansion, beginning with Austria and Czechoslovakia, to a stunned audience of high-level military and diplomatic officials.⁷³ Moreover, Gauché's memoirs also refer to a document obtained by the Deuxième Bureau in 1937 that provided a 'timetable' for German domination of Europe. Finally, a translation of the Hossbach memorandum appears among the attaché reports from Berlin to Paris in November 1937.⁷⁴ Yet a careful scrutiny of this document reveals that Paillole is mistaken. First, the translation of the Hossbach memorandum was definitely made after the war. Second, the document which Gauché describes is definitely not the Hossbach memorandum as it describes a completely different plan of aggression than the one outlined by Hitler in the original German transcript. Third, from the transcript of the telegram which François-Poncet sent to Paris on 6 November 1937 it is clear that the French ambassador had no specific knowledge of what was discussed beyond the allocation of raw materials. Nor do Renondeau reports in November and December 1937 give any hint that he had knowledge of the proceedings of this meeting. On 21 December, for example, he remarked that Hitler's intentions remained 'enveloped in cloudy uncertainty'.⁷⁵ Finally, the *rapport hebdomadaire* prepared by the Deuxième Bureau for the week in question refers to the 'important character' of the meeting of 5 November but only for its revelation that Germany was having difficulty obtaining raw materials for

⁷² SHAT, 7N 2599, Renondeau to Paris, 22 Mar. 1937.

⁷³ Paillole, *Notre espion*, 107–17.

⁷⁴ Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau au travail*, 34–35, 48; SHAT, 7N 2600, among the Nov. dispatches.

⁷⁵ See e.g. Renondeau's report of 21 Dec., where he remarks that Hitler's next move remained 'enveloped in cloudy uncertainty' in SHAT, 7N 2600. A translation of François-Poncet's telegram appears in D. Porch's convincing rejection of Paillole's claim in a review article 'French Spies and Counter-Spies', *LNS* 2 (1987), 191–5.

rearmament. No mention is made in this report of any 'blueprint' of Hitler's aggressive intentions.⁷⁶ While it is clear that the Deuxième Bureau identified Austria and Czechoslovakia as the next targets of German aggression as early as the summer of 1936, there is no proof that the French intelligence provided the Quai d'Orsay, Daladier, or the high command with a copy of the proceedings of the celebrated conference at the German chancellery on 5 November.

The intelligence services did identify two additional threats posed by Nazi policy: the German political and economic offensive in the Danubian basin and the evolution of the Rome–Berlin Axis. The Deuxième Bureau underlined the vulnerability of Romania and Yugoslavia in particular to the spread of German influence. The successes of Nazi propaganda in playing on anti-Bolshevist sentiments in these states, the damage that the Rhineland crisis had done to French prestige in this region, the failure of France to provide Yugoslavia and Romania with armaments, and, most importantly, the natural commercial ties between industrial Germany and the raw-material producing economies of these states, combined to sap French influence in this region. Barter arrangements permitted Germany to obtain large quantities of raw materials from the Balkan states in exchange for the arms and other capital goods which France was unable to supply.⁷⁷ Germany also threatened to supplant France as the chief purveyor of arms in eastern Europe and the Balkans. The Deuxième Bureau and the various military attachés posted to these states warned repeatedly of the tragic bearing that German economic and political penetration would have on French hopes for a viable second front in eastern Europe. Gauché cautioned again in June that Germany was preparing the way for its expansion into the region by working assiduously to isolate individual states in order to ensure that 'the constellation of peoples which opposed Germany during 1914–18 cannot be reconstructed'.⁷⁸ The military attaché in Belgrade, Colonel Antoine Béthouart, summed up the essence of the problem when he observed that 'one does not purchase arms from one's potential enemy'.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ SHAT, 7N 2514, RHs of 8–14 Nov. and 15–22 Nov.; Renondeau in SHAT, 7N 2600.

⁷⁷ On the German economic offensive in south-eastern Europe before the Second World War, see D. Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War: Germany, Britain, France and Eastern Europe 1930–1939* (Princeton, 1980) and M. C. Kaser and E. A. Radice (eds.), *An Economic History of Eastern Europe 1919–1975*, ii. *Interwar Policy, the War and Reconstruction* (Oxford, 1986).

⁷⁸ SHAT, 7N 2522–1, 'La Situation politique et militaire de l'Europe', 4 June 1937.

⁷⁹ SHAT, 7N 3195–1, Béthouart (Military attaché in Belgrade) to Daladier, 6 June

The French military responded to these perceived threats by attempting to tighten relations with the General Staffs of Yugoslavia and Romania in 1937. The chiefs of staff of the Romanian and Yugoslav armies were invited to the army's August manoeuvres and received deferential treatment during their stay. The following month Gamelin travelled to Budapest to attend Yugoslavian manoeuvres. The success of this military diplomacy was very limited however. Although Gamelin was able to establish good relations with senior Romanian and Yugoslav military officials, he could promise neither state rapid delivery of the large contingents of arms and equipment which they had ordered in France. French armaments manufacturers had been overwhelmed by the orders placed under the Popular Front rearmament programme of the previous year and could not meet their commitments to these states. In fact, Gamelin had approved the requisitioning of armaments produced for Yugoslavia and Romania in order to equip the French army. Political and military relations between France and the Balkan states foundered over this intractable problem. Essentially, Gamelin lacked the military and political capital essential to the success of his military diplomacy and his attempts to influence Romanian and Yugoslav policy failed utterly.⁸⁰

An equally vexing problem was the evolution of relations between Italy and Germany. Having concluded in the early 1930s that Nazi Germany would attempt to secure Italian support, or at the very least acquiescence, before embarking on an aggressive policy in eastern Europe, French intelligence monitored with anxiety the development of the Axis from the autumn of 1936 to the autumn of 1937.⁸¹ A steady stream of reports arrived from both Berlin and Rome of frequent contacts between German and Italian military officials.⁸² Despite mounting evidence of collusion between Germany and Italy in Spain and elsewhere, the Deuxième Bureau, like the rest of the French military establishment, was reluctant to accept the final demise of the Franco-Italian alliance. In September 1936 the intelligence department

1936. For other warnings from intelligence sources about the threat which German penetration posed to French interests, see the treatment of this subject in Jordan, *Popular Front*, 108–45, 188–279 and Thomas, *Britain, France*, 183–91.

⁸⁰ See SHAT, 5N 579, Dossiers nos. 7 and 8 entitled 'Cessions du matériel à l'étranger'. See also Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 224–9 and Lungu, *Romania*, 35–82.

⁸¹ Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy*, 137–55 and Young, 'Franco-Italian Alliance', 143–68.

⁸² AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, 10 June 1936 and SHAT, 7N 2514, *RH*, 1–14 Feb. 1937 and 7N 2599, 'Note sur l'attitude actuelle de l'Italie', Sept. 1936.

submitted that Italy remained attentive to the threat which a German push into the Balkans posed to its interests in the eastern Mediterranean. It concluded that Mussolini would 'retain complete freedom of action' and that potential for conflict between Germany and Italy persisted.⁸³ The following June, Gauché remained convinced that the Rome–Berlin Axis was 'fragile' and that there existed still 'considerable antagonism of interests'.⁸⁴ These impressions, probably based on intercepted Italian diplomatic traffic, were not unfounded. Up to the autumn of 1937 Italo-German negotiations left open the key question of Italian interest on the Danube and had made no mention of an *Anschluss*.⁸⁵ The military was deceiving itself in its hopes to revive the military alliance with Italy. Repeated flagrant violations of the non-intervention agreement—an agreement conceived by the French foreign ministry—had nourished a vibrant Italo-phobia within the Quai d'Orsay, particularly with Secretary General Léger. The Blum and Chautemps governments were utterly unwilling to pay Mussolini's price, tacit cooperation in the destruction of the Spanish Republic, for an entente with Italy. From November 1936 to the autumn of 1938 there was neither a French ambassador in Rome nor an Italian ambassador in Paris.

Notwithstanding these moribund diplomatic relations, the army was loathe to treat Italy as an enemy in its planning and continued to cling almost pathetically to the hope that Rome could be detached from Berlin. Secret intelligence work against the Italians only resumed in August of 1937, long after the French had become aware that Italy was once again spying on France.⁸⁶ In early November of 1937 Mussolini travelled to Germany to meet with Hitler. During this visit the Führer and the Duce had implicitly agreed that Austria must move firmly into the German orbit. The Deuxième Bureau, however, erroneously reported that Hitler had been disappointed by the results of this meeting because no formal military convention had been signed.⁸⁷ Hopes to secure Italian neutrality, if not cooperation, endured in the high command through to May of 1940.

⁸³ SHAT, 7N 2598, 'Note sur l'attitude actuelle de l'Italie', Sept. 1936.

⁸⁴ SHAT, 7N 2522-1, 'La Situation politique et militaire de l'Europe', 4 June 1937.

⁸⁵ Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy', 633-4 and Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, 334-6.

⁸⁶ AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, 3, 7, 8, 26 May and 4, 6 Aug. 1937.

⁸⁷ SHAT, 7N 2522-1, untitled SAÉ note of 12 Nov. 1937.

The sense of urgency with which service officials viewed the international situation was slow to resonate outside the relatively narrow confines of the military establishment. For most of the civilian leadership, Nazi foreign policy initiatives, in contrast to rearmament policy, did not pose an immediate threat to international stability. Even the more pessimistic politicians were convinced that France would enjoy a period of respite until Germany was ready to make war.⁸⁸ Once again, defence spending provides the best indication of government attitudes towards the German threat. In May and June 1937 yet another run on the franc caused a financial crisis. Having failed to obtain powers of decree from a mistrustful Senate, Blum resigned mid-June. A new government was formed by Camille Chautemps in which Georges Bonnet replaced Vincent Auriol as finance minister. Bonnet reintroduced a policy of rigid austerity aimed at cutting spending and restoring the faith of investors. Financial considerations once again received priority over the German threat in national policy. All three service ministries were forced to comply with the 'pause' which the new finance minister extended to the rearmament effort in mid-1937.⁸⁹

Daladier did not fight hard for more credits for rearmament. Despite the warnings of intelligence officials, he appears to have assumed that war could either be avoided or put off until French rearmament had affected a *redressement* of the situation. At the Radical Party congress at Lille in October of that year, he agreed with Bonnet's position that financial solvency must receive priority over rearmament in national policy. In his private papers for this period there are frequent references to the 'uncertainties of the international situation' but nowhere does the defence minister refer to war with Germany as an imminent possibility.⁹⁰ Although Daladier was alarmed at the apparent tightening of the Axis in September of 1937, it was not until the aftermath of the German annexation of Austria that he appears to have awakened fully to the danger of approaching conflict. Defence policy remained oriented more towards deterrence than preparation for war.

⁸⁸ E. Bonnefous, *Histoire politique de la Troisième République*, vi (Paris, 1965), 101–2.

⁸⁹ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 164–76.

⁹⁰ The relevant cartons for this period are AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 6, 7, 13, 28–32. On the party congress, see Berstein, *Crise du radicalisme*, 512–18 and Bonnefous, *Histoire politique*, vi, 207–8.

The increasingly grim prognostications for the future naval balance prepared by the *Marine Deuxième Bureau* and the *Section d'Études* were central to the *rue Royale's* campaign to secure funding for the three-year programme in 1937. This campaign was conducted under the leadership of newly promoted chief of naval staff Admiral François Darlan. Darlan had long been one of the navy's rising stars. The son of a republican senator and cabinet minister of the pre-1914 era, Darlan had ties to the centre-right of the French parliamentary spectrum in general, and to long-time minister of the *Marine* Georges Leygues in particular. Darlan had risen swiftly through the *Marine* hierarchy in the inter-war years. By 1937 he was a veteran of the politics of defence policy, having spent much of the 1920s and early 1930s in the ministerial cabinet of Georges Leygues. In addition to his strengths as an officer, he owed his accession to the summit of the naval establishment in large part to his reputation as a reliable republican Admiral and to his close ties first to Leygues and later to Gasnier-Duparc. Yet, despite his political connections, Darlan would prove a most independent-minded naval chief, establishing unprecedented authority over the French navy during a period of continual crisis.⁹¹

The bleak naval intelligence appreciations of German and Italian building programmes cited above were deployed in a series of increasingly alarmist notes drafted by the naval staff and forwarded usually unmodified by the minister to various members of the government. One such note prepared for Blum in April warned that 'the reappearance of Germany as a world power at sea has overturned all aspects of our naval position' and that Europe was now embroiled in a 'veritable naval arms race'. Both Britain and Italy had introduced important new programmes while German naval construction had doubled since 1935 to more than 100,000 tonnes per year. It argued that the proposed three-year scheme was a replacement rather than a rearmament programme and that it was essential that the Blum government break with practice and approve the funding for all three years of construction rather than grant funds for only one year at a time.⁹² In an effort to enlist the support of the foreign minister, Gasnier-Duparc warned Delbos that France was in danger of 'losing its status as a Great Power' if the three-year programme was not approved.⁹³ Before the cabinet in

⁹¹ Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 28–34, 68–121.

⁹² SHM, 1BB2 170–1, 'Situation navale de la France en Europe', 27 Apr. 1937.

⁹³ SHM, 1BB2 170–1, 'Programme de constructions neuves pour la Marine', Gasnier-Duparc to Delbos, 15 May 1937.

May the minister demanded 7.9 billion francs for new construction over the next three years. He warned that if these funds could not be found, the French navy would be unable to 'fulfil its strategic responsibilities' by the early 1940s. Similar warnings were repeated to various government officials throughout the remainder of 1937 in an increasingly desperate bid for credits.⁹⁴

Through 1937, however, the Marine was unsuccessful in obtaining the necessary credits for its proposed programme. The Blum government was unwilling to make the financial commitment to a three-year scheme. The programme would instead be approved in annual tranches 'according to financial possibilities'. But even this compromise was undermined by Bonnet's determination to reduce expenditures and the entire programme fell victim to the 'pause' of 1937.⁹⁵

The case of Pierre Cot and French air policy is the most complex of the three service ministers. The intelligence received by the air ministry indicated clearly that a tremendous gulf was opening up between the productive capacities of the French and German aircraft industries. The chief problem confronting French industry, even after the decentralization programme had been completed, was the lack of factory floor space and machine tools. For France to have any hope of rivalling German aircraft production, tremendous increases in financial outlays for the expansion of industrial plant were absolutely essential.⁹⁶ The air ministry failed to secure these outlays, however, and its rearmament effort remained essentially static through 1937. Why was French air rearmament permitted to languish in the face of mounting evidence that the pace of Luftwaffe expansion was increasing steadily with no apparent ceiling to its growth? The explanation to this crucial question is twofold. First, Bonnet's austerity policies actually scaled back French air rearmament by extending the projected completion of Plan II to 1940.⁹⁷ Second, Cot was battling for his political survival throughout 1937 and his tenuous position within the government made it very risky to apply vigorous pressure for more credits.

The air minister had come under heavy fire in debates over defence in the Chamber during the final week of January and the first week of

⁹⁴ SHM, 1BB2 170-1, 'Exposé du Ministre de la Marine', 19 May 1937; 1BB2 170-2, Darlan before an ad hoc meeting of the members of the CPDN, 19 July 1937; 1BB2 170-3, 'Note', Campinchi to Chautemps, 30 Oct. 1937; 1BB2 170-3, 'Des conditions de la guerre dans la situation internationale présente', 12 Nov. 1937.

⁹⁵ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 132-70 and Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 132-4.

⁹⁶ Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 140-5. ⁹⁷ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 82.

February in 1937. He was accused of politicizing the air force and condemned for his doctrinaire approach to nationalization.⁹⁸ Pressure on Cot increased as the precipitous decline in aircraft production became more and more apparent. By the end of the year, the air minister and the Senate air commission were engaged in open warfare. Before the commission in March Cot faced fierce criticism.⁹⁹ Several commission members argued that production had declined by 50 per cent of what it had been under the old private ownership regime and that there were eighteen-month delays in the delivery of aircraft to the air force. When Cot responded that production was about to take off he was jeered and accused openly of bad faith. On 27 May the commission drafted a note to Cot demanding 'the truth on the actual situation of our aircraft production'. The note also submitted that French air policy 'suffers from two sicknesses: nationalization and the 40-hour legislation'. Both of these '*maux*' were attributed to the Cot ministry and the clear implication was that he should resign.¹⁰⁰

Rather than admit that the situation had grown desperate and call for more credits, Cot's response to this pressure was to distort the situation of French air power both publicly and before the parliamentary commissions. In Bordeaux on 18 June, for example, he boasted that the modern material in the air force had increased by 110 per cent and that, after the Soviet Union, France possessed the most powerful air force in Europe. Speaking at Nantes several weeks later he declared that the power of the French air force had increased by 80 per cent during his tenure as air minister.¹⁰¹ These were patent falsehoods. The number of new planes received by the air force had decreased by nearly 30 per cent during the first twelve months of Cot's tenure as air minister.¹⁰² All aircraft which had been received, moreover, were outdated planes designed for Plan I. They lacked the gyros, the motorized cannon, and the retractable landing gear with which the latest German and British aircraft were equipped. The only modern prototypes which had entered the production phase by the end of 1937 were a handful of

⁹⁸ Krauskopf, 'French Air Power Policy', 230-1 and Boussard, *Aéronautique militaire au parlement*, 122-3.

⁹⁹ AS, Commission de l'Air, 'Séances du 7 mai 1937 au 12 octobre 1939' (annex), Cot Audition, 1 Mar. 1937. See also the account of British air attaché Colyer of a conversation with de la Grange of 14 May 1937 in PRO, FO 371, 20694, C 3571/122/17.

¹⁰⁰ AS, Commission de l'Air, 'Séances du 1 mai 1937 au 12 October 1939', 27 May 1937.

¹⁰¹ See the British air attaché's reporting on these speeches in PRO, FO 371 20694, C 4601/122/17, 25 June 1937; C 5966/122/17, 19 Aug.; and C 6436/122/17, 14 Sept. 1937.

¹⁰² Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 316.

Potez 63 and Morane 405 fighters which the air force did not receive until the summer of 1938.¹⁰³

Yet in March Cot appeared before the Chamber aeronautical commission with reassurances that France had more than two thousand aircraft 'ready to take to the air within the hour' and another 3,329 in reserve. He also argued that once Plan II had been completed: 'according to the calculations of our general staff, by 1940 we will have achieved rough parity with the German air force, at least in terms of first-line forces.'¹⁰⁴ This was a distortion of both the state of the French air force and of intelligence on the growth of German air power. It also contradicted what Cot had indicated to the CPDN the previous June and July. The French air force had nothing close to 2,000 aircraft ready for service in March of 1937.¹⁰⁵ The reality was that air intelligence reports had made a mockery out of Plan II. The air force general staff considered the air ministry rearmament programme manifestly insufficient and had indicated as much when it devised a new rearmament plan in February. This programme, Plan IV, marked the air staff's first attempt to make changes to the course of French air policy during the Popular Front era. It called for doubling the dimensions of Plan II to create an air force of nearly 3,000 first-line aircraft by 1939.¹⁰⁶ Contrary to common belief, Cot was not involved in the formulation of Plan IV, did not approve of it, and did not support it when it came before the CPDN for approval in February of 1937. At this meeting Cot instead observed that any further plan was impracticable because Plan II constituted the maximum effort of which the French aircraft industry was capable.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Facon, 'Le Haut Commandement aérien français et le problème du réarmement', 93–5 and Christienne and Buffotot, 'Armée de l'air française', 222–3.

¹⁰⁴ AAN, Commission de l'Aéronautique, 16ème Législature, no. 3, Cot audition, 17 Mar. 1937.

¹⁰⁵ Christienne, 'L'Armée de l'air française', 222–3. For further examples of Cot's misleading statements, see Boussard, *L'Aéronautique militaire au parlement*, 123–4.

¹⁰⁶ For the specifics of the aborted Plan IV, see SHAA, 2B 1–4 and a copy of this document in FNSP, Archives Pierre Cot, PC 4, dr. 1. A note attached to this document indicates that it was forwarded to Cot by the Service Historique de l'Armée in June 1971. See also Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 262.

¹⁰⁷ SHAT, 2N 22, *Procès-verbal* of the CPDN, 15 Feb. 1937. There is a copy of this document in Cot's papers, FNSP, PC4, dr. 1 that was also forwarded to him in June of 1971. See also Guy La Chambre's testimony in *Les Événements*, ii, 299–300. In a memoir account, Cot blames the CPDN for the rejection of this plan and his explanation has been accepted by Charles Christienne, Patrick Facon, and Herrick Chapman. Robert Frank, however, has shown that the plan was prepared without Cot's knowledge and that the air minister did not approve of the plan, Cot, *Triumph of Treason*, 297; Christienne, 'L'Armée de l'air française', 219; Facon,

Cot was justified in rejecting Plan IV. Any additional credits voted to air rearmament would have languished unused until such time as the aeronautical industry recovered and resumed production on an expanded scale.¹⁰⁸ What was needed before any truly ambitious rearmament programme could be implemented was a major expansion of the infrastructure of France's aviation industry. Yet the available archives and the existing memoir and secondary literature provide no evidence of Cot lobbying for a major expansion of industrial plant. The organ whose responsibility it would have been to approve any such programme was the CPDN. Cot made no such request in the six meetings of the CPDN in 1937. Nor did he solicit more credits from the Senate or Chamber commissions for this purpose. Members of both commissions, in fact, suggested further measures to expand the productive potential of the aviation industry. But Cot informed Maurice Béranger of the Chamber commission that the industry had reached the limit of its growth rate and that further expansion of industrial plant was impossible.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, in November, the air minister rejected a proposal by Senator de la Grange for a 300 million franc programme aimed at expanding industrial plant on the grounds that the credits were simply not available.¹¹⁰

The partisan politics of the Popular Front period had hamstrung air policy under Cot. Given the financial atmosphere of the summer of 1937, to have any hope of securing the necessary credits, the air minister would have had to sound the tocsin, revealing the extent to which aircraft production had deteriorated and exposing the acute disparity which was emerging between French and German air power. Cot's fragile political position, however, prevented him from pushing aggressively for additional funding. Public awareness of France's acute inferiority in the air compared to Germany, particularly after the air minister's confident and repeated assurances of progress, would have

'Le Plan V', 53; Chapman, *French Aircraft Industry*, 338 n. 6; and Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 262. There was another probable motive for Cot's rejection of this plan. With its emphasis on fighter production, Plan IV would have altered the composition of the Armée de l'Air, better enabling it to defend French air space but detracting from its role as a long-range strike force. Such a programme was antithetical to Cot's commitment to strategic bombing and was doomed to failure as long as he was air minister.

¹⁰⁸ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 83–5 and Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 339–43. Vivier misunderstands the political dimension to Cot's position however.

¹⁰⁹ AAN, Commission de l'Aéronautique, 16ème Législature, no. 3, Cot audition, 17 Mar. 1937.

¹¹⁰ AS, Commission des Finances, sous-commission de contrôle des dépenses engagées par la défense nationale, 'Séance du 24 novembre 1937'.

exposed Cot to his political enemies and certainly have brought about his political downfall. The air minister chose instead to cast the situation in a positive light, to await the dividends of his restructuring programmes and to intensify his campaign for a military alliance with the USSR as the only way to redress the industrial imbalance between France and Germany.

Before the Chamber aeronautical commission in March, Cot once again contended that German industrial power was twice that of France and that, in wartime, Germany would produce twice as many aircraft as France. 'To indicate otherwise would be to deceive you', he continued and concluded by arguing that 'this fact places certain obligations on our foreign policy—namely to search for allies capable of helping us counterbalance German power'.¹¹¹ He returned to this theme when the CPDN met in May, arguing that France could not hope to compete with German productive capacity and that only alliances with other states interested in opposing German power could redress this imbalance.¹¹² Indeed, as Cot admitted in his memoirs, strategic planning in the air ministry during his tenure as minister was founded on: 'The preparation of a war of coalition, chiefly by the development of agreements between France and the Soviet Union, which then possessed the most powerful military air force in the world.' The former air minister went so far as to contend that the 'aerial security of the political bloc of which France formed a part was assured' and that French security was 'at no time menaced by a serious danger as a result of the inadequacy of her aerial armament'.¹¹³ In Cot's strategic vision, French air policy was based on the full assistance of the Soviet Union and France's glaring inferiority *vis-à-vis* Germany could only be redressed by recourse to Soviet air power.

The Blum government had authorized discreet military conversations with the Soviets in November of 1936. When the army general staff dragged its feet in these negotiations in early 1937, the air ministry attempted to force the pace. Cot and his team began providing technical information on French aircraft to the Soviet air attaché in Paris. In February air force deputy chief of staff General Louis Keller was

¹¹¹ AAN, Commission de l'Aéronautique, 16ème Législature, no. 3, Cot audition, 17 Mar. 1937. Cot resurrected this defeatist line at the post-war parliamentary inquiry, where he submitted that anyone who hoped to match Germany in terms of aircraft production would have been 'either ignorant or a dreamer'. *Les Événements*, i. 268.

¹¹² DDF, 2ème série, vi, no. 450, *Procès-verbal* of the CPDN meeting of 19 May 1937.

¹¹³ Cot, *Triumph of Treason*, 316–18.

sent to Moscow to begin planning coalition warfare with the Soviets. Cot also proposed a French service ministers conference to discuss the question of combined staff conversations with the USSR. These measures sparked vigorous opposition from the war ministry. Daladier was in favour of keeping the Soviets and the Germans apart but shared the army general staff's view that the Soviet Union was incapable of intervening effectively in a European conflict. In his view, the chief role the USSR could play in French strategy would be as a source of weapons and material for France's allies in eastern Europe. The defence minister was fundamentally opposed to any hasty conclusion of a Franco-Soviet military alliance and convinced that '[i]n any case, we must not embark on these negotiations through the air ministry. The inter-ministerial conference organized by M. Pierre Cot must be adjourned *sine die*.'¹¹⁴ The army participated in tentative discussions with Soviet military representatives with great reluctance, delaying and prevaricating until the momentum for discussions dissolved amid the confusion of the Red Army purges of 1937.¹¹⁵

Significantly, a Franco-Soviet air coalition was deemed unrealistic by the Deuxième Bureau of the air force general staff. Although the Soviet air force was the largest in Europe, the quality of Soviet aircraft was considered deficient.¹¹⁶ Nor were there any promising prototypes in production. The Russian aircraft industry was modern and powerful but lacked skilled labour. Intelligence on the Soviet air force indicated that Russian bombers would be unable to act against Germany from Russian soil. The use of Czechoslovakia as a base of departure was also considered problematic. Czechoslovakia possessed few airfields which could accommodate Russian bombers and, despite persistent rumours circulated by the Germans, there had been no preliminary effort to adapt Czechoslovakia's infrastructure to serve the needs of the Soviet air force. The situation was judged the same in the case of Romania.

¹¹⁴ Cf. AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, dr. 4, 'Mémento', 31 Oct. 1936. For Daladier's approval of General Schweisguth's pessimistic appraisal of Soviet motives and capabilities, see the 'Mémentos', for 8 and 10 Oct. 1936. Elisabeth du Réau has tried to show that Daladier was in favour of staff conversations in *Daladier*, 199–202. This argument is unconvincing. Daladier, in fact, places the genesis of serious military conversations with the Soviets in the spring of 1939. AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 13, dr. 2, 'Notes inédites'.

¹¹⁵ On Franco-Soviet military conversations, see Jordan, *Popular Front*, 259–79 and Young, *In Command of France*, 146–9.

¹¹⁶ SHAA, Archives Guy La Chambre, Z 12941, 'Possibilités d'action de l'Armée de l'Air de l'URSS au profit de la France', 16 Feb. 1938.

Concern over just how acute the air imbalance with Germany had become did not penetrate to the highest levels of government until the end of 1937. Part of the reason for this was that the air ministry seems to have refused to divulge intelligence figures to the parliamentary commissions. The Senate air commission three times demanded of the air minister information on the state of German air power.¹¹⁷ Whether such information was provided and the commission refused to trust the ministry's veracity or whether information was simply not forthcoming is unclear from the fragmentary state of the archives. What is clear is that the commission began collecting information on German air power independently of the air ministry from mainly open sources.¹¹⁸

It was also during the spring of 1937 that officials within the British air ministry and foreign office began to exhibit real concern over the state of the French air force. The British air attaché in Paris, Group Captain Douglas Colyer, reported difficulties in obtaining reliable information. Foreign Office officials blamed Cot, who was considered 'probably a disaster' and 'certainly quite untruthful'.¹¹⁹ The British air ministry complained that his cabinet on the Boulevard Victor was stonewalling its requests for 'hard facts about the actual state of the French air force'.¹²⁰ In an appreciation prepared for the Foreign Office and chiefs of staff in mid-July, the Industrial Intelligence Centre judged that French aircraft production had virtually collapsed.¹²¹ In September Colyer reported that the French air ministry was still withholding information on the Armée de l'Air. He noted that the situation was a mess in Paris and that the entire issue of air power had been politicized: 'On every public occasion M. Cot quotes the most optimistic figures on the state of the air force and the output of the aircraft industry. As often as he does so, these figures are challenged by his political opponents, and the Aeronautical committees of the Chamber and the Senate'.¹²²

¹¹⁷ AS, Commission de l'Air, 'Séances du 7 mai 1936 au 12 octobre 1939', 6 Oct. 1936, 2 and 27 May 1937.

¹¹⁸ AS, Commission de l'Air, no. S14, 'Aviation étrangère: Allemagne'. This information was fragmentary and relied entirely on newspaper and periodical articles.

¹¹⁹ PRO, FO 371, 20694, C 4601/122/17, 25 June 1937. Senior foreign office mandarin Orme Sargent went so far as to remark that 'I wish for our own safety that M. Cot could be got rid of'. See J. Herman, *The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps* (Brighton, 1998), 30, 44–6 and quote from 197n. See also Thomas, *Britain, France, 140–62* and Dockrill, *British Perspectives*, 46–8.

¹²⁰ PRO, FO 371, 20694, C 5048/122/17, 1 July 1937.

¹²¹ PRO, FO 371, 20694, C 5215/122/17, 19 July 1937.

¹²² PRO, FO 371, 20694, C 6436/122/17, 14 Sept. 1937. See also Boussard, *Aéronautique militaire au parlement*, 122–5.

The British ambassador in Paris, Eric Phipps, was instructed to raise the issue with the French foreign minister.

In the midst of this maelstrom, the first reaction of the Popular Front government was to close ranks around Cot and to attempt to reassure British officials that the situation in the air was under control. Cot retained his portfolio at the air ministry in the Chautemps government. In conversations with Phipps, foreign minister Delbos refused to acknowledge a crisis was at hand. He assured the British ambassador that the fall off in production was only temporary and was 'emphatic' that recovery was already well underway. He predicted that by the spring French factories would be turning out aircraft in 'very considerable quantities'.¹²³ Delbos assumed the same position in conversations with British foreign secretary Anthony Eden in Geneva. He denied the situation was critical and produced some of Cot's figures to support his case.¹²⁴

This confidence was strictly for British consumption. There was real concern over the state of French air power within the Quai d'Orsay. In early November René Massigli, deputy director of the DAPC, prepared a memorandum for Delbos which cast grave doubt on the veracity of the figures provided by the air ministry.¹²⁵ In a communication to the foreign ministry Cot had tried to argue that French air rearmament was proceeding at the same pace as that of Britain.¹²⁶ Cot had also put German aircraft production at 200 aircraft per month—a figure which was 80 per cent lower than the estimates provided to his ministry by the air force Deuxième Bureau. Massigli openly questioned both of these estimations and pointed out that Cot's figures on German aircraft production were much lower than the estimates forwarded to the Quai d'Orsay by François-Poncet. Massigli concluded that, whatever the reality, there was no doubt that France needed to intensify its efforts to rearm in the air.

Concern was also peaking within the Senate air commission in late 1937. In November de la Grange cited intelligence, from an indeterminate source, which indicated that '[d]uring 1938 Germany will produce more planes in one month than France will during the entire

¹²³ PRO, FO 371, 20694, C 7692/122/17, 9 Nov. 1937.

¹²⁴ PRO, FO 371, 20694, C 7692/122/17, 9 Nov. 1937 (marginalia on the above document).

¹²⁵ *DDF*, 2ème série, vii, no. 213, 'Note de la Direction Politique: Situation de l'aviation française', 10 Nov. 1937.

¹²⁶ Reproduced in an annex to the above document.

year'. A few weeks later the commission heard from industrialist Michel Detroyat, who had recently returned from Germany. Detroyat reported that Germany was producing ten times as many aircraft as France and that, in terms of quality, these aircraft were far superior to the planes leaving French factories. There was more talk that Cot should resign and the President of the commission closed the session with the observation that '[i]t is time to sound the alarm, France is in grave danger.'¹²⁷

The situation only boiled over, however, in late November when Chautemps and Delbos travelled to London to meet with their British counterparts. Armed with a report prepared by Colyer which described the French air force as 'a broken reed', Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain confronted Chautemps about the state of French air power. He informed the French Premier bluntly, 'You have no modern aircraft and no prospects of producing any in the near future.'¹²⁸ Chautemps replied that the rearmament of air force had admittedly 'fallen a little behind hand'. He assured Chamberlain, however, that the French government was 'going to spend a good deal of money' and intended to 'make purchases in America'.¹²⁹

This was a front. Upon his return to Paris the Premier telephoned immediately to Pierre Cot and demanded an explanation.¹³⁰ Cot responded with a lengthy defence of his policies as air minister in 1936 and 1937. He complained that Germany took air power more seriously than did France. Aviation received only 22 per cent of defence expenditures in France while the German air ministry received over 40 per cent of military spending in Germany. Cot argued disingenuously that he had sponsored Plan IV in an attempt to obtain more credits (Chautemps had not been present at the CPDN meeting where this plan was rejected). He then repeated the familiar arguments that German industrial potential was twice that of France and that the Nazi regime was operating under a different set of rules than democratic France. Finally, he once again advanced the familiar argument that an alliance with the USSR, which he described as 'the greatest air power

¹²⁷ AS, Commission de l'Air, 'Séances du 7 mai 1936 au 12 octobre 1939', 25 Nov. and 23 Dec. 1937.

¹²⁸ Cited from J. MacVickar-Haight, Jr, *American Aid to France, 1938-1940* (New York, 1970), 5. For Colyer's report, see PRO, FO 371, 20694, C 6436/122/17, 14 Sept. 1937.

¹²⁹ PRO, FO 371, 20694, C 8237/122/17, 29 Dec. 1937. Strang minutes on correspondence with the British air ministry on French weakness in the air.

¹³⁰ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 6, untitled and undated account of the origins of Plan V.

in the world', was essential to compensate for this 'tragic' inferiority. He then promised that, if the air ministry was allocated the same finances devoted to air rearmament in Britain, France could achieve a sixfold increase in aircraft production.¹³¹

Predictably, a meeting of the CPDN two days later focused primarily on the situation in the air. Cot was clearly under siege at this point and seems finally to have decided to sound the alarm and, for the first time since the autumn of 1936, demand more credits. He warned that Germany was producing 500 warplanes per month, Britain 175–200, and France 50. He also warned that by 1940 Germany would have a first-line air force of 3,000 to 4,000 aircraft. He attributed French inferiority to insufficient funding and argued that French production could be increased by 60 per cent if the air ministry received the necessary credits.¹³² This was untrue and anyone who had followed the course of French air policy over the preceding few years would have realized this. By this time Cot was a political liability whose left-wing views were increasingly out of step with the shift to the right within the Radical Party, whose battles in Parliament and with the parliamentary commissions were proving an embarrassment, and whose nationalization policy was perceived increasingly as a costly failure. One month later, Cot lost his job as air minister in a reconstitution of the Chautemps government. He was replaced by another young Radical, 39-year-old Guy La Chambre, a confidant of Daladier and former President of the Chamber army commission.

What is most remarkable is that Cot managed to keep a lid on the crisis in French air power for the duration of 1937. Nowhere are the debilitating effects of political infighting on French security more evident than in the case of the air policy of the Popular Front. Political survival replaced the Luftwaffe as the chief concern of the air minister and his entourage in the charged atmosphere which prevailed at the Boulevard Victor during this period. It is difficult to imagine a better example of the politicization of intelligence. Information on French aircraft production and the state of the Armée de l'Air along with intelligence on German air power had been routinely distorted by both allies and enemies of the Cot regime. The result was that France lost vital time in its effort to make up for the two-year head start which Germany had seized in air rearmament.

¹³¹ FNSP, Archives Cot, PC 4, dr. 1, 'Rapport du Ministre de l'Air au Président du Conseil', 6 Dec. 1937. Also in AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 6.

¹³² DDF, 2ème série, vii, no. 325, *Procès-verbal* of the meeting of the CPDN of 8 Dec. 1937.

VI

The relationship between intelligence and French diplomacy remained ambiguous through 1937. Assessments that stressed the hegemonic ambitions of Nazi Germany and the likelihood of war did not greatly influence the formulation of foreign policy as the Quai d'Orsay remained reluctant to accept the pessimistic interpretation of the Deuxième Bureaux. Indeed, in many ways, the inspiration of Popular Front foreign policy scarcely differed from that of Barthou or Laval. The chief threat to French security remained Germany. The central aim was to negotiate a rapprochement with Germany from a position of relative strength. Neither Blum nor foreign minister Delbos viewed the situation with the same sense of desperation as did the military. The futile meeting between Blum and Schacht in Paris in August of 1936, which had the full approval of the foreign ministry, is a case in point.¹³³

Hopes to entangle Nazi Germany in a multilateral agreement, a 'western pact', persisted within the Quai throughout 1937 as the foreign ministry considered carefully a series of German overtures for improved commercial and economic relations. In early 1937 deputy political director Massigli, usually considered the leading advocate of a policy of firmness within the Quai d'Orsay during this period, reckoned that a political and economic settlement might still be possible with Germany.¹³⁴ By the end of the year Massigli was less optimistic but still refused to discount the possibilities of dialogue. He considered German objectives 'enigmatic' and judged the time 'very opportune' for frank discussions.¹³⁵ The Deuxième Bureau, conversely, considered that these proposals were merely attempts to obtain raw materials for Germany's rearmament effort and not manifestations of any desire for a lasting settlement.¹³⁶

At the same time, intelligence on German capabilities, as opposed to intentions, was an important consideration in the making of external

¹³³ G. Dutter, 'Doing Business with the Nazis: French Economic Relations with Germany under the Popular Front', *JMH* 63: 2 (1991), 296–326 and Schirmann, *Les Relations économiques*, 149–55 and 177–89.

¹³⁴ *DDF*, 2ème série, iv, no. 325, 20 Jan. 1937. See also Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 314 and Thomas, *Britain, France*, 177–84.

¹³⁵ MAÉ, Papiers Massigli, vol. 16, 'Eléments pour la conversation franco-britannique', 27 Nov. 1937. For a different view, see R. Ulrich in 'René Massigli and Germany, 1919–1938', in Boyce (ed.), *French Foreign and Defence Policy, 1918–1940*, 141–5.

¹³⁶ SHAT, 2522, 'Note au sujet de la possibilité d'un conflit en Europe', Jan. 1937.

policy. The perception that the balance of power had shifted decisively in Germany's favour conditioned France's response to the Nazi threat on every front. While few civilian officials sensed the imminence of war, French policy was anything but provocative. Anxiety over the military balance underpinned the twin policies of rearmament and military alliance with Britain, the cornerstones of Popular Front policy. In November of 1936, in a note to Blum, Delbos had underlined the ramifications of the change in the balance of power on France's diplomatic position. Outlining the progress of German rearmament, he judged that France's military inferiority precluded a policy of firmness towards either Germany or Italy that was independent of Great Britain.¹³⁷ He also urged that the recent rearmament programme be bolstered to improve France's standing in Europe. The increased respect which French statesmen were compelled to accord to German military power (and to the corresponding threat of war), combined with the British refusal to make any military commitments in Europe and the unyielding mistrust with which both foreign ministry and army officials regarded the USSR, contrived to dictate a policy of caution.

Popular Front diplomacy fought a tactical retreat in eastern Europe. The alarms which the Deuxième Bureau had raised over the spread of German influence along the Danube, even when combined with the frequent warnings of French diplomatic officials in the region, did not alter this policy. In late 1936 the foreign ministry had raised objections to Little Entente proposals to negotiate a military alliance with France. Strategic considerations were the key element in this response. Both secretary general Léger and political director Paul Bargeton strongly advised against assuming additional obligations in the east which, in the light of the worsening military balance, France was increasingly unable to fulfil.¹³⁸ This case was duly strengthened by a simultaneous Deuxième Bureau assessment which stressed the impossibility of supplying direct aid to the Little Entente without Italian cooperation. Nor could a truly significant commercial relationship be forged with the Balkan states because France could not provide an adequate market for their raw materials.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ MAÉ, Papiers Massigli, vol. 10, 'Réarmement en Europe', 3 Nov. 1936. See also Bédarida, 'La "Gouvernante anglaise"', 228–41; Young, *In Command of France*, 178–84; and Thomas, *Britain, France*, 133–7.

¹³⁸ DDF, 2ème série, ii, no. 372, 30 June 1936 and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 297–8.

¹³⁹ MAÉ, Papiers 1940, Fonds Daladier, vol. 1, 'Obligations d'assistance mutuelle pouvant incombrer la France', 9 July 1936. On relations between France and the Little Entente,

Thus, although both the military and the foreign ministry recognized at an early stage the threat to French interests, France lacked both the military and economic wherewithal to combat the spread of German influence in the Balkans. The culmination of France's policy of implicit retreat in the east was Delbos' celebrated tour of the various capitals of France's eastern European allies. In Warsaw, Prague, Bucharest, and Belgrade the foreign minister was well received and spoke warmly of the ties of friendship and mutual interest which bound France and her eastern allies. This tour was without any significant result, however, because words were all Delbos could offer. Assurances of goodwill rang hollow, if they could be heard at all, against the din and crash of German rearmament. The Little Entente states drifted further apart and Yugoslavia and Romania drew closer to the German orbit.

The sense of military inferiority in relation to Germany was a central factor shaping French policy towards the civil war in Spain. The Deuxième Bureau, along with the rest of the French general staff, warned repeatedly of the danger that the conflict might escalate into a general European war. This was an important and ever-present consideration in the French policy of non-intervention. Daladier warned the CPDN that '[o]ne would have to be blind not to see that [our] intervention in Spain will unleash a general war'. France would then find itself 'alone before Germany and Italy with the mediocre support of a weakened and far off Russia without the full assurance of British cooperation'.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, fear of provoking Germany was an argument used by the army general staff for opposing staff talks with the Soviet Union. Intelligence chief Gauché warned that, in addition to alienating Great Britain and Poland, Franco-Soviet military conversations would provide Germany with a pretext for further disturbances of the peace.¹⁴¹ For a general staff utterly opposed to these conversations, the recrudescence of German power actually constituted an argument for keeping the Soviets at arm's length by increasing the risks involved for France in drawing closer to the Soviets. The Léger 'clan' of senior permanent officials at the Quai d'Orsay accepted this tortured line of reasoning without question.¹⁴² Yet, in the final analysis, intelligence was

see Jordan, *Popular Front and Central Europe*, 189–259; Young, *In Command of France*, 144–5; and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 321.

¹⁴⁰ DDF, 2ème série, vi, no. 446, *Procès-verbal* of the meeting of the CPDN on 15 Mar. 1938. For Daladier's attitude concerning the Spanish Civil War, see also du Réau, *Daladier*, 192–7.

¹⁴¹ AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, dr. 4, 'Mémento', 31 Oct. 1936.

¹⁴² AN, Papiers Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, dr. 4, 'Compte-rendu du Général Schweisguth sur

not decisive in shaping policy towards Spain. As was so often the case during the 1930s, intelligence was interpreted in order to support a pre-determined policy. The key motivation in France's Spanish policy was the desire that this ideological conflict be contained lest it spread north of the Pyrenees.¹⁴³ In the same sense, opposition to a Franco-Soviet military alliance in 1937 was based on a combination of ideological mistrust (on the part of the military) and domestic political considerations (on the part of civilian officials concerned with the ramifications of a military alliance with the USSR on French politics).¹⁴⁴ In both cases strategic considerations were moulded to fit preconceived policies.

Most importantly, the impression of German military superiority reinforced the importance of Great Britain to French strategy. The more so since the Blum government had presided over the death throes of the alliance with Italy over the question of non-intervention in Spain. If the military clung to the hope that Italy could somehow be rallied to an anti-German front, French planning to meet the Nazi threat depended more than ever on Great Britain. The absolute necessity of a military alliance with Britain was a reality embraced at every level of government. For Blum, the Anglo-French entente was 'the primordial condition of European peace'.¹⁴⁵ For Daladier the 'fundamental principle' of French strategic policy was 'complete cooperation with Great Britain'.¹⁴⁶ The foreign ministry was equally committed to this policy. Throughout the 1930s Permanent Secretary Alexis Léger never ceased underlining the importance of Britain to French security.¹⁴⁷ Before every meeting of French and British foreign ministers or heads of government the Political Directorate would prepare strategy papers aimed at drawing Britain into a military relationship with France. These papers returned continually to the theme of the dangers which Nazi rearmament posed to both French and British security and the

un entretien avec M. Léger', 8 Oct. 1936. See also the 'Mémentos' of 9 Jan. and 2 Apr. 1936 in the same carton.

¹⁴³ On French official policy and the Spanish Civil War, see Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 301–5 and 315–21; Renouvin, 'La Politique extérieure', 331–7; Dreifort, *Ivon Delbos*, 45–63; C. Bloch, 'Les Relations franco-allemandes et la politique des puissances pendant la guerre d'Espagne', in Hildebrand and Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich*, 429–52.

¹⁴⁴ J. Dreifort, 'The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936–1937: A Dilemma in Foreign Policy', *JCH* 9 (1976), 217–36 and Jackson, *Popular Front*, 196–8.

¹⁴⁵ Cited in P. Renouvin, 'Les Relations franco-anglaises, 1935–1939: Esquisse provisoire', *Les Relations franco-britanniques de 1935 à 1939* (Paris, 1975), 18.

¹⁴⁶ SHAT, 2N 22, CPDN, *Procès-verbal*, 15 Feb. 1937.

¹⁴⁷ Pertinax, *Les Fossoyeurs*, i. 293–4; E. Cameron, 'Alexis Léger', 383, 391–5; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 24–5.

importance of staff conversations which would permit a concerted response to future disturbances of the peace. The volume of documentation concerning the importance of the Franco-British entente in French diplomatic archives increases in direct proportion to the growth of German military power.¹⁴⁸ The era of the Popular Front saw a significant amelioration in relations with Britain. This improvement was not without a price however as the importance of the attitude of Britain weighed heavily on French decision making. British opposition to any involvement in the Spanish Civil War and abhorrence of close ties with the Soviets were central, although not decisive, factors in French policy towards Spain and the USSR.

Good intelligence is of little use to a government without a coherent policy. The year 1937 marked a true nadir in the history of inter-war French foreign and defence policy. Although the threat posed by Nazi rearmament increased steadily through this year, the national focus remained inward-looking. France remained divided ideologically and stricken by the effects of the seemingly interminable economic crisis. Its economy grew no stronger while its rearmament effort continued to be choked by difficulties in production. The Chautemps government, in particular, was transfixed by these difficulties and utterly incapable of fashioning a dynamic response to the Nazi challenge. In this atmosphere, intelligence on the progress of German rearmament only deepened the sense of inferiority and pessimism which paralysed French external policy.

¹⁴⁸ A good sampling of the connection made by the DAPC between German rearmament and ties with Britain is in the *Papiers Massigli*, vol. 10, 'Projet de note pour le gouvernement britannique', 28 Aug. 1936 (the aftermath of the reintroduction of two-year service); 'Réarmement en Europe', 3 Nov. 1936. *Ibid.*, vol. 16, 'Elements pour la conversation franco-britannique', 27 Nov. 1937 and 'Mémento pour la conversation britannique du 25 janvier 1938', 11 Jan. 1938.

Munich

FRANCE'S ABANDONMENT of Czechoslovakia in late September 1938 has become a metaphor for short-sighted and even cowardly decision making. The Munich Agreement has served as a touchstone for historians who argue that French leaders surrendered to drift and indecision before the Second World War. This interpretation of Munich is based on two assumptions. First, that decision makers did not understand the nature of the Nazi threat. Second, that going to war with Germany over Czechoslovakia was the correct decision to take. Neither of these assumptions stand up to careful analysis, however. French civilian and military *décideurs* had few illusions about the nature of the Nazi regime. Most were convinced, however, that France could not make war on Germany in 1938.

The picture of the balance of power presented to decision makers by the intelligence services was central to France's Munich policy. According to Rivet, it was at this stage that 'the responsible chiefs at last sensed the need to go directly to the source of intelligence information . . . [and] . . . to bypass the many filters that stood between the organs of information and the organs of decision'.¹ Both Daladier (who became Premier in April) and Gamelin held face to face meetings with Rivet over the course of 1938 and intelligence was integrated more thoroughly into policy making than at any point since the Doumergue era. Throughout French intelligence continued to produce penetrating assessments of Hitler's intentions. Its evaluations of German capabilities, however, were increasingly overblown. Once again the tendency to overestimate German military power was linked to French self-perception. An acute awareness that France was neither materially nor psychologically prepared for war underpinned a series of 'worst case' assessments of the situation across the Rhine. This trend

¹ SHAT, Fonds Paillole, 1K 545, Carton 1, dr. 3, 'Note du Général Louis Rivet: Rapports du SR avec le ministre', 1941.

culminated during the Sudetenland crisis, when military intelligence assessed the motivations and timing of Hitler's policy with startling accuracy but produced vastly inflated appreciations of the power of the Wehrmacht. Inaccurate intelligence on German military power did not, however, alter the course of French policy in any fundamental sense. In the autumn of 1938 France was in no way prepared for another European war. Intelligence provided decision makers with superb justification for the policy of pre-emptive retreat in the east that had been pursued since the collapse of the alliance with Italy in early 1936.

I

Through late 1937 and early 1938 the intelligence services continued to sound the alarm over the long-term objectives of Nazi foreign policy. In an overview of November 1937 intelligence chief Gauché had again predicted that a German grab at the resources of eastern Europe was imminent. Austria and Czechoslovakia were the states considered the most immediately threatened. Gauché warned that '[a]llowing Germany free rein [*champ libre*] in eastern Europe will only postpone the coming of a Franco-German war. . . . One would have to know nothing of the German mentality to believe otherwise.'² If France wished to challenge Germany's bid for European supremacy, war was inevitable. Several weeks later General Gamelin warned the CPDN to anticipate German aggression in east-central Europe in the coming year. Echoing Gauché, Gamelin submitted that once the Reich had achieved predominance in the east it would only be a matter of time before Hitler's ambition threatened France's status as a European power.³ But Gamelin and the military had been warning civilian leaders about the immediacy of the Nazi menace since 1933. It was Daladier's gradual realization of the seriousness of the situation in early 1938 that proved decisive. In February, the minister of defence began to campaign, for the first time since the summer of 1936, for further increases to France's rearmament effort. He warned the Chamber army commission that German people had been 'fanaticized' by a National Socialist government that was 'completely seduced by the idea of conquest and

² SHAT, 7N 2522-1, 'Réflexions sur un conflit éventuel en Europe', 9 Nov. 1937.

³ SHAT, 2N 25, *Procès-verbal* of CPDN meeting, 8 Dec. 1937.

domination'. France had no choice, he argued, but to increase its military strength 'to the maximum'.⁴

This bleak but unfortunately accurate interpretation of the inspiration of Nazi foreign policy did not become a central element in the making of French national policy until March of 1938. It was at this point that Léon Blum succeeded Chautemps and put an end to ten months of drift in foreign and defence policy. Although the Blum government was unsuccessful in its bid to form a coalition of 'national defence', it did adopt a number of crucial defence measures that inaugurated the period of *réarmement à outrance* that was to last through to the outbreak of war. March 1938 saw the creation of a *Caisse Autonome des investissements de la Défense Nationale*, the adoption of the first truly substantial air rearmament programme of the inter-war period, the approval of an ambitious supplementary naval construction programme, and the approval of an 'exceptional programme' aimed at accelerating the pace of land rearmament.⁵ These measures were then retained and even amplified by the ensuing Daladier government. On 12 April 1938 Daladier formed a government which would prove one of the most stable and durable ministries in the history of the Third Republic. By combining the portfolios of Premier and minister of defence, Daladier ensured that defence requirements received the highest priority. Presenting his government to the Chamber, the new Premier characterized his ministry as 'above all, a government of National Defence'.⁶ By obtaining wide-ranging powers of decree from Parliament, Daladier secured the authority necessary to implement a series of vigorous measures aimed at stimulating the economy and bolstering the rearmament effort.

The priority accorded to defence policy under Daladier was based on the conviction that Nazi foreign policy was aimed at European domination. In a summit with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in London on 27 April Daladier declared that Hitler desired 'nothing less than total domination of the European continent' and that 'Europe has not faced a threat of these dimensions since the era of Napoleon'. Seeking to disabuse Chamberlain of the misguided belief that Germany could be appeased by concessions over the Sudetenland, Daladier argued that to cede Germany a free hand in eastern

⁴ AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème législature, Carton 16, Daladier audition, 9 Feb. 1938.

⁵ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 85–9 and 178–87.

⁶ Édouard Daladier, *Défense du pays* (Paris, 1939), 9.

Europe would only increase the military capacity of the Reich. He warned that '[i]f Germany gains control of eastern and south-eastern Europe, it will be assured the resources necessary to turn against the west, which, out of weakness, will have provided her with the means with which to wage the long war which she is at present incapable of sustaining'.⁷ Nor was this merely alarmism for British consumption. Daladier advised the Chamber army commission several months later that '[f]or my part, I believe that if we stand aside and allow Germany to establish its hegemony [in east-central Europe] it is clear that in a relatively short period of time it will be the independence of France itself which is threatened with destruction'.⁸ Neither the Premier nor the military had any doubt about the dimensions of the Nazi threat.

II

Although the Deuxième Bureau was confident that Hitler intended to move eastward, the precise timing of this move remained uncertain in early 1938. Analysts continued to judge the German high command fundamentally opposed to an adventurist foreign policy. There was increasing evidence, however, that the Party had achieved considerable success in its efforts to 'nazify' the younger members of the officer corps. Renondeau observed in March of 1937 that '[d]uring the early years of the regime the officer corps was far from uniformly National Socialist and there was considerable repugnance for Hitler. But the situation has evolved to the point where now one would have to say that the great majority of the army is loyal to Hitler'.⁹ This analysis appeared to be confirmed by the events of the first week in February 1938. Hitler's purge of the army command structure on 4 February was the crucial stage in the *Gleichschaltung* of the armed forces (the ideological unity of the Party, the state, and the military). Defence minister General von Blomberg and army commander General Werner von Fritsch, along with sixteen other high-ranking army generals, were replaced and the command structure of the German military was completely renovated. Hitler assumed the role of Commander-in-Chief of Germany's armed forces and Fritsch was replaced as army commander

⁷ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 8, dr. 3, unedited text entitled 'Munich', 44-5. See also Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 336-7.

⁸ AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème législature, Daladier audition, 31 Aug. 1938.

⁹ SHAT, 7N 2599, 'L'Armée et le national-socialisme', 16 Mar. 1937.

by General Walther von Brauchitsch, who assured Hitler that he was 'ready to do anything' to bring the army 'closer to the state and its ideology'.¹⁰

French intelligence interpreted the events of 4 February as a crushing victory for the Party over the high command in the struggle for control of the army. Colonel de Geffrier estimated that the military had 'lost forever the magnificent autonomy within the state that it has guarded jealously under a succession of regimes and which has until now allowed it to remain a state within a state'.¹¹ Renondeau concluded that the army had become 'a docile instrument in the hands of the government'.¹² François-Poncet echoed this point of view in his report to the Quai d'Orsay. He characterized the successful purge of the high command as the 'decisive stage in the process of achieving the complete subjugation of the state and all of its vital organs', and provided 'testament to the health, the vigour and the vitality of National Socialism, its self-confidence and its irresistible dynamism'. The net result of the crisis, according to François-Poncet, had been to 'concentrate all of the forces of the state under Hitler with the objective of providing added weight to German policy and to permit the Reich to pursue its grand designs'.¹³ These assumptions, which were endorsed by the Deuxième Bureau, and would condition the French response to rumours of opposition within the German high command to Hitler during the Czechoslovak crisis the following summer.

The Fritsch–Blomberg crisis heightened anticipation of an imminent *coup de force* which intelligence sources indicated was in preparation against Austria. In late 1937 French intelligence received increasing evidence of collusion between Germany and Italy in Spain. Renondeau speculated that the Axis had signed a military alliance. The Deuxième Bureau interpreted the tightening of the Axis as a necessary prelude to moves against Austria and Czechoslovakia. Shortly thereafter, the SGDN warned of an imminent threat to Austrian independence.¹⁴ Renondeau deemed that the extremism of Himmler,

¹⁰ K.-J. Müller, *Das Heer und Hitler: Armee und nationalsozialistisches Regime 1933–1940* (Stuttgart, 1969), 263, 255–89; Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 520–31; and G. Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II* (Cambridge, 1995), 137–43.

¹¹ SHAT, 7N 2601, 'Réorganisation du commandement', air attaché report, 9 Feb. 1938.

¹² SHAT, 7N 2601, 'Crise de commandement: Dénouement', 5 Feb. 1938.

¹³ DDF, 2ème série, viii, no. 138, François-Poncet to Paris, 10 Feb. 1938.

¹⁴ For Renondeau's views, see SHAT, 7N 2600, 'Voyage du Général von Fritsche en Italie', 21 Dec. 1937. For the impressions of the Deuxième Bureau and the SGDN, see 7N 2514, RH, 15–22 Nov. 1937; Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224–8, 'Note sur les données actuelles du

Goebbels, and Ribbentrop had achieved ascendancy over the caution of the army in the counsels of the Führer on 4 February. He speculated that the temptation to use the army might now prove irresistible for the Nazi government and predicted a spring of increased international tension.¹⁵

Once again Renondeau's estimate proved accurate. Tension began to escalate between Berlin and the Austrian government of Kurt von Schuschnigg in late January. Austria was threatened with military occupation during a meeting between Schuschnigg and Hitler in Berchtesgaden on 12 February. Schuschnigg was forced to comply with Hitler's demands that a number of Nazis be placed in the Austrian cabinet. The Austrian government tried to project calm abroad, assuring the Quai d'Orsay that negotiations with Germany were proceeding on an equitable basis. But France's military and civilian leaders knew this was a bluff. Both the SR and the foreign ministry were reading high-grade Austrian diplomatic traffic and, through communications between Vienna and the Austrian Embassy in Paris, were aware of the real tone of negotiations in Berchtesgaden. Intercepts in mid-February revealed that the Austrian government was under intense pressure and anticipated further demands from Berlin. They also made clear that Austrian policy was based on the hope that Hitler would be deterred from using force to achieve an *Anschluss* by the prospect of a general war.¹⁶ Vienna was therefore trying desperately to avoid the appearance of collapse. The Schuschnigg government feared that evidence of capitulation would lead the Western powers to withdraw their support for an independent Austria. If this happened, the Austrian foreign ministry advised its ambassador in Paris, 'all hope would be lost and it will be too late for us to take any measures whatsoever'.¹⁷

Signals intelligence thus kept French decision makers well informed of the true status of Austria. A report summarizing Nazi demands on the Schuschnigg government was prepared for Delbos on 13 February.¹⁸ The weekly intelligence summary of 28 February predicted

problème militaire français', SGDN note forwarded to Daladier by Gamelin, 8 Feb. 1938 and 2N 224-1, 'Répercussions de la situation internationale', note from Daladier to Premier Chautemps, 1 Feb. 1938.

¹⁵ SHAT, 7N 2601, 'Crise du haut commandement: Dénouement', 5 Feb. 1938.

¹⁶ MAÉ, Collection de Télégrammes Interceptés, vol. 3, Autriche, Intercepts of 15 and 16 Feb. 1938.

¹⁷ MAÉ, Collection de Télégrammes Interceptés, vol. 3, Autriche, Intercepts 16 and 21 Feb. 1938. Quotation from intercept of 16 Feb.

¹⁸ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Rochat, vol. 5, 'Note pour le Ministre', 13 Feb. 1938.

that the *Anschluss* was both imminent and inevitable. 'It might take some time,' the report concluded, 'but it is coming and this is the important point.'¹⁹ This impressive work by French code-breakers was in no way decisive. French policy towards Austria had been determined in advance. During the second week in February Daladier and Gamelin discussed the ramifications of an *Anschluss* for the strategic situation and agreed that there could be no question of unilateral military action. Neither official nor popular opinion considered preserving Austrian independence worth war with Germany. Indeed, news of the invasion and annexation of Austria found the French political elite pre-occupied with yet another cabinet crisis over the resignation of Chautemps. The reaction of the defence and foreign policy establishment was framed by its unspoken policy of pre-emptive retreat in the east. Thus, when the crisis broke, the Quai d'Orsay made a series of official protests and Austria became part of the Reich.²⁰

For the intelligence services, the German coup was a test of their system of surveillance in Germany. In the aftermath of the *Anschluss* the SR was censured in the press for having failed to provide advance warning of the coup. This censure was unjustified, however. The final decision to move against Austria was taken in Berlin only in the evening of 10 March and the SR received its first intelligence warning about Austria at 10:30 the following morning. Rivet's diary entry for 14 March reads: 'Annexion pure and simple of Austria. Good work by the SR.'²¹ There does seem to have been a failure in liaison between army intelligence and the foreign ministry however. The Quai d'Orsay was caught off guard by the precise timing of the *Anschluss* and Léger complained to Gamelin that the DAPC had not been kept informed by the SR and Deuxième Bureau.²² But this breakdown in communication was to have positive effects. It appears to have convinced the Quai d'Orsay to sponsor weekly information sharing conferences which

¹⁹ SHAT, 7N 2515, *RH*, 21–28 Feb. 1938.

²⁰ J. Bariéty, 'La France et le problème de l'*Anschluss*. Mars 1936–mars 1938', in Hildebrand and Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich*, 553–75. See also Young, *In Command of France*, 136–9; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 327–8; and Adamthwaite, *France*, 80–6.

²¹ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 14 Mar. 1938. See the entries for 17 and 18 Mar. 1938 in the same volume for Rivet's reaction to criticism in the press. On Hitler's decision making, see Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, 293–8. Paul Stehlin claims to have warned Paris of the *Anschluss* four days before it occurred: *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 96–8 and Porch, *French Secret Services*, 140. Given the timing of Hitler's decision, this was clearly impossible.

²² Paillole, *Notre espion*, 125; Adamthwaite, 'French Intelligence', 203; and Porch, *French Secret Services*, 146.

convened from mid-April 1938 through to the outbreak of war. These were chaired normally by the head of the DAPC and attended by representatives from the army, air, and naval Deuxième Bureaux, the SR, the SGDN, and at least one representative from the ministry of the interior. The *Anschluss* also led to the implementation of the SR's proposal to station secret intelligence officers in French consulates inside Germany. In late April both Léger and Émile Charvériat (deputy director of the DAPC) finally agreed to this measure as a means of better monitoring preparations for mobilization in Germany.²³

In the weeks following the *Anschluss*, the Deuxième Bureau, like much of the rest of the world, correctly identified Czechoslovakia as the next target of German aggression. Once again, however, determining the precise timetable of Hitler's aggressive policy proved problematic. During the 'May crisis' of 1938 military intelligence endorsed reports emanating from Czechoslovakia of an imminent German invasion of that country. While these rumours proved to be unfounded, the reasoning of the Deuxième Bureau was fundamentally sound. Intelligence officials attributed tremendous importance to the military imbalance in their assessments of the likelihood of war. Time, they reckoned, was on the side of the rearmament efforts of France and Britain. It was assumed that Germany would be tempted to strike before it lost its military superiority.²⁴ This line of reasoning was to increase in importance within the French general staff and to underpin the phoney war strategy of 1939.

Rumours of an imminent threat to Czechoslovakia began to surface even before the annexation of Austria. Naval intelligence reported an imminent German attack on Czechoslovakia on 17 February. This intelligence, along with other rumours emanating from Prague, was dismissed by the SR.²⁵ On 8 April, however, Hans-Thilo Schmidt reported that Hitler was considering an attack on Czechoslovakia in the immediate future. He added that the German high command was said to be opposed to such an attack and sought its delay until the following October at the earliest. 'The final decision', the SR noted, 'once again depends entirely on the Führer.'²⁶ The hypothesis of a German

²³ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, entries for 1, 23, and 29 Apr. 1938.

²⁴ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Fonds Daladier, vol. 1, 'Note sur la situation militaire actuelle dans le monde', 29 Mar. 1938.

²⁵ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 17, 18, and 19 Feb. 1938.

²⁶ Quote from SHAT, 7N 2522-2, 'Renseignement: Opérations contre la Tchécoslovaquie [Source Z]', 8 Apr. 1938. See also 7N 2522-2, 'Note sur la possibilité d'une action allemande contre la Tchécoslovaquie', 8 Apr. 1938 and *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 8 Apr. 1938.

coup de force appeared strengthened in mid-May by reports of the presence of an abnormal number of mechanized and motorized units near the Czechoslovak frontier at the same time as a resurgence in Sudeten agitation which was considered 'more or less fomented by Berlin'.²⁷ Rumours of the build-up of German aggression exploded into an international crisis several weeks later when Czechoslovak intelligence became convinced that Germany was about to invade. The Czechoslovaks had received detailed information, from a source that remains obscure, which alleged that Germany had deployed ten infantry and mechanized divisions along its frontier with Czechoslovakia.²⁸ This intelligence arrived in Paris early on the morning of 20 May. The same day the French military mission in Prague, citing Czech sources, reported German troop concentrations in Saxony and Bavaria.²⁹

Significantly, virtually all reports of German troop concentrations had come from the Czechoslovaks. The military attachés in Berlin, despite reconnaissance trips to Saxony and Silesia, could report no inordinate military activity inside Germany.³⁰ Reconnoitring by Renondeau, Réa, and the British and Belgian military attachés on 21, 22, and 23 May, supplemented by the aerial reconnaissance of de Gefrier and Stehlin, uncovered nothing out of the ordinary in terms of military preparations.³¹ But the Deuxième Bureau attached great importance to the information from the Czechoslovaks and warned the high command, the foreign ministry, and the Premier that Germany might attempt another Austria-like coup that weekend.³² In London, the SIS was of the same view and warned the Chamberlain government of the danger of an imminent European war.³³ Just after midday on 22 May, Daladier summoned Colonel Rivet to his offices on the rue St Dominique. Rivet described the situation as 'grave' and urged the Premier to consult with the entire high command.³⁴

²⁷ SHAT, 7N 2515, RH, 25–30 Apr. 1938.

²⁸ The most detailed consideration in English is Lukes, *Czechoslovakia*, 141–57. Until recently most analyses had assumed that Paul Thümmel was the source of this information. See Moravec, *Master of Spies*, 125–7 and Andrew, *Secret Service*, 552–5.

²⁹ SHAT, *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 20 May 1938; SHAT, 7N 3110, 'Note sur la situation militaire actuelle', 20 May 1938 and 7N 3097, General Faucher to Paris, 20 May 1938.

³⁰ SHAT, 7N 2601, Renondeau to Paris, 20 May 1938. See also DDF, 2ème série, ix, no. 407.

³¹ SHAT, 7N 2601, 'La Tension germano-tchécoslovaque—les aspects militaires', 24 May 1938.

³² SHAT, 7N 2522–2, 'Note pour le commandement', 20 May 1938.

³³ Andrew, *Secret Service*, 552–4.

³⁴ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 22 May 1938.

The governments in Paris, Prague, and London all took these warnings seriously. The Czechoslovaks called 200,000 reservists to the colours. The French and the British governments both made strong protests in Berlin, which alarmed and surprised officials at the Wilhelmstrasse because rumours of a possible invasion were unfounded. The troop movements reported by the Czechs were routine manoeuvres. The information received by Prague probably originated with Hitler's instructions to the German high command to prepare a list of divisions that could be ready to march against the Czechoslovaks within twelve hours. There were no finalized plans to invade Czechoslovakia at this juncture. The Germans denied any intention of moving against Czechoslovakia and by the late afternoon of 22 May the storm clouds, which had appeared so menacing over the weekend, had dispersed.³⁵

But the May crisis was a watershed in the history of intelligence during the inter-war period. It marked the first episode where both the French Premier and the British Prime Minister were paying close attention to intelligence and making decisions based on information received from secret sources. Clearly, Daladier's accession to the premiership had confirmed the importance of intelligence in the making of national policy. The chief effect of the crisis on French perceptions of the international situation was to increase the expectation that Germany would move against Czechoslovakia in the near future. In Berlin, Renondeau had at first dismissed the Czech information as entirely unfounded and advised that in the future information from Prague be treated with scepticism. 'Rash decisions taken on the basis of unconfirmed intelligence', he warned, 'might lead to the gravest of consequences.'³⁶ Eventually, however, he changed his mind and judged that Hitler had been contemplating intervention in Czechoslovakia but had been persuaded to put off the operation after the high command had warned that Germany was not yet ready to attack Czechoslovakia and hold off the French in the west at the same time. Renondeau considered that 'this does not mean that the Germans have not secretly made up their minds to resolve the Sudeten question militarily', and that 'there is no doubt the question will be raised anew'.³⁷

³⁵ On Czechoslovak policy, see Lukes, *Czechoslovakia*, 144–7. Lukes makes the argument that the misunderstanding was the product of Soviet deception. On the French side, see Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 338–9; Adamthwaite, *France*, 88–90; for German policy, see Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy', 655–6 and Weinberg, *Starting World War Two*, 367–9.

³⁶ SHAT, 7N 2601, 'La Tension germano-tchécoslovaque', 24 May 1938.

³⁷ SHAT, 7N 2601, 'La Tension germano-tchéque', 24 May 1938.

Once again, Renondeau proved the best informed of French sources on the situation inside Germany. The May crisis had, if anything, strengthened Hitler's resolve to settle matters with Czechoslovakia as soon as possible. The following week, expressing his 'unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action at the earliest possible opportunity', Hitler instructed the German high command to accelerate planning for an invasion of Czechoslovakia.³⁸ Plans for a revised *Fall Grün* (attack on Czechoslovakia) began immediately with the target date set for 28 September. Military intelligence was faced with the dual task of determining the timetable for the operation and judging whether Hitler could be deterred by a strong show of support for Czechoslovakia by France. The Deuxième Bureau proved capable of both tasks. It was able to provide the precise date which had been set for the operation and to correctly advise French decision makers that Hitler was not bluffing.

Through May and June the Deuxième Bureau remained vigilant for indications of an imminent German aggression. A clear picture of German intentions did not begin to emerge, however, until late June. The principal source of information at this time was Luftwaffe Deputy Chief of Staff General Karl Bodenschatz. Bodenschatz was a confidant of Hermann Göring and an important figure within the Nazi hierarchy. He had served as Göring's adjutant in the famous Richtofen fighter squadron during the First World War and had rejoined his superior at the air ministry shortly after the Nazis succeeded to power. Bodenschatz was considered an ambitious man of average intelligence but also 'inclined to share confidences'. He was responsible for liaison between Hitler and Göring and was therefore regarded as a prize source of information by French army and air intelligence.³⁹ At a party given at the embassy on 25 June, Bodenschatz purposefully struck up a conversation with assistant air attaché Paul Stehlin about the European situation. He informed Stehlin that the attitude of France and England during the May crisis had 'profoundly irritated the Führer'. Denying that Germany had harboured any aggressive intentions during this crisis, Bodenschatz declared that '[t]he Führer has decided to accept no further provocations from the Czechs and to respond by

³⁸ Quoted in P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe* (London, 1986), 237–8. See also R. Overy, 'Germany and the Munich Crisis: A Mutilated Victory?', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 10 (1999), 191–215.

³⁹ SHAT, 7N 2602–1, 'Compte-rendu d'une conversation entre le Capitaine Stehlin et le Général Bodenschatz', 25 June 1938 and Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 141.

force to the next incident fabricated by Prague'. He then confided that, in order to defend Germany's western frontier against possible intervention by France, Hitler had decided to construct a system of fortifications along the Franco-German frontier 'the scale of which defies description'. At the same time Bodenschatz lamented that France and Germany should feel compelled to expend so much time and energy erecting fortifications 'on a frontier that the Führer has solemnly guaranteed'. He assured Stehlin that '[w]e have absolutely no interest in any French territory, we ask only that you allow us to settle purely German problems as we see fit'. A detailed summary of this conversation was prepared the very same evening by the embassy and forwarded to Daladier, Bonnet, Gamelin, and the Deuxième Bureau by diplomatic valise the following day.⁴⁰

Hitler was by now convinced that the time had come for the first of his short wars. Bodenschatz's confidences were part of a programme of disinformation and intimidation which the Germans mounted in the summer of 1938. The institution of civil conscription and the intense propaganda campaign which accompanied construction on the west-wall were other such measures. Similarly, the Wehrmacht made no effort to conceal its gradual mobilization over the ensuing two months. Stehlin and de Geffrier were not prevented from tracking German preparations from the air. Nor were Renondeau and his adjutants forbidden from travelling anywhere in Germany—with the predictable exception of regions where fortifications were under construction. The aim of this sustained campaign of deception was to intimidate Western decision makers into inaction.⁴¹

One week later the Deuxième Bureau produced an assessment of the situation for Daladier. According to this report expansion in the east remained the *idée directrice* of German foreign policy. The key consideration in determining the timetable of this expansion was the existing balance of forces: 'Germany's present [military] superiority is without doubt the principal reason it desires to precipitate a war sooner rather than later.'⁴² Contrasting reports on the progress of work on the west-wall with the information received from Bodenschatz, the SAE concluded that Bodenschatz was exaggerating the strength of German

⁴⁰ SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Compte-rendu d'une conversation entre le Capitaine Stehlin et le Général Bodenschatz', 25 June 1938.

⁴¹ Weinberg, *Starting World War Two*, 366 and Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy', 658.

⁴² MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Fonds Daladier, vol. 1, Deuxième Bureau Report, 13 July 1938.

fortifications.⁴³ The ostentatious work on the Siegfried Line, along with frequent and voluble proclamations of the solidity of the Axis with Italy, were carefully orchestrated attempts to dissuade France from responding to the coming attack on Czechoslovakia. The time necessary to build a really formidable system on the scale which Bodenschatz had described would permit France to regain much lost ground with its rearmament effort. The Deuxième Bureau was convinced, however, that Hitler would not wait until the westwall was fully completed but would attempt to profit from the present military imbalance. An operation against Czechoslovakia, Daladier was warned, could come any time after the middle of August.⁴⁴

Intelligence on the timing of the anticipated German action against Czechoslovakia began to arrive in Paris in early July. On 8 July Daladier read to the French cabinet a message from François-Poncet which predicted that after mid-August Europe would face a 'particularly critical period' and that Hitler had decided on a 'lightning attack against Czechoslovakia' using the first available pretext.⁴⁵ Another intelligence scare emerged on the weekend of 21–23 July when the SR reported that the entire 1913 class of German reservists had been called up. At the same time, the normally reliable military attaché from Switzerland informed the general staff that long columns of army vehicles had been observed moving south from Dresden and north from Vienna towards the Czechoslovak frontier.⁴⁶ This alarm proved false. It was important nonetheless in that it prompted the SR to mobilize its network of Centres de Renseignements along France's northern and eastern frontiers and to amplify its exchanges of information with Czechoslovak and Polish intelligence.⁴⁷ This triggered a flood of daily messages reporting on the call up of reservists, that workers and material were pouring westward for construction on the Siegfried Line and that the mood in Germany appeared increasingly fatalistic at the prospect of war. The daily intelligence *comptes-rendus* increased in length from an average of two to three pages to an average of eight to

⁴³ SHAT, 7N 2602–1, 'Affaire tchécoslovaque et fortifications de l'Ouest', 29 June 1938 and 'Fortifications allemandes', 6 July 1938.

⁴⁴ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Fonds Daladier, vol. 1, Deuxième Bureau Report, 13 July 1938.

⁴⁵ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Fonds Daladier, vol. 1, Note from Reynaud to Daladier discussing the cabinet proceedings of 8 July, 8 July 1938. For François-Poncet's report, see *DDF*, 2ème série, x, no. 150, 5 July 1938.

⁴⁶ SHAT, 7N 2523–1, 'Comptes-rendus', 20 and 21 July 1938.

⁴⁷ SHAT, 7N 2486–3, 'Note sur la mobilisation des Centres de Renseignements', 24 July 1938 and *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 23 and 26 July 1938.

nine pages. The SAE also began producing daily intelligence summaries which were circulated to Generals Colson, Georges, and Gamelin.⁴⁸ Through the remainder of July, August, and September, the Deuxième Bureau provided decision makers with a remarkably accurate picture of the situation.

It was in late July that intelligence began arriving in Paris concerning unrest within the German army high command. A group of high ranking officers, including army Chief of Staff Ludwig Beck, opposed the timing of the operation against Czechoslovakia, did not share the Führer's confidence that France and Britain would stand aside and was convinced that Germany could not wage war on two fronts. After a failed attempt to organize collective insubordination to Hitler's orders by the general staff, Beck resigned on 21 August. Beck's successor, General Franz Halder, appears briefly to have considered the idea of a conspiracy against Hitler but this notion was quickly abandoned.⁴⁹ French intelligence received fragmentary news of the existence of determined opposition to Hitler's war plans from Renondeau, the SR, and from the Quai d'Orsay. In April Carl Goerdeler, Mayor of Leipzig, a German nationalist and future conspirator against Hitler, visited Paris and met with Alexis Léger. He informed Léger of the resistance to Hitler in Germany and advised that France adopt a firm policy towards future German threats.⁵⁰

But there was other evidence of dissatisfaction within the army high command. Through the spring and summer of 1938 Renondeau maintained the judgement that the army was opposed to risking a two-front war.⁵¹ His views were supplemented by information which reached the Quai d'Orsay from Roger Cambon, chargé at the London embassy, that unofficial emissaries from the German army high command had appeared in London to urge the British to take a firm stand over Czechoslovakia and hinted that this might facilitate the overthrow of Hitler's regime.⁵² These rumours were supplemented by an SR report

⁴⁸ These daily reports are in SHAT, 7N 2523-1.

⁴⁹ Müller, *Das Heer*, 342-77; Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 527-8; Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy', 659-60; and Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, 141-5.

⁵⁰ On this and other rumours of a coup against Hitler, see Lacaze, *France et Munich*, 503-4; P. Hoffman, *The History of German Resistance, 1933-1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 56-7; and K. von Klemperer, *German Resistance against Hitler* (Oxford, 1992), 95-6.

⁵¹ SHAT, 7N 2602-1, Renondeau to Paris, 20 July 1938; 'Situation générale', 27 July 1938; 'Situation générale', 17 Aug. 1938. See also the *Liaison hebdomadaire* of 9 June 1938 in 7N 2522-2.

⁵² MAÉ, Papiers Massigli, vol. 19, Cambon to Massigli, 9, 23 Aug. 1938. These emissaries

from an indeterminate source which related that in war counsels Hitler had insisted the situation was favourable for a move against Czechoslovakia and had refused to listen to any dissenting opinion. The report claimed that the German high command was 'highly agitated' by Hitler's views and 'are openly criticizing the bellicose projects of National Socialist policy'.⁵³ Further rumours of discontent within the army high command were communicated to Paris in early September through Dr Reinhold Schairer, a lecturer in international law at the London School of Economics and contact of Karl Goerdeler, Hjalmar Schacht, and other conservative opponents to the Nazi regime within Germany.⁵⁴

None of the rumours of a possible coup directed against Hitler were taken seriously by either the Quai d'Orsay or the Deuxième Bureau. Nor should they have been. The hesitancy of the German general staff in no way threatened Hitler's government.⁵⁵ Renondeau judged that Hitler's will would 'smash all opposition to his designs on Czechoslovakia'. Along with François-Poncet, he rightly dismissed 'whispered messages' urging a policy of firmness on the French government as unreliable and of suspicious origin.⁵⁶ The Deuxième Bureau agreed. An appreciation prepared for Gamelin which reached Daladier's personal staff judged that the Fritsch-Blomberg crisis had rendered the German high command 'incapable of opposing the violent policies of the Chancellor'.⁵⁷ Gamelin accepted this interpretation. In London in mid-September he advised the British Chiefs of Staff that, although the German high command was not enthusiastic about attacking Czechoslovakia, it would follow orders and its efficiency would not be gravely compromised.⁵⁸ The same view prevailed within the Quai d'Orsay. Karl Goerdeler's advice was treated with great scepticism because he was known to have close ties to both Göring and Hitler's adjutant

were General Ewald von Kleist and Colonel Hans Boehm-Tettelbach. These events are examined in Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, 394–7 and Andrew, *Secret Service*, 556–7.

⁵³ SHAT, 2523–2, 'Hitler et les chefs de l'armée et l'affaire tchèque', 27 Aug. 1937.

⁵⁴ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Cabinet Bonnet, vol. 1, 'Note remise au Directeur Politique', 8 Sept. 1938. Dr Schairer was also in contact with Paul Reynaud, see the explanation in the Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr. 2, sdr. b, 'Compte-rendu d'une conversation tenue par mon représentant avec M. X le 6 et 7 Novembre', undated but certainly Nov. 1938.

⁵⁵ Klemperer, *Resistance*, 105–10; Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy', 659–60; Deist, 'Re-armament of the Wehrmacht', 527–9; and Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, 142–3.

⁵⁶ SHAT, 7N 2602–1, Renondeau to Paris, 20 July and 22 Aug. 1938.

⁵⁷ SHAT, 7N 2602–1, 'Compte-rendu de renseignements', initialled by Gamelin and stamped 'exploité pour le ministre', 24 Aug. 1938.

⁵⁸ PRO, WO 190/686, 'Comments on General Gamelin's views', 26 Sept. 1938.

Captain Fritz Wiedemann. Nor, finally, did Beck's resignation have any effect on French policy. Indeed, the SR did not learn of his replacement by General Halder until 5 September.⁵⁹

By late August, however, the Deuxième Bureau was able to identify the end of September as the targeted date for the German offensive. On 24 August information arrived from a *très bonne* source (which, again, cannot be identified) that Hitler had 'declared his intention to occupy Czechoslovakia on the 28th of September' and was convinced that neither Britain nor France would intervene.⁶⁰ The following day Schmidt informed the SR that Hitler was in a highly nervous state and had decided on the 25th as the day the Wehrmacht would move.⁶¹ On 6 September Schmidt repeated that the attack would come at the end of the month.⁶² At the same time, the SR reported that many of its double agents had been advised that the settlement of the Czechoslovak question would come at the end of September.⁶³ These reports were complemented by intelligence on German troop concentrations throughout the month of September. In late August the Deuxième Bureau learned that the Wehrmacht had called up a number of Landwehr divisions. This led to the conclusion that Germany was in the process of a virtual mobilization.⁶⁴ On 15 September military intelligence informed the high command that the Germans had moved nearly all of their motorized and mechanized divisions to the Czechoslovak frontier.⁶⁵ Analysis of Wehrmacht radio traffic indicated the transfer of at least sixteen divisions from western Germany to Austria.⁶⁶ At midnight on 17 September Gauché and Rivet prepared a summary of the situation for Daladier to take with him when he left to confer with Chamberlain in London early the next morning.⁶⁷ On 19 September

⁵⁹ SHAT, 7N 2523-1, 'Compte-rendu de renseignements', 6 Sept. 1938 and *DDF*, 2ème série, xi, no. 40, 7 Sept. 1938 and Lacaze, *France et Munich*, 504-5.

⁶⁰ SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Compte-rendu', 24 Aug. 1938. This intelligence corresponds with the information which Thümmel provided Czechoslovak intelligence: Moravec, *Master of Spies*, 150-1.

⁶¹ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 25 Aug. 1938; SHAT, 7N 2523-2, SR report from 'Source Z' ('excellent' marked in pencil next to this appellation), 25 Aug. 1938.

⁶² SHAT, 7N 2523-1, SR report 'Source Z', 6 Sept. 1938.

⁶³ SHAT, 7N 2523-2, SR report, 7 Sept. 1938. Similar reports of 1, 7, 8, 16, and 17 Sept. in Dossier 1 of this carton also point to the end of the month as the time of the invasion. See also Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 279-83.

⁶⁴ SHAT, 7N 2523-1, *BdR*, 30 Aug. 1938.

⁶⁵ SHAT, 7N 2523-1, *BdR*, 15 Sept. 1938.

⁶⁶ SHAT, 7N 2523-2, 'Note pour le Général chef de l'État-major de l'armée', 7 Sept. 1938.

⁶⁷ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 17-18 Sept. 1938.

the army Deuxième Bureau estimated that the Germans had mobilized seventeen to twenty reservist divisions and the forces on the Czech frontier would be ready to move in three days.⁶⁸

Significantly, intelligence analyses of the situation through the month of September remained convinced that Hitler was not bluffing, that he desired to settle the Czech affair militarily and that he could not be deterred from this course of action by a policy of firmness. Renondeau forwarded a penetrating analysis of German policy to Paris, judging that 'Hitler is counting on our inertia, our impotence and, if worst comes to worst, the protection of his defensive systems'.⁶⁹ He also deemed that '[t]he reason the Germans avoid outlining their demands openly is quite simple. The Führer and his entourage are not interested in negotiated solutions. The solution they desire is the most radical: the destruction of Czechoslovakia.'⁷⁰ During the first week in September Renondeau wrote directly to Dentz to express his conviction that Hitler had 'decided absolutely' to move against Czechoslovakia.⁷¹ On 23 August the Deuxième Bureau report to the weekly intelligence meeting concluded that, 'Hitler will be satisfied with nothing less than the complete dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and its removal as a factor in international politics'.⁷² Even Bonnet, the high-priest of French appeasement, understood that Hitler would not be satisfied with concessions over the Sudetenland, but instead desired to 'erase Czechoslovakia from the map of Europe'.⁷³

Moreover, the Deuxième Bureau combined the view that Hitler actively desired war with the familiar judgement that Czechoslovakia was only a stage in Germany's bid for European hegemony. An appreciation in July advised that 'the destruction of Czechoslovakia will be only the first episode' in Germany's drive to dominate the continent and that the Reich was seeking to obtain in eastern Europe the raw materials and foodstuffs it lacked and which would permit it to wage a long war and establish its dominance on the continent.⁷⁴ In fact, assessments were imbued with a sense of inevitability regarding the coming war: 'The force of Germany', Daladier was reminded in July, 'is driven by the most primitive of motives and guided by the powerful will of its

⁶⁸ SHAT, 7N 2523-1, 'Compte-rendu', 17 Sept. 1938.

⁶⁹ SHAT, 7N 2599, Renondeau to Paris, 22 Mar. 1937.

⁷⁰ SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Affaire tchécoslovaque et fortifications de l'Ouest', 29 June 1938.

⁷¹ SHAT, 7N 2602-1, Personal letter from Renondeau to Dentz, 6 Sept. 1938.

⁷² SHAT, 7N 2522-2, *Liaison hebdomadaire*, 23 Aug. 1938.

⁷³ Quoted in Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 337.

⁷⁴ SHAT, 2N 224-1, 'Note sur l'évolution du problème militaire français', 27 July 1938.

chief . . . [it] . . . cannot be broken by peaceful means.⁷⁵ Hitler's thirst for domination would not be satisfied by concessions over the Sudetenland. Sooner or later France would either have to submit or fight.

In sum, French intelligence supplied policy makers with detailed and accurate warning that Hitler had targeted Czechoslovakia long in advance of the actual threat in September of 1938. Intelligence reports also placed Czechoslovakia within the framework of a vast plan of expansion and domination which posed a mortal threat to French security. In addition, the Deuxième Bureau also underlined that the German high command did not feel ready to run the risk of a two-front war. Yet the Daladier government, to the enduring humiliation of France, abandoned Czechoslovakia and capitulated to Hitler at Munich. French policy evolved from retreat in advance to open retreat. A central element in this process was the perception that the strategic situation favoured Germany in 1938. The picture of German military capability outlined by French military intelligence in the spring and summer of 1938 was crucial in shaping this perception.

III

Nineteen thirty-eight marked a turning point in overall French naval policy as the naval staff's foreboding view of the strategic situation finally penetrated to the upper echelons of the government. Calculations of the future naval balance reached their inter-war nadir during the first months of 1938. In September of 1938 total German naval strength was estimated at 150,000 tonnes, including the three pocket battleships, four first-class cruisers, and twelve submarines suitable for missions outside the Baltic sea.⁷⁶ In the more important category of ships under construction, the Deuxième Bureau estimated that more than 250,000 tonnes in new warships were under construction in German shipyards. It reported that the 1939 naval programme would include a third 35,000-tonne capital ship that would probably mount eight 16 inch guns. The intelligence section also predicted that 83,097 tonnes in new warships would come into service with the German navy by the end of 1938, including the capital ships the *Gneisenau* and the

⁷⁵ SHAT, 2N 224-1, 'Note sur l'évolution du problème militaire français', 27 July 1938.

⁷⁶ SHM, 1BB2, 95, 'Situation des flottes allemande et italienne', 12 Sept. 1938. Only the 712-tonne Type IX class and the 500-tonne Type VII class were considered able to operate on the high seas.

Scharnhorst, nine destroyers, and as many as fifteen 'blue water' submarines.⁷⁷ Longer range estimations of the rate of German naval production concluded that by mid-1940 the German fleet would have two raiding forces, each comprised of two battleships, one aircraft carrier, three or four cruisers, and two squadrons of destroyers, available for use against French shipping in the Atlantic.⁷⁸ By 1943 the German fleet was expected to surpass 430,000 tonnes of modern warships and to be comprised of five large battleships, three pocket battleships, two aircraft carriers, fifteen heavy and medium cruisers, and at least sixty ocean-going submarines.⁷⁹ Typically, however, evaluations of the fighting power of these new vessels were not integrated into Deuxième Bureau assessments of the present and future naval balance.

This was probably due to a general lack of information about German naval *matériel*. While, the fragmentary state of the Marine archive makes it difficult to make unqualified assertions, it does appear that a serious dearth of technical intelligence on the ships under construction persisted into 1938. French naval intelligence assumed that both the *Bismarck* and the *Tirpitz* were being built close to the 35,000-tonne limit imposed by the second Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1937. It also continued to estimate the size of the *Gneisenau* and the *Scharnhorst* battlecruisers as close to the 26,000 tonnes announced officially by the Germans.⁸⁰ But actual designs for German capital ships were much larger than French estimates. The *Bismarck*, for example, was to be a 42,000-tonne battleship mounting eight 15 inch guns. Meanwhile, the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were 20 per cent larger than French estimates assumed, both displacing more than 31,800 tonnes.⁸¹ Conversely, estimates of the rate of German shipbuilding were exaggerated. By mid-1937 a lack of shipyard capacity combined with chronic raw material shortages to produce a 'general crisis' in the German shipbuilding industry. This caused delays of between eight months and one year in

⁷⁷ SHM, 1BB2, 92, *BdR*, May 1938; SHM, 1BB2, 94, 'Le Programme naval allemand', 11 Oct. 1938 and SHM, 1BB2, 180, 'Situation internationale des armements navals', 20 Jan. 1938.

⁷⁸ SHM, 1BB2, 94, 'Les Marines allemande, italienne et britanniques', Feb. 1938.

⁷⁹ SHM, 1BB2, 94, 'Le Programme naval allemand', 11 Oct. 1938.

⁸⁰ SHM, 1BB2, 94, 'Les Marines allemande, italienne et britannique', Feb. 1938; SHM, 1BB2, 92, *BdR*, May 1938 and SHM, 1BB2, 95, 'Constructions pour la Marine de Guerre en Allemagne', 28 Aug. 1938.

⁸¹ Dülffer, *Marine*, 372–80. During the summer of 1937 the Soviets obtained accurate intelligence on some German naval construction and forwarded this to the British Admiralty. Unfortunately, either this intelligence was not shared with the French naval staff or it was rejected by the Deuxième Bureau. See Maiolo, 'Admiralty Intelligence', 40–1.

battleship and aircraft carrier construction. The *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* did not enter into service until the outbreak of war and the aircraft carriers under construction never became part of the German fleet.⁸²

The mistakes made in assessing the German naval threat at this stage stemmed from the familiar combination of a lack of information, on the one hand, and entrenched assumptions about the situation across the Rhine, on the other. Two central misconceptions about naval rearmament conditioned naval intelligence appreciations. The first, which contradicted initial analyses of German attitudes towards the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, was that Germany was adhering to the technical limitations imposed by its naval agreements with Britain. In February of 1938 the naval attaché reported that these limitations were considered as 'definitive and permanent' by German policy makers who wanted above all to avoid another naval race with the British.⁸³ The second was the by now standard failure to integrate reports of widespread raw material shortages into estimates of the pace of German shipbuilding. In November 1937, for example, naval intelligence reported correctly that 'the lack of raw materials remains the most pressing preoccupation of the Reich' and that 'the lack of metals concerns naval construction in particular'.⁸⁴ Although the *Deuxième Bureau* received a steady stream of information confirming this report, raw material shortages were never mentioned either in the studies of German naval production cited above or in overviews of the naval balance. Emphasis was instead placed on information that German shipyards were working in split shifts to accelerate production. Darlan complained that, while French construction was restricted by the 40-hour week, German shipyards were working at maximum capacity.⁸⁵

Grim estimates of the future naval threat from Germany were not enough to alter French policy, however. It was Mussolini's announcement on 8 January of a new naval programme that would include two more 35,000-tonne battleships that finally pried funds loose for large-scale rearmament. The naval staff was ready for the Italian proclamation because the *Deuxième Bureau* had reported the Italian intention

⁸² On the state of the German shipbuilding industry, see Dülffer, *Marine*, 566–71; Salewski, *Seekriegsleitung*, i, 37–63; and Deist, *Wehrmacht*, 82–3.

⁸³ SHM, 1BB2, 94, 'Les Marines allemande, italienne et britannique', Feb. 1938.

⁸⁴ SHM, 1BB2, 91, *BdR*, Dec. 1937; for subsequent information, see esp. SHM, 1BB7, 134, 'Le Potentiel de guerre allemand', 7 July 1938.

⁸⁵ SHAT, 2N 224–1, 'Situation actuelle', 17 Oct. 1938; SHM, 1BB2, 180, 'Politique navale', 20 Jan. 1938; SHM, 1BB2, 95, 'Constructions pour la Marine de Guerre en Allemagne', 29 Aug. 1938.

to build two new capital ships the previous November.⁸⁶ In a lengthy note of 20 January the naval staff warned that the new Italian programme, which would double the amount of naval tonnage under construction, had ‘demolished the equilibrium in the Mediterranean’. The combination of the accelerated German and Italian building programmes would mean that:

Up to 1939 the French fleet will be clearly superior to the individual German and Italian fleets. From the middle of 1939 up to 1941 the French fleet will be comparable to the Italian fleet and superior to the German fleet. From 1942 the French fleet will be clearly inferior to the Italian fleet and, in relation to the German fleet, it will be first comparable and then inferior.

The political consequences of this situation would be devastating:

Up to 1939 we can face one of the two continental naval powers. From 1939 to 1942 our fleet will not be capable of acting alone with success in the Mediterranean. After 1942 our fleet will constitute a heavy burden for an eventual ally and we could be defeated if we acted alone in any theatre. Our overseas possessions would be at the mercy of other powers.

The note ended with a reminder that ‘decisions taken in 1938 will condition the situation in 1942–1943’.⁸⁷ In a note to Campinchi, Darlan demanded a supplementary construction programme. He warned, in typically restrained fashion, that ‘if we continue to sleep, our country will be incapable of following a foreign policy of any kind’.⁸⁸

This ‘worst case’ picture of the strategic balance achieved its objective. In March the CPDN and the short-lived Blum cabinet approved plans for a tranche 1938*bis* aimed at funding all construction delayed by the austerity measures of the previous spring and summer. This programme was amplified by the ensuing Daladier government in the form of a 2 May decree authorizing the laying down of 98,375 tonnes of combat vessels including two more 35,000-tonne capital ships. In total six billion francs were to be invested in a five-year construction programme aimed at achieving a total of 743,558 tonnes of warships by 1943, thus ensuring France’s place as the strongest continental European naval power. Even Darlan expressed satisfaction with these results.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ SHM, 1BB2, 92, *BdR*, 8 Oct.–8 Nov. 1937.

⁸⁷ SHM, 1BB2, 208, ‘Politique navale’, 20 Jan. 1938. See also M. Nouschi, ‘La Puissance navale française en 1937–1938’, *RHA* 3 (1983), 53–9.

⁸⁸ *Lettres, notes*, no. 30, Darlan to Campinchi, 7 Jan. 1938, 72.

⁸⁹ SHAT, 224–1, ‘Situation actuelle’, 17 Oct. 1938. On naval rearmament in 1938, see

IV

The timing of the Sudetenland crisis could not have been worse for the French air force. The appointment of Guy La Chambre as air minister in January 1938 had marked the beginning of a new era in French air policy. By spring 1938 La Chambre did not need to convince his cabinet colleagues of the need for an immense effort to redress the situation in the air, the danger was all too apparent. And relations with the rest of the defence establishment were no longer confrontational. La Chambre was a close friend of Daladier and enjoyed good relations with both parliamentary aviation commissions.⁹⁰ Under these conditions air policy was able to make the kind of progress which had been impossible under Cot.

The new minister replaced air force chief of staff Féquant with General Vuillemin and he resurrected the Conseil Supérieur de l'Air, which had fallen into abeyance during Cot's tenure. He took further steps to re-establish the relationship between the ministry and the air staff by abolishing the structural reforms of the Cot ministry and reorganizing the air force once again.⁹¹ Most importantly, La Chambre was able to secure the funding necessary for an ambitious air rearmament programme. Before officially assuming his responsibilities, La Chambre had met with Daladier to discuss the situation of French aviation. Crucially, both agreed that major investment would be necessary to expand and retool the aviation industry in order to introduce effective mass production.⁹²

The foundations were thus laid for a massive effort to restore French air power. The rearmament programme introduced by the air ministry in March of 1938, Plan V, was formulated to meet the strategic requirements of French air power in the event of a war in which France and Britain were pitted against Germany and Italy with Spain neutral.⁹³

Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 90–1 and 177–91; Masson, 'Réarmement', 73–7; Coutau-Bégarie and Huan, *Darlan*, 135–43; and Nouschi, 'La Puissance navale', 55–7.

⁹⁰ Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 438–45; Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 144.

⁹¹ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12962, 'Le Plan V: Son origine, Son élaboration et son exécution', no date, probably written by La Chambre. See also Facon, *L'Armée de l'air*, 21–8 and 75–91; Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 435–69; and Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 154–5.

⁹² AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 5, sdr. d, Daladier note on an interview with La Chambre in Jan. of 1938.

⁹³ SHAA, 1B 3, 'Rapport au Conseil Supérieur de l'Air', 7, 8, 9 Mar. 1938. See also Facon, 'Plan V', 55–6.

The objective was to equal estimated German air power in January of 1938. The rearmament programme aimed at providing France with a force with 2,617 first-line aircraft and 2,122 reserves by 1940. This force would consist predominantly of fighters, which were less expensive and could be produced faster than bombers. Plan V was to be achieved in two stages. In keeping with the defensive–offensive configuration of French grand strategy, priority was given to securing French airspace. Consequently, the first tranche would consist almost exclusively of fighters. Just as importantly, the new programme called for a major retooling and expansion of the aeronautical industry which aimed at increasing production to 330 aircraft per month (six times the target of the Cot regime) by June of 1939. In pursuit of these objectives, the new regime borrowed heavily from the British system that had been in place since 1936. In early March a British air mission came to Paris to discuss new strategies for modernization and mass production with representatives from the French air ministry and aero-industry. The air ministry was allocated a total of 16 billion credits to finance the new programme. Expenditure on air rearmament rose from 21 to 42 per cent of total defence spending.⁹⁴

Significant increases in credits, however, could not immediately transform the situation. Owing to the inability of the aviation industry to cope with the enormous demands of the new rearmament programme, Plan V was not expected to improve significantly the disparity between French and German air power until the spring of 1939.⁹⁵ In April La Chambre commissioned Senator de la Grange to begin negotiations for the purchase of up to 1,000 American-built fighters.⁹⁶ But the existing disparity in air power was not alleviated by these measures. During the summer of 1938 Plan V had yet to begin paying dividends, there was a desperate shortage of modern equipment and the Armée de l'Air was in the midst of the structural reorganizations decreed by the new team at the air ministry. France's vulnerability in the air at this stage made German successes in building the Luftwaffe all the more impressive and demoralizing. The resulting sense of impotence and

⁹⁴ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 5, sdr. d, 'Les Armements français en 1938', undated. See also Facon, *L'Armée de l'air*, 81–7; Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 88–90; Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 438–42. On Franco-British technical cooperation, see P. Fridenson and J. Lecuir, *La France et la Grande Bretagne face aux problèmes aériens, 1935–1940* (Vincennes, 1976) and Thomas, *Britain, France*, 220–1.

⁹⁵ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 5, sdr. d, 'Les Armements français en 1938'.

⁹⁶ See Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 469–77 and Haight, *American Aid to France*, 4–11.

inferiority conditioned perceptions of the situation in the air and underpinned the tendency to overestimate German air power.

In May 1938 Duvernoy was promoted to deputy chief of air staff and was replaced as chief of the Deuxième Bureau by Lt. Colonel Alfred d'Arnaud de Vitrolles. From one of the wealthiest and most influential families in France, de Vitrolles, like his predecessor, was originally a cavalry officer who joined the air force after the Rif War in Morocco, receiving relatively rapid promotion to the rank of Group Commandant by the summer of 1929.⁹⁷ De Vitrolles attended the École Supérieure de Guerre from 1932 to 1935 and was attached to the personal staff of air minister Denain upon his graduation. He headed air intelligence from 15 May 1938 until he was killed in a plane crash during the phoney war. Although he took over the Deuxième Bureau at a particularly bleak juncture in terms of assessments of the air balance, de Vitrolles would prove a very capable intelligence chief. His estimates of the situation in the air were consistently more balanced and less alarmist than those of his superiors, Vuillemin in particular.

By spring 1938 the air intelligence had concluded that most of the first-line aircraft of the Luftwaffe were products of the German air ministry's renovation programme of 1937. The quality of the aircraft introduced under this programme was impressive. The Messerschmidt Bf 109 had set the world speed record the previous November and was considered the finest fighter in the world. The new twin engine Heinkel He 111 and Dornier Do 17 medium bombers were capable of speeds from 390 to 440 km/h and were thus faster than all but a handful of French fighters. These bombers, according to the Deuxième Bureau, were also able to transport up to two tonnes of explosives as far as 1,000 kilometres.⁹⁸ As Europe hovered on the edge of war during the summer of 1938, the Deuxième Bureau estimated that the Luftwaffe possessed an operational strength of 230 squadrons and 2,760 aircraft—including 1,368 bombers and 524 fighters. Even more unsettling was the conclusion that 80 per cent of German first-line fighters and 87 per cent of first-line bombers, 1,766 aircraft in all, were considered to be products of the recent refurbishment programme and

⁹⁷ SHAA, uncatalogued 'État des services de Lt. Colonel de Vitrolles'. This personal dossier is incommunicable until 2017.

⁹⁸ SHAA, 2B 63, 'Note sur l'appareil de chasse allemand Messerschmidt Bf. 109', 1 Apr. 1938; 2B 61, 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938; 2B 59, 'Dossier de campagne', 1 June 1938; SHAT, 5N 579-2, Daladier to Churchill, 11 May 1938. See also Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 88, for impressions of German matériel in 1938.

superior to any aircraft in service in the French air force.⁹⁹ Added to this was the power of the air defence network developed by the Germans during the 1930s, which French intelligence considered the best in the world.¹⁰⁰

This estimate was significantly overblown. Once again, calculations of the total number of squadrons and first-line aircraft were accurate. The decisive flaw in French assessments was a failure to determine the percentage of modern and serviceable aircraft in the Luftwaffe order of battle. These were difficult issues which no foreign intelligence service was able to resolve at this point. In September of 1938 only 1,669 of 2,750 first-line German aircraft were fit to take part in operations. Less than half of these were modern.¹⁰¹ The importance of this inflated view of the Luftwaffe was magnified by the perception that German planes would begin bombing Paris from the outset of war.

In 1938 air intelligence expected the Luftwaffe to play an important strategic role in a Franco-German conflict. Aware of debate between army and air force representatives within the Wehrmacht over the use of air power, air intelligence judged that Göring's status as Hitler's lieutenant would secure for the Luftwaffe an independent role in German strategy. This was an important misperception on the part of the air force Deuxième Bureau. In reality, the primary role of air power in German war doctrine was one of tactical support for ground forces. Significantly, French analysts did not lack evidence which pointed to this conclusion. As early as December of 1935, an attaché report prepared by Poincaré had called for a reconsideration of the assumption that the Luftwaffe was first and foremost an independent force. Poincaré had noted that in the Wehrmacht command structure the commander in chief of the air force was subordinated to the army high command. This, he concluded, suggested that the first responsibility of the air force would be to provide close support for ground operations.¹⁰² This interpretation appeared to be confirmed by an analysis of the German manoeuvres of autumn 1936 produced by the air Deuxième Bureau:

⁹⁹ SHAA, 2B 59, 'Dossier de campagne: Allemagne', 1 June 1938; SHAT, 7N 2697, 'Ordre de bataille de l'armée de l'air allemande à la date du 1 Septembre 1938'.

¹⁰⁰ SHAA, 2B 61, 'Conférence sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Oct. 1937; 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938; and 'L'Armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1939.

¹⁰¹ Overy, 'German Air Strength', 468–70. On the very similar difficulties experienced by British air intelligence at this stage, see Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 48–52 and 61–78.

¹⁰² SHAT, 7N 2596, 'Organisation de l'Aéronautique: Emploi de l'aviation dite indépendante', 11 Dec. 1935.

The structure of the German air force, the temperament of its chief and certain information garnered from the press all give the impression that German air doctrine will be inspired by a nearly absolute spirit of independence regarding the ground command. . . . But the latest manoeuvres have shown that this is not the case. The air command has proceeded with extreme care to collaborate closely with ground forces. The capital lesson to be taken from the manoeuvres of 1936 is that in all decisive action the air command is directly subordinate to the ground command.¹⁰³

These manoeuvres had further demonstrated 'a particular preoccupation with coordinating aviation and army operations' in German doctrine. In addition to heralding the appearance of close tactical cooperation between armoured and dive bomber units, the manoeuvres also revealed that 'all bomber and dive-bomber planes intervene in the decisive phase of the battle in cooperation with armoured formations'.¹⁰⁴ A subsequent study based on a synthesis of attaché reports, reports on operations in Spain, and on a captured Luftwaffe manual entitled *Luftkriegführung* (Conduct of Aerial Warfare), stressed that the versatility of the new German medium bombers permitted them to either intervene in conjunction with fighters and dive-bombers on the field of battle or to be employed to disrupt enemy supply and communications systems and to prevent reinforcements from reaching the battlefield. The entire bomber fleet could therefore be expected to support the army during ground operations.¹⁰⁵ This was a comprehensive understanding of the role of air power in German military doctrine. It was supplemented by lessons taken from the war in Spain, which suggested that air power could play a key role in supporting ground operations. There were few instances, conversely, where large-scale bombing achieved decisive results.¹⁰⁶

Yet, down to the outbreak of war, air intelligence continued to focus on the 'strategic' threat posed by the Luftwaffe and ignored evidence that it would be placed at the disposal of German ground forces. The

¹⁰³ SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1937.

¹⁰⁴ Cited from SHAA, 2B 61, 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938 and 2B 60, 'Les Grandes Manoeuvres allemandes—1937', 3 Feb. 1938. See also Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 289–94.

¹⁰⁵ SHAA, 2B 62, 'Étude sur la doctrine d'emploi de l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1939. See also 2B 62, 'L'Armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1939.

¹⁰⁶ SHAT, 7N 2506, 'Études: Enseignements de la guerre d'Espagne', Mar. 1938. This lengthy summary cites air intelligence bulletins as well as air force and military observers in Spain. See also M. Astorika, 'L'Aviation et la guerre d'Espagne: La Cinquième Arme face aux exigences de la guerre moderne', in Hildebrand and Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich*, 325–48.

air Deuxième Bureau held insistently to the conviction that 'the German air force is above all an offensive tool', and that its 'fundamental role is that of an independent strike force'. The chief argument for this interpretation was the preponderance of bombers, particularly Heinkel and Dornier medium bombers, in the Luftwaffe order of battle. Another argument was the fact that Göring was the only Field Marshal in the Wehrmacht and that he would therefore secure a decisive and independent role for air power in German war doctrine.¹⁰⁷ At the root of this analysis remained entrenched attitudes within the air force general staff regarding the use of air power in a future war.¹⁰⁸ Appreciations continued to be conditioned by the air staff's mirror imaging. Assessments and intelligence remained convinced down to the outbreak of war that the fundamental task of the German air force would be to undertake large-scale bombing offensives against France's *potentiel de guerre*. German bombers were expected to strike at airfields in France immediately (perhaps before hostilities had officially been declared) and to bomb French industrial and population centres heavily from the outset of a conflict.¹⁰⁹

This misreading of the role of air power in German military thinking undoubtedly contributed to the general terror which an air attack inspired in civilian officials responsible for French security. But the relative importance of this mistake should not be exaggerated. Historians Williamson Murray and Wesley Wark have argued persuasively that the preoccupation of British intelligence with the 'strategic' role of the Luftwaffe distorted perceptions of German military power and provided unjustified support for the policy of appeasement in London.¹¹⁰ The same argument does not apply in the French case. Although the Luftwaffe was incapable of mounting effective air raids on Britain without bases in the low countries, it was quite capable of mounting a sustained bombing offensive against northern France.¹¹¹ French air

¹⁰⁷ Cited from SHAA, 2B 61, 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938.

¹⁰⁸ On the tension between the army and air force high commands over the role of military aviation, see Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 58–71 and 364–86; Young, 'The Strategic Dream', 57–76; and M. Alexander, 'Force de frappe ou feu de paille? Maurice Gamelin's Appraisal of Military Aviation before the Blitzkrieg of 1940', *Colloque Air* (Paris, 1985), 65–80.

¹⁰⁹ SHAA, 2B 62, 'Idées allemandes sur l'emploi de l'armée de l'air indépendante', 8 Sept. 1938. See also 2B 61, 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938; 2B 59, *Dossier de campagne: Allemagne*, 1 June 1938.

¹¹⁰ W. Murray, 'German Air Power and the Munich Crisis', in Bond and Roy (eds.), *War and Society* (London, 1977), 107–18 and Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 65–9.

¹¹¹ Murray, *Strategy for Defeat*, 12–13, 21.

intelligence was therefore correct in emphasizing that, should static warfare once again prevail on the western front, the large number of Luftwaffe bombers would provide Germany with an important advantage.¹¹²

Intelligence on the productive capacity of the German aircraft industry was equally alarming and equally misleading. According to the air force Deuxième Bureau, the aviation industry had more than doubled in size between 1936 and 1938. Appreciations of the number of workers employed in the manufacture of aircraft increased from 40,000 in January of 1936 to well over 200,000 by 1939.¹¹³ In January of 1938 air intelligence estimated that Germany was manufacturing 350 military aircraft per month. By June this figure had been raised to 450 with the prediction that output could be doubled if the industry was placed on a war footing.¹¹⁴ Estimates continued to rise during the summer of 1938. By August French, British, and American air attachés were duped into reporting that German factories were working two 10-hour shifts. This caused production estimates to rise to an incredible 1,000 fighting machines per month for the crisis months of August and September.¹¹⁵

In contrast to the massive acceleration reported by the air Deuxième Bureau, actual aircraft production declined during 1938. Germany produced only 427 military aircraft in September of 1938.¹¹⁶ The failure of air intelligence to provide accurate information on the German aircraft industry is strikingly similar to the errors made in estimating levels of armaments production by the army Deuxième Bureau. Intelligence analysts were unable to penetrate the Nazi façade to detect the organizational difficulties and the general scarcity of iron, steel, other essential raw materials, and, not least, labour, which combined to limit aircraft production. While periodic assessments made reference to

¹¹² SHAA, 2B 61, 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938.

¹¹³ SHAA, 2B 58, *BdR*, 1er trimestre 1936; 2B 62, 'Mémento: L'Industrie aéronautique allemande', 1 Dec. 1937; 2B 61, 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938; 2B 62, 'L'Armée de l'air allemande', 11 May 1939.

¹¹⁴ 2B 61, 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938; SHAT, 5N 579, Daladier to Churchill, 11 May 1938. Figures correspond roughly to those provided in Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe*, 190.

¹¹⁵ MAÉ, Eu 18-40, Allemagne, Carton 663, 'Accroissement du matériel de l'Armée de l'Air en Allemagne', 9 Nov. 1938; SHAT, 5N 579-5, 'Le Matériel et la production aéronautique du Reich', La Chambre to Daladier, 2 Dec. 1938.

¹¹⁶ Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe*: 144-5, 159, 231 (figure cited from 231). See also Wagenführ, *Die deutsche Industrie im Krieg*, 74; Overy, 'The German Pre-War Aircraft Production Plans', 78r; Deist, 'Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', in *GSWW*, i/2, 498-9.

these reports, there was no systematic attempt to measure the effect of these deficiencies on the aero-industry. Appreciations were based instead on the assumption that the general shortage of labour and raw materials in Germany would not be permitted to affect the aircraft industry. More important in shaping French perceptions was a declaration made by Göring in late 1937, quoted in three separate studies on the German aircraft industry, that 'material considerations' would not be permitted to interfere with air rearmament.¹¹⁷ The overblown analyses of German air power produced by the air force Deuxième Bureau during the summer of 1938 were a major victory for the German campaign of bluster and disinformation.

Numerous historians have attributed decisive importance to the mistakes made by air intelligence in 1938. Inflated estimates of the capabilities of the Luftwaffe, it has been argued, distorted perceptions of the balance of power and exerted an undue influence on decision making.¹¹⁸ This interpretation is misleading. It was the decrepit state of the French air force, rather than the power of the Luftwaffe, which was foremost in the minds of key policy makers. Moreover, the credulity with which French air intelligence officers interpreted German intimidation tactics can only be understood within the context of French weakness in the air. Unbelievable as it may seem, in September of 1938 the French air force possessed less than 50 modern warplanes. Moreover, only 700 of its 1,126 total aircraft lanes were operational—250 fighters, 320 bombers, and 130 reconnaissance planes. Of these, only a handful of Potez and Morane fighters were considered even roughly comparable to the latest Messerschmidts under mass production in Germany.¹¹⁹ There were no modern bombers. The best French bomber, the Bloch 210, had been designed in the late 1920s and was more than a generation behind the German bombers in technical terms. Most French bombers were constructed of wood and canvas rather than the steel and stressed aluminium used in the construction

¹¹⁷ See, in particular, SHAA, 2B 61, 'Notice sur l'armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1938; 2B 61, 'L'Armée de l'air allemande', Jan. 1939; and SHAT, 5N 579-5, 'Le Matériel et la production aéronautique du Reich', La Chambre to Daladier, 2 Dec. 1938. See also Vivier, *Politique aéronautique militaire*, 507-18.

¹¹⁸ Lacaze, *France et Munich*, 503-6; Buffotot, 'Réarmement aérien allemand', 280-2; Du Réau, 'Renseignement et la décision', 257-8; Vaisse, *Diplomatie et outil militaire*, 389-91; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 340-1; Adamthwaite, *France*, 238-51; Le Goyet, *Munich*, 363-5; and W. Murray, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', *INS* 2 (1987), 47-66; and *Path to Ruin*, 235-47.

¹¹⁹ SHAA, Z 11607, pièce 156, 'Rapport du contrôleur Thouvenot'. AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 5, sdr. d, 'Aviation Française—Avril 1938', and 496 AP 32, dr. 6, 'État actuel des forces aériennes françaises', 2 Apr. 1938.

of the latest Heinkels, Dorniers, and Junkers.¹²⁰ The aircraft industry was in an equally dismal state. Production had not yet recovered from the breakdown which followed Cot's decentralization programme. During the first six months of 1938 the entire industry produced an average of 50 military aircraft per month. In July and August, at the very height of the crisis over Czechoslovakia, Daladier was informed that French factories had produced a total of 50 military aircraft.¹²¹

The summer of 1938 was thus the bleakest period in assessment of the German air threat. An acute sense of inferiority combined with a lack of reliable information generated an addiction to worst case thinking. The results were vastly exaggerated appreciations of Luftwaffe strength, the threat of mass bombing of urban centres, and the productive power of the German aircraft industry. The weaknesses that air intelligence had detected in the German air force since 1934, paradoxically, do not figure in the intelligence appreciations which were produced during the spring and summer of 1938. The focus was instead overwhelmingly on the numerical and qualitative disparity between the French and German fleets.

France's crushing inferiority in the air was the dominant preoccupation of General Vuillemin, the newly appointed Chief of Staff of the air force, during the months leading up to the Munich Conference. Vuillemin reiterated his apocalyptic prediction of mid-January, that the French air force would be wiped out within a fortnight in the event of war with Germany, before a meeting of the CPDN on 15 March and then to virtually anyone who would listen during the tension filled month of September. Vuillemin's determination to press his view upon civilian decision makers served to keep the disparity in air power in the forefront of the minds of La Chambre, Daladier, and the cabinet.¹²² Daladier was virtually bombarded with alarmist reports. Before departing for his first meeting with Neville Chamberlain in early April, Daladier was advised by the SGDN that '[g]iven the present state of our aviation it is absolutely essential that Britain agrees to deploy a

¹²⁰ Facon, *L'Armée de l'air*, 26–30 and T. Vivier, 'L'Armée de l'air et la révolution technique des années trente (1933–1939)', *RHA* 1 (1990), 34–5.

¹²¹ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12932–1, 'Production des avions de guerre'. These figures match those in SHAT, 5N 583–9, 'Information du Président: Production aéronautique', 17 Sept. 1938.

¹²² P. Facon, 'Le Haut Commandement aérien français et la crise de Munich', *RHA* 3 (1983), 10–16; A. Teyssier, 'Le Général Vuillemin: Un haut responsable militaire face au danger allemand', *RHA* 2 (1987), 105–6.

significant portion of its air power on French soil in the event of war'. Gamelin was equally direct when he advised the Premier that the French air force was, 'completely outclassed', and that 'aerial cooperation with Britain is indispensable'.¹²³ Upon his return from London, Daladier received a lengthy Deuxième Bureau report documenting the growth of German air power since 1936. By the end of 1938, he was informed, the Luftwaffe would comprise 'two thousand ultra-modern combat planes' and concluded that 'German air strength is without any doubt superior to that of any other Great Power'.¹²⁴

Predictably, Daladier took a bleak view of the air balance and its ramifications on the strategic situation. During an interview in May, US Ambassador William Bullitt queried Daladier as to whether France would make war in support of Czechoslovakia. 'With what?' was Daladier's reply. He went on to explain that 'the present air disparity between French and German forces' made war to protect Czechoslovakia 'impossible'. Quoting from the aforementioned intelligence report, Daladier informed Bullitt that Germany would soon be producing 500 aircraft per month while France was struggling to manufacture one-tenth that amount. Britain, the French Premier complained, was 'unwilling to engage in war on the continent for Czechoslovakia or any other purpose than the defence of their immediate interests on the channel coast'. The situation for the Czechs, he concluded, was hopeless.¹²⁵

General Vuillemin did everything possible to further darken Daladier's perspective on the balance of power. After a much publicized visit to Germany in late August, he returned with an even stronger conviction that the French air force would be wiped out in a war with Germany. A report Vuillemin submitted upon his return, which was circulated to the ministries of defence and foreign affairs, confirmed the intelligence the air ministry had received over the past several months. Contrary to what has been alleged by a number of scholars, however, neither Vuillemin nor his entourage were 'taken in' by

¹²³ DDF, 2ème série, ix, no. 230 and SHAT, 2N 227-3, 'Note sur la collaboration franco-britannique', 24 Apr. 1938. For Gamelin to Daladier, see Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 5, sdr. d, 2 Apr. 1938.

¹²⁴ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 35, dr. 2, sdr. b, 'Forces aériennes allemandes en 1938', 27 Apr. 1938.

¹²⁵ Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1938*, i, Bullitt to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, 9 May 1938, 493-5. Daladier also opined that, although its air force comprised 5,000 aircraft, it was doubtful that the USSR would take the offensive in Europe because of the state of its army.

German deception tactics.¹²⁶ Both Vuillemin and air intelligence chief de Vitrolles, who also travelled to Germany, acknowledged that the German object throughout had been to ‘bluff’ the French with intimidating displays of the overwhelming strength of the German air force and to mislead them as to the capabilities of various German aircraft. Despite their acknowledgement of these efforts at deception, both concluded that the Armée de l’Air was clearly outclassed by the Luftwaffe.¹²⁷ Vuillemin reiterated this judgement again in an assessment prepared for La Chambre and Daladier of 26 September. He warned that the vast majority of French aircraft were ‘clearly inferior’ and reserves remained ‘for all intents and purposes non-existent’. More alarming still, the ‘extreme disproportion of forces in favour of Germany’, would render France’s demographic and industrial centres virtually defenceless against ‘massive and repeated air attacks’.¹²⁸ During a meeting with Daladier on the eve of the Munich conference Vuillemin became so overwrought at the prospect of war that the former became embarrassed and felt compelled to terminate their interview.¹²⁹

During the Czechoslovak crisis the air minister was unequivocally *munichois*. On 19 September the La Chambre read aloud portions of another exceedingly bleak report which Vuillemin had prepared upon his return from Berlin to a meeting of the cabinet.¹³⁰ La Chambre painted a dismal view of the situation to Ambassador Bullitt. German planes would be able to bomb French cities at will and ‘the destruction of Paris would pass all imagination’.¹³¹ In a post-Munich testimonial La Chambre submitted that ‘[i]n September 1938 the situation of French aviation was so deficient that it effectively deprived our country of its freedom of action in the international sphere . . . its restoration

¹²⁶ See, among others, Murray, *Path to Ruin*, 193, 211; Lacaze, *France et Munich*, 394–414; Barton Whaley, ‘Covert Rearmament in Germany 1919–1939: Deception and Misperception’, *JSS* 5: 1 (1982), 18–29; and Mihalka, ‘German Strategic Deception’.

¹²⁷ SHAA, Archives Vuillemin, Z 11272, 2 Sept. 1938 and MAÉ, Cabinet Bonnet, vol. 1, 3 Sept. 1938 and PRO, FO 371, 21710, C 8787/1425/18, de Vitrolles conversation with Colyer, 25 Aug. 1938. See also P. Facon, ‘La Visite du Général Vuillemin en Allemagne’, *Recueil d’articles et études (1981–1983)* (Vincennes, 1987), 221–62.

¹²⁸ SHAA, Fonds La Chambre, Vuillemin to La Chambre, 26 Sept. 1938 and AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 5, sdr. d. Daladier remarked that this note was ‘even more pessimistic than usual’.

¹²⁹ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 8, dr. 5, sdr. d.

¹³⁰ A. de Monzie, *Ci-devant* (Paris, 1941), 29.

¹³¹ Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs*, vol. vii, documents 1306 and 1306A, Bullitt to Roosevelt, 28 Sept. 1938.

was the preliminary condition to any decision'.¹³² For Daladier, German air superiority was a *facteur primordiale* which limited his options during the crisis. He later submitted that '[t]he air situation constantly conditioned my thinking. When considering our options we always came back to the same problem, the inferiority of our aviation in relation to that of Germany.'¹³³ Colonel de Geffrier, air attaché in Berlin since the previous January, summed up the role of the air situation in a report prepared in the aftermath of the Munich Conference. 'The German air force', he concluded, 'has, by the sole threat of its power, held all of Europe breathless.'¹³⁴

V

Although the situation on the ground was not considered as disastrous, the assumption was that little could be done to prevent Germany from overrunning Czechoslovakia. Almost immediately after the *Anschluss*, the Deuxième Bureau began to produce bleak assessments of the strategic situation for Czechoslovakia.¹³⁵ Estimates of how long the Czechoslovaks could resist a German invasion ranged from several days, to several weeks, to several months. At the height of the crisis the Deuxième Bureau judged that the Czechoslovak army represented a 'formidable force' of thirty-five well-equipped divisions 'determined to give battle to the invader'. Nonetheless, it predicted that the Czechs could hold out for a maximum of one month.¹³⁶ Throughout the crisis

¹³² Cited in P. Jackson, 'La Perception de la puissance aérienne allemande et son influence sur la politique extérieure française pendant les crises internationales de 1938 à 1939', *RHA* 39: 4 (1994), 81.

¹³³ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 8, dr. 5, 'Munich'.

¹³⁴ SHAT, 579-6, 'Le Facteur aérien dans le conflit germano-tchécoslovaque', 10 Oct. 1938. De Geffrier report forwarded by La Chambre to Daladier. On the air question, see also Lacaze, *France et Munich*, 492-3 and Young, *In Command of France*, 197-204.

¹³⁵ SHAT, 7N 2522-2, 'La Tchécoslovaquie devant le nouvel empire allemande', 17 Mar. 1938; 'Note au sujet de la possibilité d'une action allemande contre la Tchécoslovaquie', 8 Apr. 1938; 'Aide soviétique éventuelle à la Tchécoslovaquie', no date; 'Considérations sur la forme que pourrait prendre une attaque allemande contre la Tchécoslovaquie', 23 July 1938; 'Note sur le problème militaire tchécoslovaque', 21 Sept. 1938; and 'Note sur les caractéristiques possibles d'un plan d'invasion de la Tchécoslovaquie', 23 Sept. 1938.

¹³⁶ The most common hypothesis during the tension-filled month of Sept. was that the Czechs could hold out for up to two months. On this question, see this author's 'French Military Intelligence and Czechoslovakia, 1938', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 5: 1 (1994), 99. For a well-researched study that reaches an opposing conclusion see R. F. Crane, *A French Conscience in Prague: Louis Eugene Faucher and the Abandonment of Czechoslovakia* (New York, 1996).

the French high command consistently advised that the only way to ensure the survival of Czechoslovakia was to avoid war.¹³⁷ This exceedingly grim interpretation of the strategic situation was not based on an underestimation of Czechoslovak military potential. Throughout the 1930s the Deuxième Bureau had produced invariably positive assessments of the quality of Czechoslovakia's armed forces.¹³⁸ It was based instead on a distorted perception of German military power.

In the spring of 1938 French military intelligence constructed an in-depth assessment of Germany's ground forces. It estimated that the regular army comprised forty-three divisions and 850,000 effectives including three light mechanized and four Panzer divisions. The Deuxième Bureau reckoned that the German army, after mobilization, could field another 1.5 million men in thirty-six reservist divisions and thirty-six Landwehr divisions. In total, French intelligence estimated that Germany could field 116 divisions seven days after general mobilization had been declared.¹³⁹ In an invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Deuxième Bureau anticipated that Germany would deploy forty-eight divisions, including all of its armoured and motorized divisions, against the Czechoslovaks. A defensive force of thirty divisions, composed primarily of reservists, would be deployed along the Franco-German frontier. The remainder of the German field army would be held in reserve.¹⁴⁰

This was a serious distortion of the size and capability of Germany's ground forces. In a magnification of the pattern of French appreciations of the German threat during the 1930s, the Deuxième Bureau proved efficient in estimating the size of the German regular army but very inaccurate in its assessment of the number of reserve divisions. In the summer of 1938 the German regular army consisted of thirty-seven infantry, four light mechanized, and three Panzer divisions. But the Reich simply did not possess the industrial capacity to outfit large numbers of reservist

¹³⁷ See R. Young, 'Le Haut Commandement français au moment de Munich', *RHMC* 24 (1977), 110–29; Alexander, *Republic in danger*, 279–80; and Facon, 'Le Haut Commandement', 13–16.

¹³⁸ Jackson, 'French Military Intelligence', 86–109.

¹³⁹ SHAT, 7N 2522–2, 'Considérations sur la forme que pourrait prendre une attaque allemande contre la Tchécoslovaquie', 23 July 1938 and AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP 35, dr. 5, sdr. a, 'Allemagne: Forces terrestres', 27 Apr. 1938.

¹⁴⁰ This would also leave a force of 14 divisions for deployment along the frontier with Poland and 15 divisions as a strategic reserve. SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Note sur les moyens et les possibilités de manoeuvre de l'armée allemande face à l'ouest, dans l'hypothèse d'une action offensive principale contre la Tchécoslovaquie menée avec le gros de ses forces', undated but pre-Munich and post-*Anschluss*. See also 7N 3715, 'Directive pour l'offensive entre Rhine et Luxembourg', 9 June 1938 and Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau*, 137–9.

divisions. In fact, mobilization could provide only twenty-seven additional reservist and Landwehr divisions. Nor was this force prepared to fight a war of attrition. The German army possessed ammunition for only six weeks of heavy fighting.¹⁴¹ Hence the Deuxième Bureau overestimated the number of reserve-type divisions by nearly 150 per cent and the size of the German field army by nearly 70 per cent. This error was not a purposeful exaggeration intended to secure increased expenditure on the military. Estimates drafted in view of securing more funds for the military budget were even more exaggerated. One of these, produced several weeks later for the ministry of defence and the CPDN, attributed nearly 200 divisions to the German army after mobilization.¹⁴² Behind this critical misperception was the continuing lack of crucial intelligence on German industrial output. In December of 1937 and again in February of 1938 Daladier admitted to the Chamber army commission, that accurate information about such critical factors as armaments production and stocks of strategic raw materials remained fragmentary.¹⁴³ The Deuxième Bureau was again relying on its exaggerated view of German industrial capacity and to estimate levels of armaments production. Thus, once again, intelligence analysts failed to make the connection between widespread shortages in raw materials and their inevitable affect on armaments production. The result was a series of grave miscalculations of Germany's capacity to wage war.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the French were completely overawed by the power of the German army. Military intelligence correctly identified a number of the Wehrmacht's deficiencies. Both regular and reserve formations were considered desperately short of trained officers.¹⁴⁴ Renondeau judged that 'grave deficiencies' remained in the armament of the peacetime army and that the field army was much worse.¹⁴⁵ The Deuxième Bureau reckoned that only

¹⁴¹ Murray, *Path to Ruin*, 219–22.

¹⁴² SHAT, 7N 3434–3, 'Note sur les besoins auxquels doit satisfaire l'armée française', note by the general staff of General Georges, 1 Apr. 1938. See also a general staff memorandum which censures the above document for exaggerating the number of divisions the Germans could put into the field in 7N 2522–2, 'Remarques sur la note du Général Georges', 8 Apr. 1939.

¹⁴³ AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème législature, Daladier auditions, 1 Dec. 1937, 9 Feb. 1938.

¹⁴⁴ SHAT, 7N 2601, 'Degré d'entraînement de l'infanterie allemande', 17 Jan. 1938 and 2680–2, 'L'Armée allemande fin de 1937', 25 Apr. 1938.

¹⁴⁵ SHAT, 7N 2601, Renondeau to Paris, 26 Jan. 1938 and esp. 'Niveau actuel du réarmement allemand', 2 Feb. 1938. See also François-Poncet's report on 'La Crise intérieure allemande: Les Événements du 4 février', in *DDF*, 2ème série, viii, no. 138.

one-third of the regular army formations were equipped with heavy artillery. An appreciation of early 1938 judged that 'although one should not underestimate its force, there is no doubt that the German army has far to go before it reaches the level desired by its general staff'.¹⁴⁶ Another study prepared in September postulated that, although the Wehrmacht was 'a very powerful instrument, possessing modern material and able to undertake operations on extremely short notice', it was 'not yet ready to throw itself into a general conflict'.¹⁴⁷ Intelligence which the Deuxième Bureau had received about the divergence of views between the high command and the Führer appeared to reinforce this point of view. The Deuxième Bureau deemed that these weaknesses would make it imperative for Germany to smash the Czechs quickly and 'present the world with a fait accompli' before being faced with the prospect of a two-front war.¹⁴⁸ Nor, significantly, was the Wehrmacht considered capable of breaking through France's defences. German armour was deemed insufficient and unable to withstand the firepower the French army could bring to bear either in Belgium or along the eastern frontier.¹⁴⁹

These factors were never important considerations in the thinking of the high command. By 1938 France's military leadership was pre-occupied with their own impotence and had abandoned any intention of a swift offensive into western Germany. The French army was in no way ready for war. France's armaments industry had proved utterly incapable of coping with the massive demands placed by French rearmament. Widespread bottlenecks in almost every sector of this industry had set the timetable of French rearmament back up to fourteen months. Only one of three envisaged light mechanized divisions was operational while the planned heavy armoured division was far from ready. The renovation of the active army remained confined to its preliminary stages due to the chronic delays in the delivery of all types of

¹⁴⁶ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12968-1, 'Ministre de l'Air: Cabinet', 11 Feb. 1938. Summary of a report on the German army received from the army Deuxième Bureau.

¹⁴⁷ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'L'Armée de terre allemande', Sept. 1938.

¹⁴⁸ SHAT, 7N 2522-2, 'Considérations sur la forme que pourrait prendre une attaque allemande contre la Tchécoslovaquie', 23 July 1938.

¹⁴⁹ For the high command's conviction that Germany could not break through France's defensive system in 1938, see SHAT, 7N 1N 43-3, 'Note sur la situation militaire actuelle dans le monde', 29 Mar. 1938; 7N 3434-3, 'Note sur les besoins auxquels doit satisfaire l'armée française', 1 Apr. 1938 (study prepared by General George's staff); 2N 224-1, 'Note sur l'évolution du problème militaire français', 27 July 1938. For Daladier's views, see AAN, 'Commission de l'armée', 16ème législature, no. 16, Daladier audition, 31 Aug. 1938. On this question, see also Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler*, *passim*.

material from weapons to armoured cars.¹⁵⁰ The training and organization of the regular army had declined dramatically as a result of the cancellations of large-scale manoeuvres from 1935 to 1937. Significantly, the partial mobilization of the French field army at the height of the Munich crisis proved a complete disaster. Thousands of reservists were sent to the wrong assembly depots, there were desperate shortages of equipment of all kinds at every level and there had been a general breakdown in the system established for transporting assembled units to their assigned positions.¹⁵¹ Nor was the French army capable of striking a decisive blow at Germany. In 1938 the emphasis on ensuring the inviolability of France's frontiers was more immediate than ever. After the *Anschluss* the army operations bureau prepared a fifteen-page study of the possibility of a swift French offensive into western Germany. It concluded that to mount such an attack with the hope of even moderate success would require 'a complete reorganization of our army and the restructuring of our military policy'.¹⁵²

The ramifications of this conviction for the Czechoslovak alliance were made explicit to France's political leadership during a meeting of the CPDN on 15 March where Gamelin and Daladier advised that, in the event of German aggression, France could supply no direct aid to its ally but could only hope to pin down a portion of German military strength along the Franco-German frontier while Germany devoted its main effort to crushing Czechoslovakia.¹⁵³ The operations bureau concluded that '[w]e can have no illusions about providing [Czechoslovakia] with significant aid'.¹⁵⁴ France could eventually attack in the west but only after a lengthy phase of preparation. The conclusion was that '[b]y the time we intervene, if we intervene, the situation for the Czechoslovaks will already be very critical'.¹⁵⁵ The army staff had ceased to plan any major offensive operations against Germany since the collapse of the Franco-Italian military arrangement. In fact the only offensive operations envisaged in the short term were against Italy

¹⁵⁰ The best discussions of these problems are in Alexander, *Republic in danger*, 120–4 and Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 133–74.

¹⁵¹ AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème législature, no. 17, 'Contrôle des fabrications d'armement: Rapport de M. Camille Fernand-Laurent', 25 Oct. 1938.

¹⁵² AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 35, dr. 5, sdr. a, 'Notes sur une action offensive pour soutenir la Tchéco-slovaquie', undated but clearly post-*Anschluss*. Also SHAT, 7N 3434–3.

¹⁵³ DDF, 2ème série, viii, no. 446, *Procès-verbal* of the meeting of the CPDN of 15 Mar. 1938.

¹⁵⁴ SHAT, 5N 579–1, 'Étude pour le Président', 13 Sept. 1938.

¹⁵⁵ SHAT, 7N 3715, 'Note pour le Ministre: Directive pour l'offensive entre Rhine et Luxembourg', 9 June 1938. See also Gamelin, *Servir*, ii. 346–7.

in North Africa. This had been confirmed by the CPDN the previous December when French strategic policy was officially reoriented and the Mediterranean was designated the principal theatre of operations during the initial stages of a conflict. This strategy would hardly benefit the Czechoslovaks in a war with Germany. Hence the bemused complaint of one Foreign Office official to French planning during the crisis: 'when one asks how the French are going to fight for Czechoslovakia the only answer one gets is that they will march—in Libya!'¹⁵⁶

Gamelin would not have resisted the order to go to war, but he did everything in his power to drive home the unfavourable military circumstances to Daladier and the rest of the government. This included emphasizing the strengths of the Wehrmacht and playing down its vulnerabilities. The issue of Germany's fortifications in the west is a case in point. The German westwall had been under construction since late 1936. Yet intensive work had begun only after Hitler decided on invading Czechoslovakia at the end of May 1938. The building of the Siegfried Line was accompanied by a massive propaganda campaign aimed at intimidating the West into believing that the westwall was much further advanced than was actually the case.¹⁵⁷ The *Deuxième Bureau*, however, was well-informed on the progress of the westwall. In addition to the reports and the useful aerial photographs provided by Section Nemo, the *Deuxième Bureau* received reports from several SR agents who had infiltrated work on these fortifications as labourers. An engineer was assigned to the Section Allemande to aid in the assessment of the strength of the Siegfried Line.¹⁵⁸ By August the *Deuxième Bureau* estimated that over 200,000 civilian labourers were employed in the construction of fortifications in the west. It concluded that, despite the vast quantities of manpower and resources which were being poured into work on the westwall, there was no chance that this system would constitute an effective defensive barrier before the spring of 1939.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Cited in R. Young, 'French Policy and the Munich Crisis of 1938: A Reappraisal', *Historical Papers* (Canadian Historical Association) (1970), 194. For the minutes of the Dec. meeting of the CPDN, see *DDF*, 2ème série, vii, no. 325. See also Salerno, 'The French Navy', 77–81.

¹⁵⁷ Weinberg, *Starting World War Two*, 379.

¹⁵⁸ SHAT, 7N 2641–3, 'Note sur les travaux de fortifications entrepris par les allemands sur leur frontière occidentale', 12 Aug. 1938; 7N 2602, 'Affaire tchécoslovaque et fortifications de l'Ouest', 29 June 1938; Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau*, 135; and Navarre, *Service de renseignements*, 69, 82–3.

¹⁵⁹ SHAT, 7N 2602, 'Fortifications allemandes', 6 July 1938; 'Renseignements sur les

Utterly opposed to the idea of a headlong offensive into Germany, however, Gamelin and the general staff continually stressed the difficulties which these fortifications would pose to a projected French offensive.¹⁶⁰ In fact, the operations bureau of the general staff had explicitly ruled out an offensive into western Germany before construction on the westwall had been expanded.¹⁶¹ Yet Gamelin repeatedly alluded to the importance of the Siegfried Line. 'I will attack,' he promised Daladier, 'but before me I have fortifications . . . [thus] . . . expectations should be realistic.' An offensive into the German fortified region, he advised, would result in a 'modernized Battle of the Somme'.¹⁶² This emphasis on the strength of Germany's defensive system in the west was a smokescreen, a distortion of received intelligence that deceived only the wilfully blind. Privately, Gamelin judged that 'another year or even more would be necessary to make the Siegfried Line really formidable'.¹⁶³ And Daladier revealed to the Chamber army commission in late August that the German westwall was 'in no way comparable to our Maginot Line', and 'will not constitute a powerful defensive front until the summer of 1939'.¹⁶⁴

Germany had been conceded powerful western defences by default. Gamelin, as we have seen, had abandoned serious plans for an offensive months before the Rhineland had even been remilitarized. Gauché had done his part to justify this pre-emptive abandonment when he observed in March of 1937, months before any serious work was even begun on the Siegfried Line, that '[i]n the near future a French offensive into the Palatinate will encounter significant difficulties'.¹⁶⁵ Nor can it be argued that Daladier was deceived by the army staff in this regard. In the minds of French officials psychologically committed to a defensive posture during the initial stages of a conflict, Germany's western fortifications were unbreachable long before they even existed.

manifestations actuelles de l'activité militaire du Reich', 28 July 1938; 'Équipement de la frontière occidentale du Reich', 2 Aug. 1938. See also AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème législature, Carton 16, Daladier audition, 31 Aug. 1938.

¹⁶⁰ SHAT, 1N 61-2, 'Exercices 1937-1938', studies on the possibilities of a French offensive into western Germany in the event of war in central Europe.

¹⁶¹ SHAT, 1N 48-1, 'Études préparatoires fixant le dispositif des armées sur le théâtre d'opérations du Nord-Est en cas d'agression allemande contre la Tchécoslovaquie', Apr.-May 1938.

¹⁶² Cited from Gamelin, *Servir*, ii. 334, 346-7.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Adamthwaite, 'French Military Intelligence and the Coming of War', 192.

¹⁶⁴ AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème législature, Carton 16, Daladier audition, 31 Aug. 1938.

¹⁶⁵ SHAT, 7N 2522-1, 'Réflexions sur un conflit éventuel en Europe', 9 Mar. 1937.

VI

Intelligence on the political and economic situation across the Rhine reinforced the pervasive gloom that prevailed in Paris. Through the summer of 1938 assessments continued to reinforce the perception that Germany had subordinated its entire economy to preparations for war. The French commercial attaché in Berlin abandoned completely the idea that Germany might revise its economic policy and concluded that '[t]he intensity of the German industrial effort can have only one explanation: preparations for war'.¹⁶⁶ To French observers all too aware of the divisions in their own society, Germany seemed to exude an aura of determination and militaristic vitality that was quite terrifying. A report prepared by financial attaché Jean Aris in the summer of 1938 conveys the sense of a coming war:

For the past five years, the new masters of Germany have single-mindedly pursued the goal of restoring the nation's military power and have prepared, with the method and efficiency which characterizes the German spirit, for an eventual war. Step by step the economic activity of the nation has been subordinated to the creation of an instrument of conquest capable of establishing German hegemony in Europe.¹⁶⁷

Reports such as this could only have strengthened the conviction that Hitler was not bluffing over Czechoslovakia.

Yet appreciations of the economic situation indicated that the structural weaknesses in the German economy continued to create difficulties for the Nazi leadership. In early summer 1938 the DAPC prepared a lengthy report on German war potential that received wide circulation within the defence community. While underlining German industrial and demographic strength, this study concluded by citing the judgement of the Berlin embassy that Nazi Germany's 'latent strengths' were 'certainly inferior to those of Imperial Germany' and that '[a]n examination of [Germany's] material and human resources . . . tends, it seems, to show that after several months of a general war Germany will be faced with grave difficulties in terms of both supply and effectiveness'.¹⁶⁸ In a subsequent report, Aris considered that the 'frenetic state spending' and the 'abuse of public investments'

¹⁶⁶ *DDF*, 2ème série, x, no. 149, 5 July 1938.

¹⁶⁷ France, *Ministère des Finances* (cited hereafter as MF) Série B, 31484, Questions économiques 1938, no. 394. Also in Deuxième Bureau records in SHAT, 7N 2424-1.

¹⁶⁸ SHAT, ARR, 505, dr. 182, DAPC to EMA-2ème Bureau, 11 July 1938, summarizing reports of 13 Apr. and 23 June.

had brought Germany to the verge of the worst financial crisis since 1923. The Nazi government, he judged, could avoid financial collapse only by reducing its rearmament effort or by embarking on a policy of conquest.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, a commercial attaché report which the Deuxième Bureau received depicted the German economy as stretched to the limit:

The National Socialist government has placed the national economy completely at the service of rearmament. All of the resources of the nation are now mobilized. These measures have restricted the population to a Spartan lifestyle. Germany is essentially a vast factory where the worker labours more than nine hours per day. In certain industries factories operate non-stop.¹⁷⁰

François-Poncet agreed. He considered that '[t]he economy of the Third Reich is more than a paradox, it is an idol with clay feet . . . becoming more precarious as it grows larger'. As long as Hitler retained his hold over the German people, the system could hold together. He concluded that this was why 'Hitler has no choice but to keep searching for success in the domain of foreign policy'.¹⁷¹ The familiar anxiety that an internal crisis might propel Germany towards war was as powerful as ever in 1938. Renondeau endorsed this point of view. He unequivocally rejected the possibility that Germany might scale back rearmament and reported instead that plans existed for the construction of two new Panzer divisions and to increase the size of the regular army by 25 per cent by 1939.¹⁷² All of this pointed to war and soon.

Significantly, the possibility of a popular revolt by the German people was discounted and did not play an important role in decision making in during the Czechoslovak crisis. Received intelligence indicated that the German population was becoming resigned to the prospect of war. Renondeau reported that the 'war psychosis' of the German people had deepened into a 'general malaise' in which the inevitability of war was accepted with resignation.¹⁷³ In another report Renondeau characterized the public mood as dominated by a sense of *fatalisme de guerre*.¹⁷⁴ A Deuxième Bureau synthesis judged popular opinion in

¹⁶⁹ MF, B 31484, N, no. 381, 23 Feb. 1938.

¹⁷⁰ DDF, 2ème série, x, no. 149, 5 July 1938.

¹⁷¹ DDF, 2ème série, viii, no. 114, 24 Feb. 1938. See also the army and naval intelligence reports of 6 and 8 July 1938 in SHAT, 7N 2602-1 and SHM, 1BB2, 94, respectively.

¹⁷² SHAT, 7N 2601, 'Renforcement de l'armée allemande', 22 Feb. 1938 and 'Ralentissement possible du réarmement allemande', 9 Mar. 1938.

¹⁷³ SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Situation générale', 27 July 1938.

¹⁷⁴ Cited from 7N 2602-1, Personal letter from Renondeau to Dentz, 6 Sept. 1938. See

Germany to be 'in truth very anxious and opposed to war.' It concluded, however, that the German people would follow their Führer: 'If faced with the prospect of war, there is no doubt the masses will obey with discipline but without enthusiasm.'¹⁷⁵ This analysis appeared to be confirmed as tension mounted in September and Renondeau described Germany as 'a vast armed camp'.¹⁷⁶

The central considerations in assessments of the German threat during the summer of 1938 were not the weaknesses in the German economy but instead the strengths of the Nazi system of *Wehrwirtschaft*. The tremendous advantages which this system provided Germany in terms of economic mobilization and general preparedness to make war were a central component of intelligence assessments of German military capability. During the annexation of Austria in March, for example, French observers were struck above all by the speed with which Hitler's decision to move into Austria was put into operation. According to one study, Vienna had been occupied only 72 hours after Hitler had decided to move. Such rapidity of action was deemed possible 'only in a political system where the entire machinery of the state is placed at the disposal of the leader and the armed forces'. The system of *Wehrwirtschaft*, the report warned, had been designed 'with the sole and specific purpose of allowing the nation to move to a war footing'.¹⁷⁷ Another assessment judged that the state of semi-mobilization at which the German economy was functioning constituted a crucial advantage in strategic terms:

Thanks to the present state of organization of the German economy, in the event of a conflict the process of shifting to wartime production levels, so critical to most states which will have to transform fundamentally their national industry, will be for the Third Reich only a matter of implementing the final stages of a system which is already in place.¹⁷⁸

The steps taken to prepare Germany both physically and morally for

also the Renondeau reports of 11 Jan., 23 Feb., 21 May, 27 July, 17 Aug. 1938 as well as another personal letter from Renondeau to Dentz of 17 Mar. in 7N 2602-1.

¹⁷⁵ SHAT, 7N 2523-1, 'Compte-rendu', 16 Sept. 1938. Initialled by Gamelin, Colson, and Georges.

¹⁷⁶ SHAT, 7N 2515, *RH*, 1-7 Aug. 1938 and 7N 2602-1, Personal letter from Renondeau to Dentz, 20 Sept. 1938.

¹⁷⁷ SHAT, 7N 2629-3, 'Études Allemagne: L'Occupation de l'Autriche par l'armée allemande', July 1938.

¹⁷⁸ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur le matériel dans l'armée allemande: L'Industrie allemande et le réarmement', Apr. 1937.

war had provided Hitler with a decisive material and psychological edge over France.

VII

The contrast between Germany's short-term preparedness and the situation in France was demoralizing. The French economy was profoundly unprepared to undertake war with any major power. By early 1938 national production was still less than 75 per cent of pre-1900 levels. National revenue had decreased by over a half and France remained unable to resolve its seeming endless financial difficulties.¹⁷⁹ The franc, which had functioned since 1927 as a symbol of French economic stability and had served as an effective agent of French interests abroad, had been devalued for the third time in eighteen months. As a result, another exodus of capital had drained the gold reserves of the Bank of France and caused panic at the ministry of finance. During the crisis days of September a run on the franc prompted finance minister Paul Marchandau to warn Daladier that France was threatened with financial collapse. Significantly, the mobilization procedures of late September 'caused wholesale upheaval in the French banking system' and forced the government to impose strict restrictions on capital fleeing the country in order to prevent the bankruptcy of the treasury.¹⁸⁰ The collapse of investment reflected the poor state of national confidence at this juncture. It was both a cause and a symptom of France's stagnant industry. And these developments came to a head at a time when German national production had effected a spectacular recovery, marking a 17 per cent increase from its pre-Depression levels. To make matters worse, in the summer of 1938 the lag between the financial effort devoted to rearmament and the production of French defence industries was at its greatest.¹⁸¹ Hence, while the flight of capital and the costs of rearmament threatened France's finances with

¹⁷⁹ S. Bernstein, 'La Perception de la puissance par les partis politiques français en 1938-1939', in Girault and Frank (eds.), *La puissance en Europe*, 291.

¹⁸⁰ M. Thomas, 'France and Czechoslovak Crisis', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 10 (1999), 122-59. See also R. Girault, 'La Trahison des possédants', in Michel Winock (ed.), *Les Années trente: De la crise à la guerre* (Paris, 1990), 160-3 and Frank, *Hantise du déclin*, 168-81.

¹⁸¹ Frank, *Hantise du déclin*, 42-6 and Jean Bouvier and Robert Frank, 'Sur la perception de la puissance économique en France pendant les années 1930', in Girault and Frank (eds.), *La Puissance en Europe*, 176.

bankruptcy, Germany's military superiority had increased.¹⁸² Daladier was painfully aware of the relationship between economic strength and military power. In his initial address to the Chamber after the formation of his government in April he stressed that '[t]he fundamental requirements of national defence are a healthy currency and a strong economy', and that 'a Great Power cannot long retain its status if it is not served by a vibrant economy'.¹⁸³ The economic situation in France constituted a powerful restraint on France's response to Nazi aggression.

A less tangible but equally important factor in French perceptions of the balance of power were the deep ideological fissures in French society. The effects of the divide between right and left had been sharpened by the social policies of the Popular Front. The right attributed France's economic problems to Popular Front policy. The left considered that the conservative elements in France had systematically sabotaged the efforts of the Popular Front to reform and revitalize the nation's economy. Each side accused the other of egotism detrimental to the cause of national defence. Dispute crystallized into a bitter conflict over the question of the 40-hour week. The right considered that this law had crippled national production while the left cherished the 40-hour week as the most important achievement in the history of the workers movement in France. Amid all of this acrimony, the Czechoslovak question did not serve as a rallying theme. Quite the opposite in fact. The principal conclusion reached in the massive study of French public opinion at this juncture by Yvon Lacaze is that France was deeply divided at every level over Czechoslovakia.¹⁸⁴ Daladier could not hope to lead a united France into war in 1938. Looking across the Rhine, the profound rifts in French society contrasted sharply with the resolve and strength of purpose conveyed by Nazi Germany. Intelligence reports tended to stress the iron grip with which the Party controlled German society. Germany appeared better prepared to face the rigours of war at every level.

The diplomatic situation was equally grim. By the summer of 1938 the French eastern system lay in ruins. Poland, the largest and most populous of France's eastern allies, desired to share in the spoils of an invasion of Czechoslovakia. French observers in Warsaw judged that Poland might very well enter an eventual conflict on the side of Germany. The Little Entente, moreover, had been broken. When tension

¹⁸² Berstein, 'La Perception de la puissance par les partis politiques français', 291.

¹⁸³ Cited from Du Réau, *Daladier*, 224. See also Frank, *Hantise du déclin*, 62–89 and 178–81.

¹⁸⁴ Y. Lacaze, *L'Opinion publique française et la crise de Munich* (Berne, 1991), 603–12.

increased over the Sudeten question during the summer both Romania and Yugoslavia declared their intention to remain neutral in the event of hostilities.¹⁸⁵ Nor did Soviet intervention appear a viable option. Russia's armed forces, with their ravaged command structure, were judged incapable of intervening to prevent Germany from over-running Czechoslovakia. According to the Deuxième Bureau the execution of Marshal Tukhachevski and the bulk of the Russian officer corps had left the Red Army 'no more than a decapitated corpse'.¹⁸⁶ Vuillemin and the air force general staff considered that the USSR could not provide significant air support to Czechoslovakia in time to prevent the destruction of the latter's major airfields.¹⁸⁷ These perceptions of Soviet power were as much a product of the ideological bias of the French military as they were calculated readings of the military situation. They were accepted, however, without serious question by civilian decision makers who were profoundly suspicious of Soviet motives and unwilling to count on the assistance of Communist Russia in a war with Germany. The war in Spain had only exacerbated these suspicions. The army staff and defence ministry, in particular, became convinced that the USSR desired to use the Spanish Civil War as a pretext to foment war between France and Germany. And this conviction only delayed the slow evolution of French strategic policy towards a military alliance with the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁸

Most importantly, neither the United States nor Great Britain would commit to supporting France in the event of war over Czechoslovakia. During the summer of 1938 Ambassador Bullitt warned French officials repeatedly that the Roosevelt government would apply its neutrality legislation from the moment war broke out in Europe. All sales of military hardware to France would cease and American aid would be limited to the moral support of its more enlightened citizenry.¹⁸⁹ The British government had made it clear the previous

¹⁸⁵ See the diplomatic overview presented by foreign minister Bonnet to the Senate foreign affairs commission on 8 June 1938 which is in MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Cabinet Bonnet, vol. 1.

¹⁸⁶ SHAT, 7N 2522-3, 'Aide soviétique éventuelle à la Tchécoslovaquie', no date but certainly the spring/summer of 1938. See also Vaisse, 'La Perception de la puissance soviétique', 22; Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau*, 76-7.

¹⁸⁷ SHAT, Fonds Gamelin Supplémentaires, Carton 7, Vuillemin to Gamelin, 29 Aug. and 16 Sept. 1938.

¹⁸⁸ P. Jackson, 'French Strategy and the Spanish Civil War', in C. Leitz and J. Dunthorne (eds.), *Spain in an International Context, 1932-1973* (Oxford, 1999), 55-80.

¹⁸⁹ Bullitt, *For the President*, 252-300; B. R. Farnham, *Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis: A Study of Political Decision-Making* (Princeton, 1997); J. McVickar Haight, Jr, 'France, the US and the

November, in April of 1938 and again on 8 September that Great Britain would not enter a war 'caused by German aggression against Czechoslovakia'.¹⁹⁰ In private, London was unsure how it would react. As late as 30 August 1938 the British cabinet was still refusing to consider the question of aiding Czechoslovakia.¹⁹¹ The British government had been receiving overviews of the strategic situation which were every bit as dire as those produced by the Deuxième Bureau. British air intelligence warned of a 'knock-out blow' by the Luftwaffe while military intelligence, basing its estimations in large part on information obtained from Paris, exaggerated the size and effectiveness of the German army.¹⁹² These considerations do not appear to have shaped decision making in London however. At the heart of the policy of appeasement as it was practised by Britain was instead Neville Chamberlain's belief that it was possible to come to a workable understanding with Hitler in which the structure of Europe could be maintained.¹⁹³ It was this conviction that set Chamberlain apart from Daladier and which distinguishes British from French appeasement.

And French policy makers were well aware of this. Signals intelligence was able to provide confirmation that the British government was working fervently to forge an agreement with Hitler over Czechoslovakia, at almost any price. French cryptanalysts were reading the British 'R' code, a low-grade Foreign Office cipher used for transmissions that were not highly sensitive. This enabled French observers to follow the day-to-day correspondence between London and the Paris Embassy. It did not, however, provide insight on the perceptions of high-level British policy makers. But the material from the 'R' code was useful. It provided the French with both advance notice of what they would be hearing from Ambassador Phipps and a check on how

Munich Crisis', *JMH* 32: 4 (1960), 333–52; and A. A. Offner, *American Appeasement* (Cambridge, Mass, 1969), 229–69.

¹⁹⁰ See e.g. British foreign minister Anthony Eden's warning to this effect in late 1937 in *DDF*, 2ème série, vii, no. 41. The British held this line through 1938. See the discussions between the British and French heads of state in Apr. 1938 where the broad outlines of Anglo-French cooperation over Czechoslovakia were established. These are in *DBFP*, 3rd series, i, no. 164. The French record of these exchanges, which is less detailed, is in *DDF*, 2ème série, xi, no. 405. For the warning of 8 Sept., see *DBFP*, 3rd Series, ii, no. 814.

¹⁹¹ PRO, CAB 23/94, 30 Aug. 1938.

¹⁹² See Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 59–79 and Hinsley *et al.*, *British Intelligence*, 45–85.

¹⁹³ Recent and compelling versions of this argument include Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement, passim*, and an interesting and highly nuanced study by Erik Goldstein, 'Neville Chamberlain, the British Official Mind and the Munich Crisis', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 10 (1999), 276–92.

accurately the British embassy was relating messages back and forth between Paris and London.¹⁹⁴ All indications from Great Britain, both official and clandestine, indicated that if France decided to aid Czechoslovakia it would do so alone.

Such a decision simply would not be taken. The progress of German rearmament meant that Great Britain had never been more important to French planning. In the spring and summer of 1938 Daladier received memoranda concerning the vital importance of British support from all sides. 'More than ever,' Gamelin declared in a personal note in late March, 'it is essential that we have England with us.'¹⁹⁵ On the eve of his departure for the first summit meeting with Chamberlain in April the SGDN produced a long document on the importance of Franco-British military cooperation. The acute disparity between French and German air power and the familiar bogey of demographic inferiority were invoked along with the possibility of war with Italy. In such an event France would face a bloc of 75 million Germans and 40 million Italians. 'France cannot resist forces three times as numerous,' the SGDN warned. British support would be essential.¹⁹⁶ From Paul Marchandeau at the ministry of finance came repeated warnings that France was dependent on British support to maintain the solvency of the franc.¹⁹⁷ Daladier's cabinet summed up the strategic situation with the conclusion, 'France can only defeat Germany in a war if it is assured, in every possible respect, of total British assistance.'¹⁹⁸

This was preaching to the converted. Daladier had been a firm believer in close ties with Britain since the early 1930s. It had been Daladier who had declared to the CPDN that '[o]ur policy is presently, and will continue to be, aimed at complete collaboration with Great Britain'.¹⁹⁹ The overriding priorities of the Daladier government were to redress France's terrible military, economic, and diplomatic situation and to meet the Nazi challenge in close accord with Great Britain. Accordingly, economic reform, rearmament, and British

¹⁹⁴ Transcripts of intercepted messages encoded in the 'R' code (labelled 'chiffre alla' by French code-breakers) are in MAÉ, *Télégrammes Interceptés*, vols. 1–2. I am grateful to John Ferris for information on British ciphers during this period.

¹⁹⁵ *DDF*, 2ème série, viii, no. 432, 14 Mar. and no. 445, 15 Mar. 1938.

¹⁹⁶ MAÉ, *Papiers Daladier*, vol. i, 'Note sur la collaboration militaire franco-britannique', 24 Apr. 1938.

¹⁹⁷ R. Girault, 'The Impact of the Economic Situation on the Foreign Policy of France', in Mommsen and Kettenacker (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement*, 209–26.

¹⁹⁸ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 31, dr. 5, 'Note sur la mobilisation industrielle', 5 Apr. 1938.

¹⁹⁹ SHAT, 2N 22, *Procès-verbal* of the CPDN, 15 Feb. 1937.

military support received priority over ties to Czechoslovakia. Several weeks before Daladier acceded to the premiership Gamelin officially requested a 387 million franc increase in defence spending and recommended an end to the 40-hour week. A memorandum produced by the SGDN warned that 'given the current international situation, measures to increase our armaments production must be taken with all urgency whatever the financial and industrial repercussions'.²⁰⁰ On 20 April, less than one week after forming his government, Daladier assured Gamelin that 'I am in complete accord with your note of 11 February. . . . The question of supplementary credits will be settled very soon by decree laws which I intend to demand from Parliament which will permit us to order a substantial portion of the material earmarked for 1939.' In the same note Daladier hinted at 'alterations' to the 40-hour week.²⁰¹ All of the major undertakings of the ensuing twenty-two-month period—the extensive financial reforms, the modification of the 40-hour week, the Law for the Organization of the Nation in Time of War, and the ever-expanding outlays for army and air force rearmament—were intended to attract capital back to France, restore the national economy, and bolster France's military preparedness.

The direction of French policy was established with Daladier's choice of Georges Bonnet as foreign minister the previous April. Historians have often argued that this decision was taken in response to British pressure.²⁰² This overstates the role of Great Britain and ignores the importance of military considerations in the making of French policy. After Reynaud, Blum, and Herriot were eliminated as candidates, the final decision was between Paul-Boncour, also foreign minister in Blum's short-lived government, and Bonnet. Bonnet was in favour of accommodating Germany at the expense of Czechoslovakia while Paul-Boncour advocated standing by the Czechoslovak alliance with or without Great Britain. The British government, significantly, had made it clear that it preferred anyone but Paul-Boncour as foreign minister. On 10 April Paul-Boncour met with Daladier to request the foreign minister's portfolio. Daladier's perspective on the European balance of power is distilled in his response to Paul-Boncour '[t]he

²⁰⁰ SHAT, 2N 224-1, 'Les Données actuelles du problème militaire français', SGDN note forwarded by Gamelin to Daladier, 2 Feb. 1938. See also Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224-8, 'Développement des armements', Gamelin to Daladier, 11 Feb. 1938.

²⁰¹ SHAT, Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224-9, dr. 1, Daladier to Gamelin, 20 Apr. 1938.

²⁰² Most recently in J. Herman, *Paris Embassy*, 84-7.

policy you propose is a good one, the honourable course for France to follow. Sadly, I do not believe that we have the capability to follow such a policy. I will take Bonnet.²⁰³ This interpretation is borne out by Colonel Rivet's account of his meeting with Daladier during the May crisis. According to Rivet, the Premier described France as 'impotent' and 'had decided not to intervene in the German–Czech conflict'.²⁰⁴

Under Daladier and Bonnet, French foreign policy aimed at presenting a solid Franco-British alliance to Berlin which would provide Czechoslovakia with leverage in its negotiations with Germany over the Sudetenland. This was the context in which the meetings between French and British heads of state in April and again in September must be interpreted.²⁰⁵ France would publicly affirm its fidelity to the alliance with Czechoslovakia. France would, in conjunction with Britain, warn Germany of the possible consequences of unprovoked aggression. There was no hope, however, that France could save Czechoslovakia by going to war. This was made clear to Czechoslovak government in mid-July when Bonnet informed the Czech ambassador in Paris that France would not make war with Germany without British support.²⁰⁶ When, as French intelligence had predicted, Hitler refused to negotiate on a reasonable basis, the betrayal of Czechoslovakia became all but inevitable.

This is not to say that France would not have gone to war under any circumstances. There were two possible scenarios that could have brought about a decision for war. The first was a guarantee of British support in war against Germany. The second was Czechoslovak defiance. Had the Benes government refused to submit, it is possible that public opinion in both France and Great Britain might have forced a change of policy. Any discussion of France's Munich policy should mention that the Daladier government had begun taking precautionary military measures in late August. Leave was cancelled and various

²⁰³ Paul-Boncour, *Entre deux guerres*, iii, 101.

²⁰⁴ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 22 May 1938.

²⁰⁵ See political director René Massigli's assessment of the conversations of early Apr. in MAÉ, Papiers Massigli, vol. 16, 'Programme général des conversations franco-anglaises', 24 Apr. 1938. See also Bonnet's explanation of French policy towards Czechoslovakia to the Senate foreign affairs commission on 8 June 1938 in MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Cabinet Bonnet, vol. 1.

²⁰⁶ *DDF*, 2ème série, x, no. 218, 17 July 1938 and no. 222, 'Note du Ministre', 21 July 1938. Léon Noël and Igor Lukes, among others, have claimed that this warning was never given: Noël, *La Guerre de 39 a commencé quatre ans plutôt* (Paris, 1979) and Lukes, *Czechoslovakia*, 174–6. But the day after Bonnet met Osusky, President Benes summoned the French minister in Prague, Victor de Lacroix, for a 'very emotional' interview where he demanded clarification of France's position: *DDF*, 2ème série, x, no. 242, Lacroix to Paris, 21 July 1938.

classes of reservists were called up until, by 24 September, France had more than one million men under arms and the majority of the Marine had been placed on 24-hour alert.²⁰⁷ On 25 September Rivet recorded a 'sense that we are moving rapidly towards war'.²⁰⁸ But neither of the above scenarios emerged and Daladier flew to Munich to participate in the dismemberment of France's lone military ally.

This policy was not founded on the hope that Hitler could be trusted once he had been appeased over the Sudetenland. Appeasement, for Daladier, was a policy of expediency, the dangers of which he was painfully aware.²⁰⁹ It was based on the conviction that France was unready to face the prospect of war with Germany. The perceptions of German power conveyed to the high command and to Daladier were central to this conviction. The elements of German power stressed in intelligence reports—quantitative superiority on the ground and especially in the air, the superior productive capacity of its war industries, and the concept of *Wehrwirtschaft*—became all the more compelling as arguments for capitulation when compared with the disorganized state of the French army, the impotence of French air power, the inadequacies of France's armaments production, and the frailty of the French economy. The military balance was not the only factor involved in the decision to forsake the Czechs. It was kept to the forefront, however, by proponents of appeasement both inside and outside the government.

During the Czechoslovak crisis, intelligence played a central role in shaping perceptions of both the balance of military force and the day-to-day movement of events. Both Rivet and Gauché were in constant contact with the high command and the Premier's offices throughout the crisis. There is no doubt that decision makers were kept up-to-date regarding the political situation in Europe in general and German intentions in particular. But it is also clear that the intelligence services performed less well when it came to evaluating German military capability. The crucial failure was the assumption that Germany's manufacture of armaments was keeping pace with the expansion of the regular army and the training of reserves. This led to the erroneous conclusion that Germany could field an army of millions upon mobilization and constituted an important victory for Nazi propaganda.

²⁰⁷ SHM, 1BB2, 172, 'La Crise de septembre 1938', 31 Mar. 1939; Gamelin, *Servir*, ii, 344–8; and Lacaze, *France et Munich*, 226–40.

²⁰⁸ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 25 Sept. 1938.

²⁰⁹ Cited in Young, *In Command of France*, 215.

The sense of impotence and inferiority which conditioned thinking within the general staff played an important role in this failure. Military intelligence was psychologically incapable of penetrating the veneer of propaganda to see the widespread organizational and material deficiencies which afflicted the German army.

Yet, once again, the failures in intelligence assessment were not decisive factors in the decision to retreat before Germany. Given the state of the French army, the impotence of the *Armée de l'Air*, Britain's refusal to commit to France, the impending financial catastrophe coupled with the general sickness of the economy, and, perhaps above all, the overwhelming reluctance at every level of French society to accept the risk of war, exaggerations of German military capability were not decisive in shaping policy. Indeed the exaggeration of German power was in many ways a product of the inferiority complex which reigned in both civilian and military circles.

A Change in Perspective

THE MUNICH Agreement was the high-water mark in France's retreat before the resurgence of German power. By mid-April of 1939 this policy had been abandoned for one of firmness. France had extended its commitments in eastern Europe. Guarantees had been issued to Poland, Romania, and Greece and French policy was set on a course of resistance to further German (or Italian) aggression which would culminate in war over Danzig the following September. Intelligence played a pivotal role in this shift to a *politique de fermeté*. Resistance to Hitler was based on the conviction, which had been advanced by the Deuxième Bureau since 1933, that Hitler's hegemonic ambition posed a mortal threat to France's status as a European power. The gradual spread of this conviction from the relatively narrow confines of the service ministries to the ministries of foreign affairs, finance, and to the general public, when combined with a palpable resurgence in French national confidence and the long-awaited military commitment from Britain, wrought a fundamental change in the perspective from which French decision makers viewed the international situation. The end result was the decision to challenge Germany's second bid for hegemony and face the risk of another world war.

I

Hitler regarded Munich as a failure.¹ The Four-Power Agreement signed on 30 September had deprived him of the first of the 'little wars' he had envisioned waging as his plans for German expansion unfolded. The Führer resolved never again to let himself be manoeuvred into another international conference. This meant that Britain, and

¹ The following paragraph is taken from Watt, *How War Came*, 37–44; Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy', 672–9; and Weinberg, *Starting World War Two*, 466–97.

probably France, would have to be defeated militarily to prevent them from interfering in his grand objective of conquering *Lebensraum* in European Russia. War with the West would require an understanding with Poland over Danzig that would bind the Poles to Germany and destroy forever the Franco-Polish alliance. It would also require that an extension and consolidation of German economic domination over south-eastern Europe. Finally, Italy and if possible Japan would have to be bound to the Reich in a military alliance against the British and French Empires. Hitler began planning a general European war in the aftermath of Munich.

With a view to the implementation of this policy, the Reich's preparations for war were intensified. Work on the western fortifications was expanded and rearmament was accelerated. On 14 October, addressing the newly constituted Reich defence council, Göring revealed plans to triple the volume of rearmament in 'a gigantic programme compared with which previous achievements are insignificant'. Aircraft production was to be boosted to 20,000 planes per year in order to bring the first-line and reserve strength of the Luftwaffe to 20,000 aircraft. The army's seven armoured and motorized divisions were to be expanded to twenty. A few months later Hitler approved the 'Z-Plan' to quadruple the size of the German navy by 1944.² Moral preparations for war were similarly intensified. The Führer had been dismayed by the desire for peace the German population had demonstrated during the Czech crisis. In early November the German press was instructed to step up efforts to prepare public opinion to accept the prospect of war.³ The first priority, however, was to smash what was left of Czechoslovakia. On 21 October Hitler issued a directive for operational plans aimed at 'the liquidation of the remainder of the Czechoslovak state'.⁴ In order to preclude another coordinated Franco-British response to this project, Hitler made an overture for a Franco-German understanding through François-Poncet in mid-October.⁵ This effort to drive a wedge between Britain and France was a temporary measure however. In Hitler's grand scheme, France would either have to be crushed

² Deist, 'Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 474-9 and 500-1 and Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe*, 222-9.

³ Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy', 673 and Watt, *How War Came*, 38-9.

⁴ *DGFP*, Series D, iv, no. 81.

⁵ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 383; Watt, *How War Came*, 73-4; and Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy', 674-6.

militarily or accept a clearly subordinate position to Germany on the continent.⁶

In the aftermath of Munich, the Deuxième Bureau remained as convinced as ever that Germany continued to pursue an expansionist policy. Both Renondeau and the SR reported that Hitler considered Munich a defeat and even a humiliation.⁷ The intelligence forwarded to the high command and the government in the autumn of 1938 indicated clearly that German preparations for aggression were being amplified. There was a crucial difference of opinion, however, between the Deuxième Bureau in Paris and the newly appointed military attaché in Berlin over the possibility of a general European war during the coming year.

In early November Renondeau left Berlin. His successor, Colonel (later General) Henri Didelet, was another *polytechnicien*. Didelet had distinguished himself during the Great War, had accompanied General Mittelhauser and the French military mission to Czechoslovakia during the 1920s, had impressed his superiors during the Rif War and had then served with Weygand's personal staff from 1930 to 1935. In nominating Didelet for the accreditation of the Quai d'Orsay, Daladier alluded to his 'exceptional intelligence' and 'brilliant performance during the 1914–18 war'.⁸ General Didelet may indeed have been an intelligent soldier but he was not especially qualified for his assignment in Berlin. Indeed he was not the first choice to replace Renondeau as military attaché. The preferred candidate, General Marcel Dame, was unable to take up the posting for personal reasons. Essentially, the general staff needed a replacement of suitable rank and Didelet was chosen out of a shallow pool of available senior staff officers with extensive foreign service experience.⁹ Didelet had served with the Deuxième Bureau only briefly during the early 1920s. He was not an intelligence veteran nor did he speak fluent German. His reports were more categorical than his comparatively cautious predecessor. But this willingness to make bold predictions was flawed, however, by a serious misreading of Hitler's thinking. Didelet insisted throughout

⁶ F. Knipping, 'Die deutsche-französische Erklärung vom 6 Dezember 1938', in Hildebrand and Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich*, 524–5; Bellstedt, *Apaisement oder Krieg*, esp. 214–22 and Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy', 675.

⁷ SHAT, 7N 2605, Renondeau to Paris, 11 Oct. 1938 and the *RH* for 10–16 Oct. 1938.

⁸ SHAT, 7N 2702, Daladier to the foreign ministry, 13 Apr. 1938. Information on Didelet from SHAT, 615/G⁴: État des Services du Général Henri Antoine Didelet.

⁹ SHAT, 7N 2702, Gamelin to Daladier, 11 June 1938.

most of his sojourn in Berlin that the Führer would not risk a general European war before German military preparations were completed. This brought him into conflict with both his assistant attaché in Berlin and with Colonel Gauché and the Section Allemande in Paris. It also played an important role in the evolution of French policy in the spring of 1939.

Although he understood that the German Chancellor was 'driven by an obsessive desire to accomplish the vast task he has undertaken' and was also 'feeling the pressure of time', Didelet based his reports on the assumption that 'Hitler is not mad' and therefore would not commit the Wehrmacht to a general war before military preparations were completed. 'All indications', he reported in December of 1938, 'place this date between 1940 and 1942.'¹⁰ Evaluating the capabilities of the Wehrmacht, he did consider that the German army was capable of achieving swift victory in a limited war in eastern or central Europe. He predicted that it was in this direction that Hitler would move next. He was unequivocal, however, in asserting that a lack of heavy artillery and gaps in Reichswehr modernization absolutely precluded an offensive in the west. The clear implication of this assessment, which was read carefully and remarked upon extensively by army chief of staff General Louis Colson, Gamelin, and Daladier, was the erroneous assumption that a policy of firmness in the face of future Nazi threats would force Hitler to back down. Didelet, in contrast to Renondeau, made the mistake of assuming that Hitler could be counted on to interpret the military balance in the same light as French (and for that matter German) military leaders. The reality was that Hitler viewed the strategic situation from his own unique perspective and attributed decisive importance both to the perceived decadence of his potential opponents and the vitality of the German race.

Gauché challenged Didelet's interpretation of Hitler's thinking. In a note to Gamelin on 28 December he stressed the intensification of German military preparations, the ever-increasing level of German rearmament and, above all, Hitler's unpredictability, stating that 'under no circumstances can the possibility of war this year be discounted'.¹¹ Gamelin agreed. He advised Daladier in late December

¹⁰ Cited from SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Rapport sur la situation générale', 11 Apr. 1939 and 7N 2602-1, 'Tour d'horizon', 12 Dec. 1938, respectively.

¹¹ SHAT, 1N 43-7, Gauché to Gamelin, 22 Dec. 1933. See also Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau*, 96-7 and Carré, 'Les Attachés militaires', 288-9. For a different interpretation of Didelet's role, see Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 293-5.

that 'Germany has a number of compelling reasons to push the pace of events'. These included preventing French and British rearmament from closing the gap with Germany and the desire to take advantage of Italy's willingness to cooperate with German designs.¹² Didelet, nonetheless, stuck by his analysis of Hitler's thinking through to the end of April 1939.

This debate remained unresolved in the months following Munich because French intelligence was unable to turn up precise information on Hitler's next move. The secret sources of information which had proved so prolific the previous summer appear to have dried up and the weekly intelligence summaries for October and November could provide no clear picture of Hitler's immediate intentions.¹³ The prevailing conviction remained that Germany would proceed with its expansionist drive eastward in order to secure the raw materials of eastern Europe and the Balkans which would enable the Reich to sustain a long war against the West. One of Renondeau's final dispatches before his departure from Berlin judged that 'German policy in the east doubtless has several further surprises in store for us in the coming months'.¹⁴ But this was as precise as French intelligence could get in the final months of 1938.

Evidence abounded, however, that Germany was amplifying its preparations for war. Renondeau produced a perceptive analysis of the intense propaganda campaign implemented by the Nazi regime in early November. He judged correctly that the objective of this campaign was to combat the 'profound lassitude which the German population demonstrated when faced with the prospect of another war'. A few days later he informed the general staff that 'the German army has entered an important new phase in its reorganization and development' and reported that as many as six new divisions were under construction.¹⁵ This phase was examined in detail by the Deuxième Bureau in two studies prepared at the end of November. In these reports the Section Allemande noted that the arming of the Wehrmacht 'continues without respite at a hitherto unprecedented cadence'.

¹² SHAT, 7N 2522-2, Gamelin to Daladier, 27 Dec. 1938.

¹³ SHAT, 7N 2515, *RHS*, 10-16, 17-23 Oct.; 24 Oct.-6 Nov.; 6-20, 21-7 Nov.; and 28 Nov.-4 Dec. 1938.

¹⁴ SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Recherche du renseignement', 29 Oct. 1938.

¹⁵ On morale: SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Propagande militaire', 9 Nov. 1938 and SHM, 1BB2 181-1, Tracou to Paris, 29 Sept., 6 Oct., and 10 Nov. 1938. On rearmament: Renondeau to Paris, 15 Nov. 1938.

Two new armoured divisions, two light mechanized divisions, one division of infantry, and three alpine divisions were under construction in Germany. The latest expansion programme, both reports noted, focused on the creation of armoured, mechanized, and motorized formations apt for offensive operations.¹⁶

The assessments of the air force Deuxième Bureau agreed that the Nazi regime had opened the throttle on rearmament. The aftermath of Munich marked the absolute nadir in assessment of the German air threat during the inter-war period. Indeed the most striking feature of intelligence analyses at this stage is the credulity with which fantastic reports were received by experts in both Paris and Berlin. In the autumn of 1938 the attachés in Berlin produced a pair of wildly exaggerated assessments of German air power which received much attention from officials within the air ministry, the ministry of defence, and the Quai d'Orsay. The first of these recounted yet another conversation between Stehlin and Bodenschatz during the Munich summit. Bodenschatz had boasted to Stehlin that Germany had amassed 2,000 bombers and dive-bombers along the Czechoslovak frontier. All of these had been assigned precise objectives and all were supposedly ready to take to the air at the word of the Führer. This disinformation was accepted uncritically by the air attachés who used it to explain the discrepancy between estimates of aircraft production (which were overblown) and appreciations of the apparent size of the Luftwaffe (which were more accurate). De Geffrier noted that the figures provided by Bodenschatz were '[p]erfectly admissible if one takes into account the quantity of material which must have accumulated as a result of the elevated cadence of the German aviation industry this past summer'. Consequently, the figure of 2,000 bombers was accepted by the Deuxième Bureau and written into the extensive report which the air ministry prepared on the Munich crisis.¹⁷ One month later another report arrived from the attachés in Berlin which was inspired, in all probability, by rumours about the new rearmament programme approved by Göring in mid-October. This report warned that '[a] major augmentation of the German air force is under way', and confirmed

¹⁶ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Note sur le développement des forces allemandes', 25 Nov. 1938 and 7N 2676, 'Note sur le développement des forces terrestres allemandes', 30 Nov. 1938—forwarded by Gamelin to Daladier on 3 Dec.: 5N 582–3.

¹⁷ De Geffrier's report, 'Le Facteur aérien dans le conflit germano-tchécoslovaque', is in SHAT, 7N 2602–1 and 5N 579–6. The air ministry report is in SHAA, 2B 60, 'Tension Septembre', Mar. 1939.

the (erroneous) estimate that the German aircraft industry had been producing 1,000 military aircraft per month during the previous summer.¹⁸ It added that seven new airframe and motor factories had begun production during the past six months and estimated that the size of the workforce employed by the industry had grown to 258,000. There was no discussion in either of these two reports of the raw materials question and its ramifications on industrial activity. Stehlin's claim that the team of attachés in Berlin consistently forwarded balanced and accurate appreciations of the strength of the Luftwaffe must be rejected in the light of this evidence.¹⁹

De Geffrier's reports formed the basis for intelligence assessments of German air power in late 1938 and early 1939. A Deuxième Bureau report prepared in late November summarized the above information and warned that the German aviation industry was still expanding with no apparent limit. Once again the limitations that the raw materials situation might place on the production of aircraft was not addressed.²⁰ This led to seriously inflated estimates of the size of the Luftwaffe. An assessment prepared for Guy La Chambre in late December put the first-line strength of the German air force at 4,170 aircraft. Significantly, over 3,000 of these aircraft were considered to be modern. The report estimated that there were another 2,230 modern aircraft in reserve and put the total number of first-line and reserve strength of German air power at 7,600 aircraft.²¹

The navy Deuxième Bureau did not obtain precise intelligence on plans for a massive expansion of the German naval construction programme in the autumn of 1938. This is not surprising as the 'Z-plan' did not gain official approval until January 1939. Nevertheless naval intelligence did report that the *Gneisenau* and the *Scharnhorst* (still listed erroneously as 26,000-tonne battle-cruisers) would enter into service in the coming months. It also reported that a third 35,000-tonne

¹⁸ MAÉ, Eu 18-40, Allemagne, Carton 663, 'Accroissement du matériel de l'Armée de l'air en Allemagne', 10 Nov. 1938. This report is summarized in the *RH* of 6-20 Nov. 1938 in SHAT, 7N 2515.

¹⁹ P. Stehlin, 'Fin septembre 1938, Munich', *Dix leçons sur le nazisme* (Paris, 1976), 155-79 and *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 39-40, 54-7, and 86-109. This claim has been accepted rather uncritically by du Réau, 'Renseignement et décision', 257-8; Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 306-8; and Porch, 'French Intelligence and the Fall of France', *passim*.

²⁰ SHAT, 5N 579-13, 'Le Matériel et la production aéronautique du Reich: L'Augmentation de l'Armée de l'air', 2 Dec. 1938.

²¹ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12941, 'Tableau comparatif de la situation des armées de l'air', 1 Jan. 1939.

battleship would be laid down in 1939 along with two medium cruisers, four destroyers, and seven new medium-sized submarines. All were included in the revised long-term estimates which predicted that by 1943 the German fleet would total 428,000 tonnes of modern warships including five capital ships, three pocket battleships, and sixty-eight submarines.²² Qualitative assessments of the new German ships were characteristically vague however. The Deuxième Bureau advised that it was 'difficult to make comparisons' between the *Gneisenau* and the *Scharnhorst* and their French counter-parts, the *Dunkerque* and the *Strasbourg*. The German ships were slower but with longer range. The chief difference, according to French observers, was that the *Dunkerque* class mounted larger 330mm guns. What naval intelligence failed to discern, however, was that the German naval staff was planning to mount 360mm guns on both the *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* once these ships cleared the slipways. But the Deuxième Bureau did recognize that the pace of the German naval build-up was about to increase yet again. In mid-December an intelligence bulletin judged that '[t]he end of 1938 and the first months of 1939 will mark a crucial period in the renaissance of German sea power' and that 'all indications point to a further acceleration of naval construction'.²³

The assessments prepared in late 1938 were serious distortions of the true state of German military power. In the case of the Luftwaffe, in particular, the level of distortion was worse than had been the case during the Czechoslovak crisis. While Hitler and Göring could make all decrees they liked regarding speeding up the rearmament effort, the cadence of aircraft production was dependent on the availability of raw materials and skilled labour. Hence expansion programmes devised upon high were consistently reduced to more realistic levels by mid-level planners within the German air ministry. In fact, in contrast to Göring's rhetoric and the appreciations of French air intelligence, chronic labour and raw material shortages forced a reduction of monthly aircraft production targets from late 1938 into 1939.²⁴ While it is difficult to obtain precise figures, it is clear that German air strength in early 1939 was nowhere near the levels reported to Guy La Chambre by the air force Deuxième Bureau. In fact, when war broke out the

²² SHM, 1BB2 94, 'Note de renseignements: Le Programme naval allemand', 11 Oct. 1938.

²³ SHM, 1BB2 91, *BdR*, Nov.–Dec. 1938. On plans for the armament of the German ships, which were subsequently abandoned, see Dülffer, *Hitler und die Marine*, 500–4.

²⁴ Overy, 'The German Pre-War Aircraft Production Plans', 786–90.

following September the total strength of the German air force was only 3,500 first-line aircraft. By this time, however, French estimates had been scaled back and were more accurate.²⁵

Underlying the credulity which characterized intelligence assessments at this juncture was the shock produced at every level of French society by the realization that France had come to the very brink of a war for which she was in no way prepared. The tremendous outpouring of relief which greeted Daladier upon his return from Munich was a public expression of the deep sense of vulnerability which spanned the political and social spectrum. Munich constituted the low point in French national confidence before the German threat.

The trauma of the Czechoslovak crisis combined with fresh evidence of continued German military preparations provided the military establishment with a window of opportunity which the commanders of all three services exploited to press the government for increased expenditure on rearmament. Gamelin spelled out the challenge facing France in familiar demographic terms: 'The population of Germany now surpasses 80 million, in other words, double that of continental France. Its military potential is unrivalled. In the near future the Reich will be capable of waging war effectively on several fronts.' To meet this threat Gamelin urged that France 'reestablish its internal stability, augment its military power [particularly in the air] and, above all, reinvigorate its birth-rate'. He advised that '[t]he rearmament programmes of yesterday are no longer sufficient for the situation of today' and that '[t]he time has come to ask ourselves whether the safety of the country must not be given priority over all other considerations'.²⁶ In early December Gamelin forwarded intelligence on increases in the rate of rearmament in Germany to Daladier, adding that '[i]n a great military nation like Germany, every active division can be transformed into *at least* three divisions in wartime'. 'By next spring,' he warned, 'Germany will be ready to wage war against France and Poland at the same time.' He concluded with the alarming observation that '[t]he situation could thus become grave very quickly *even for the defence of our territory*'.²⁷ Vuillemin was just as forceful in expressing the need to expand the recently adopted Plan V. 'What do

²⁵ Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 245.

²⁶ SHAT, 2N 224-1, 'Note sur la situation actuelle', 12 Oct. 1938 and 'Note sur la situation actuelle', 26 Oct. 1938.

²⁷ SHAT, Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224, Carton 7, dr. 1, Gamelin to Daladier, 3 Dec. 1938. Emphasis in original. See also 5N 582-3, Gamelin to Daladier, 3 Dec. 1938.

we have to throw against 5,000 modern German and Italian planes? Nothing for the moment. By 1 April 1939: probably less than 500 aircraft.²⁸ In another note addressed to La Chambre, Vuillemin was equally blunt: 'We may be sufficiently armed to resist a ground assault thanks to our fortifications and our natural frontiers, we are certainly not capable of defending ourselves in the air.'²⁹ Darlan echoed the concerns of his colleagues and pressed for more credits to accelerate the progress of the new building programme obtained in the spring. Like Gamelin and Vuillemin, however, he also gave priority to increasing French air power.³⁰

II

Although uncertainty continued to prevail concerning the direction of the next German move, indications pointed to further pressure in the east in the months to come. Despite their disagreements as to the possibility of Hitler risking a general war, both Didelet and the SAE agreed that Germany would attempt to secure access to the natural resources of eastern Europe and the Balkans before turning westward. Gauché informed the high command that the Deuxième Bureau had received 'intelligence from an excellent source' which revealed that the German army was 'working intensely' at revising its mobilization schemes for the following spring. Gauché noted that the majority of mechanized and motorized units were stationed in the east of Germany. The German military effort in the west, by contrast, remained fundamentally defensive. 'Certain pieces of information we have received,' Gauché added, 'point to the Russian Ukraine.' The Nazis were the chief patrons of Ukrainian nationalism.³¹

In early December Didelet produced a lengthy analysis of the situation in Germany which Gamelin characterized as a 'very remarkable report'.³² The attaché judged Romanian oil and Ukrainian wheat to be

²⁸ SHAT, 5N 579-1, Vuillemin to Gamelin, 25 Oct. 1938.

²⁹ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12967, Vuillemin to La Chambre, 9 Nov. 1939.

³⁰ SHAT, 2N 224-1, 'La Situation actuelle', 17 Oct. 1938. See also the *procès-verbal* of the meeting of the army, navy, and air chiefs of staff, 25 Nov. 1938 in SHAT, 2N 225-2.

³¹ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Note sur le développement des forces terrestres allemandes', 30 Nov. 1938. Ambassador Coulondre provided Paris with a detailed analysis of the activity of the 'National Union of the Ukraine' which operated out of Berlin. See *DDF*, 2ème série, xiii, no. 116, 13 Dec. 1938.

³² SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Tour d'horizon', 12 Dec. 1938 and 'Déclarations du Chancelier Hitler à l'Ambassadeur de Belgique', 28 Nov. 1938.

the chief targets of German *Ostpolitik*. He speculated that the remainder of Czechoslovakia might first be completely subjugated in order to serve as an effective 'point of expansion', but judged Romania, Poland, and the Ukraine to be the central targets of Hitler's policy of expansion. Air intelligence once again concurred. An appreciation prepared in mid-November considered that Germany was about to embark on the *Weltpolitik* phase of the foreign policy programme outlined by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. To underpin this policy Germany required domination of the raw materials of east-central Europe and the Balkans. The study predicted that a German drive to the east to secure these resources 'is beginning to develop before our eyes'. The following passage from *Mein Kampf* was quoted by way of conclusion:

The German people will have no right to colonial political activity as long as it has been unable to bring its sons together in one and the same state. When the territory of the Reich contains all Germans, if it is found inadequate to feed them, the necessity of this people will give birth to its moral right to acquire foreign lands. The plough will then give way to the sword, and the tears of war will prepare the harvests of the future world.³³

The intelligence services were gearing up for further Nazi aggression in 1939.

European tension was greatly increased by the celebrated anti-French tirade of Italian foreign minister Galeazzo Ciano before the Fascist council in Rome in late November. Ciano concluded with demands on Djibouti (capital of French Somaliland), Tunisia, Corsica, and even Nice. This was followed by Italy's formal renunciation of the Franco-Italian alliance of 1935.³⁴ The intelligence services predicted that this was the opening salvo in an Italian campaign for Mediterranean dominance and warned that this campaign was predicated on German support. In early 1939 French code-breakers produced a series of decrypts that left no doubt that Italian policy aimed at destroying French power in the region in collaboration with Nazi Germany.³⁵ The conviction that the Germans and Italians were collaborating in an imminent disturbance of the peace was reinforced by intelligence obtained by the SR from a 'high-ranking German military personality'.

³³ PRO, AIR, 9/93, translation of a French air intelligence assessment entitled 'Germanic Expansion', 12 Nov. 1938.

³⁴ Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy*, 239–44 and Watt, *How War Came*, 51, 57.

³⁵ P. Jackson, 'Intelligence and the End of Appeasement', in Boyce (ed.), *French Foreign and Defence Policy*, 239–41.

According to this source, Germany would seek to extend its hegemony over eastern Europe and the Balkans by sponsoring Ukrainian nationalist movements in both Poland and Russia. Once Poland was torn apart by minority unrest and the Ukraine had been detached from the Soviet Union, Germany would be able to use these regions as 'excellent bases of departure for expansion towards the inexhaustible riches of the Caucasus'. Germany would count on Italian cooperation for this policy. In return Italy would receive German support for its ambitions in the Mediterranean. The information obtained from this official (possibly Hitler's adjutant Captain Fritz Wiedemann) were taken very seriously in Paris. Gamelin forwarded a copy of the intelligence report personally to Daladier and remarked that 'France must thus envision the hypothesis that the Rome–Berlin Axis will pose, in the near future, in the spring or the summer of 1939, yet another "problem of force"'.³⁶

Daladier had already received intelligence which indicated Germany intended another brutal challenge to the European order. In late November a report on the situation in Germany by Dr Schairer was forwarded to the Premier by Paul Reynaud. The source of Schairer's information was undoubtedly Goerdeler. The report warned that the extremist element in Hitler's entourage had gained the upper hand. The latest increases in rearmament had placed intolerable strains on the German economy and Hitler and the extremists had resolved to alleviate these strains by further expansion. The report claimed that 95 per cent of the German population was against the Nazi regime and that the peace could only be saved by firm resistance to future German aggression. Goerdeler hinted that such a policy would provide the opposition to Hitler in Germany with the opportunity to topple the regime.³⁷ This information and other rumours of powerful opposition to Hitler were rejected as unreliable by the Deuxième Bureau. Intelligence

³⁶ SHAT, 7N 2522–2, Gamelin to Daladier, 19 Dec. 1939. The original SR reports remain lost, destroyed, or unavailable. Wiedemann, a member of the 'moderate' group within the Reich Chancellery, was opposed to risking war with Great Britain and France and had provided reliable information on the timing of the invasion of Czechoslovakia the previous summer. See MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Cabinet Bonnet, 'Note remise à la Directeur politique', 8 Sept. 1938. On Wiedemann, see G. Ritter, *The German Resistance: Carl Goerdeler's Struggle against Tyranny* (London, 1958), 474–5. For the corresponding views of the naval Deuxième Bureau, see SHM, 1BB2 91, *BdR*, Nov.–Dec. 1938.

³⁷ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr. 2, sdr. b, 'Mémorandum: Compte-rendu d'une conversation tenue par mon représentant avec M. X le 6 et 7 November [1938]', no date. This information corresponds to reports the British Foreign Office received from Goerdeler and other German sources in Nov. of 1938. See D. Dilks (ed.), *Diaries of Alexander Cadogan* (London, 1971), 128–9; Watt, *How War Came*, 90–2; and Andrew, *Secret Service*, 585–7.

assessments acknowledged that the prospect of war had been received with dread by the bulk of the population but concluded that the vast majority of Germans would obediently have followed Hitler into war.³⁸

Nor was the Reichswehr considered a threat to Hitler. Renondeau judged that '[t]he progressive elimination of military chiefs insufficiently imbued with the doctrine of National Socialism', had made future resistance to Hitler's designs from the military 'very improbable'.³⁹ Didelet came to the same conclusion, considering that 'military resistance like that which surfaced during the Czech crisis, seems impossible now', and that there was 'no chance' that the high command could 'thwart the intentions of the master of the Third Reich'.⁴⁰ The Section Allemande was in complete accord with these views. It judged that the German general staff had been subjected to 'a veritable purge' in 1938 and concluded that '[t]he Führer can count on the passive obedience of his army in an absolute manner'.⁴¹

This was an accurate assessment of the prospects of a successful coup against the regime but an underestimation of the extent of opposition to Hitler within the German military. In late 1938 and early 1939 Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, chief of the Abwehr, circulated a number of false rumours of impending German attacks on Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland and even bombing offensives against the British Isles. Canaris and his deputy, Colonel Hans Oster, were both, in varying degrees, opponents of the Nazi regime. Their hope in planting this bogus intelligence in the SIS network in western Europe was to build resistance to Hitler in the west.⁴² Perhaps because the Germans had been unsuccessful in penetrating the French agent network in western Europe, or possibly because Hitler's opponents considered that French policy was made in London, the Deuxième Bureau did not receive the same volume of misinformation.

In fact the bulk of the rumours French intelligence received on a possible German attack in the west came from British sources.⁴³ In contrast to British intelligence, Deuxième Bureau assessments pointed consistently to looming disturbances in the east. In the final analysis, the Deuxième Bureau could not reasonably have been expected to

³⁸ SHAT, 7N 2523-2, 'Étude sur le situation et l'esprit en Allemagne', 22 Oct. 1938.

³⁹ 'Mutations dans le Haut Commandement', 12 Nov. 1938.

⁴⁰ SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Tour d'horizon', 12 Dec. 1938 and 'L'Armée et le parti national-socialiste', 13 Dec. 1939.

⁴¹ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Le Führer et l'armée allemande', 16 Feb. 1939.

⁴² See Andrew, *Secret Service*, 580-1 and Watt, *How War Came*, 100-1.

⁴³ See e.g. SHAT, 7N 2523-4, 'Compte-rendu des renseignements', 26 Dec. 1939.

provide a more accurate picture of German intentions at this point. In late 1938 and early 1939 German external policy was indeed devoted to preparing the way for war with France and Britain by neutralizing Poland and securing economic predominance over eastern Europe. The Poles, however, had proved uncooperative. They had refused to surrender the free port of Danzig and had instead signed a joint declaration to consult with the Soviet Union. There were divisions of opinion within Hitler's entourage as to how the Poles should be brought to heel. Elements within the German high command favoured an end to negotiations and the adoption of military measures. Another group, which included foreign minister Ribbentrop, advocated continued negotiations to bring Poland firmly into the German orbit in preparation for war in the west. Hitler remained undecided. He authorized Ribbentrop to pursue talks with Polish foreign minister Joseph Beck while at the same time ordering military preparations for a sudden occupation of Danzig.⁴⁴

These hesitations were reflected in French intelligence reports. Specific evidence of Hitler's immediate intentions remained lacking into early 1939. Yet the conviction was that trouble was on the horizon and that this trouble would manifest itself in eastern Europe. In late December, Gauché advised his superiors that 'the vast majority of intelligence received recently indicates that Germany will move to liberate itself from any threat from the east in early 1939'. He speculated that the aims of German policy were to control the natural resources of eastern Europe and to 'dismantle Poland' which it judged to be 'the sole military power capable of intervening effectively in the east when the time comes to settle accounts with France'.⁴⁵ On 27 December Gamelin informed Daladier that intelligence provided by the Deuxième Bureau 'confirms the resolution of the Führer to pursue his program of hegemony' and that Poland was the most likely target of future Nazi aggression.⁴⁶ But uncertainty persisted. The weekly intelligence bulletin for late December and early January reported that '[a] clear picture of the dimensions of the German threat to eastern Europe has yet to take shape'.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Watt, *How War Came*, 65–71 and Weinberg, *Starting World War Two*, 482–90.

⁴⁵ SHAT, 7N 3056–2, 'Considérations sur la constitution d'un bloc oriental', 28 Dec. 1938.

⁴⁶ SHAT, Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224–9, dr. 1, Gamelin to Daladier, 27 Dec. 1938.

⁴⁷ SHAT, 7N 2515, *RH*, 19 Dec. 1938–9 Jan. 1939.

The atmosphere of anticipation was heightened in the New Year by rumours which emanated from the SR network in western Germany of preparations for a *Probe Mobilmachung* (trial mobilization) in early January. The SAE speculated that these preparations might also portend a move against Memel from East Prussia.⁴⁸ Further information reached the Section Allemande which suggested that Hitler had ordered the army to be ready from the end of February to 'support a diplomatic action which might generate an armed conflict'.⁴⁹ From Berlin, Didelet initially discounted these rumours, considering that 'Germany does not at the moment envisage a coup de force'.⁵⁰ By the middle of January, however, he reported that certain units of reservists had been called up and that the atmosphere in Berlin was becoming increasingly tense. He reported that '[a]ll indications suggest that Germany is in a phase of intensive military preparation'. Didelet predicted that the army would be ready from the beginning of March 'either for a surprise action or for another show of force which will make such an action unnecessary'. The most likely target was Romanian oil. Didelet insisted, however, that Hitler had no intention of attacking France and that the Führer would in fact recoil if presented with the prospect of a world war.⁵¹

The increasingly tense political situation generated greater demand for intelligence within the war ministry. Hence from early February to the outbreak of war, the SAE prepared weekly bulletins specifically on the activities of the Axis states as well as weekly summaries of secret intelligence obtained from the SR to supplement its *rapports hebdomadaires*. These supplementary reports were read by Gamelin, Colson, Major General Alphonse Georges, commander-designate of the north-eastern theatre, by the Premier's cabinet, and often by the Premier himself. Intelligence would play an ever more important role in decision making during the final months of peace.⁵²

An examination of these reports reveals that Didelet's information regarding widespread convocations of reservists were corroborated by information provided by both the SR and French consulates. Throughout January and February the Deuxième Bureau continued

⁴⁸ SHAT, 7N 2605, SAE to Didelet in Berlin, 31 Dec. 1938 and 7N 2515, *RH*, 19 Dec. 1938 to 9 Jan. 1939.

⁴⁹ SHAT, 7N 2515, *RH*, 9–15 Jan. 1939.

⁵⁰ SHAT, 7N 2602–2, 'Mesures de mobilisation en Allemagne', 3 Jan. 1939.

⁵¹ SHAT, 7N 2602–2, 'Prévisions', 10 Jan. and 'Information', 17 Jan.

⁵² The *BdRs* on the Axis can be found in SHAT, 7N 2516, dossiers 1 and 2. Copies of these were forwarded to Gamelin's cabinet and can be consulted in Série N [Supplémentaire], 1N 19, dr. 3. The *Comptes rendus des renseignements du SR* are in 7N 2571.

to receive evidence of measures of partial mobilization in Germany and rumours of lightning offensives into south-eastern Europe.⁵³ The signals military intelligence was picking up were a combination of disinformation spread by Canaris, an intensification of reservist training in the German army, and the preliminary preparations for the move against Czechoslovakia.

Historians have often concluded that French intelligence failed to provide the high command and government with warning of the 'Prague coup'.⁵⁴ This is mistaken. The Deuxième Bureau focused attention on a possible move against the Czechs from early March. Both Daladier and Gamelin were warned of German intentions fully seven days before Prague was occupied. The first substantial rumour of Hitler's designs on the principalities of Bohemia and Moravia emanated from François-Poncet's successor in Berlin, Robert Coulondre. In December Coulondre passed on information, from a 'most reliable source' (which remains obscure), that the decision to liquidate the remainder of the Czech state had been taken by Hitler in November.⁵⁵ No further information turned up which complemented this intelligence until mid-February, when Hans-Thilo Schmidt reported preparations for a German 'intervention'.⁵⁶ An intelligence bulletin of 14 February duly reported that 'the situation will likely deteriorate during the first fortnight of March'.⁵⁷ On 5 March Madelaine Bihou-Richet arrived at the French frontier with Germany with a message from Colonel von Vivremont. 'Source MAD' informed the SR that a military operation had been planned against the Czechs for Wednesday 15 March.⁵⁸ This intelligence was complemented by similar information from the SIS through the military attaché in London.⁵⁹ Daladier and the Quai d'Orsay were alerted to the possibility of an imminent German action on 8 March.⁶⁰

⁵³ SHAT, 7N 2515, *RHs*, 23–9 Jan. and 30 Jan.–5 Feb. 1939 and 7N 2516–1, *BdRs*, 6, 14, 21, 28 Feb. 1939.

⁵⁴ Adamthwaite, 'French Military Intelligence', 201–5; R. Overy, 'Strategic Intelligence and the Outbreak of the Second World War', *War in History*, 5: 4 (1998), 467; and Porch, *French Secret Services*, 146.

⁵⁵ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 402–3.

⁵⁶ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 13 Feb. and 6 Mar. 1939. See also SHAT, 1K 545, Fonds Paillole, 12, dr. 2, sdr. 1.

⁵⁷ SHAT, 7N 2516–1, *BdR*, 14 Feb. 1939. See also Paillole, *Notre espion*, 143.

⁵⁸ SHAT, 7N 2642–4, BRÉM (SR post at Metz), 5 Mar. 1939 and *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 6 Mar. 1939.

⁵⁹ SHAT, 7N 2642–5, 'Rapports et compte-rendus de Londres: 11–20 Mars 1939'. For the perspective from the British side, see, Andrew, *Secret Service*, 585–6.

⁶⁰ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr. 4, sdr. a, 'Les Visées de l'Allemagne sur la

By 9 March the Deuxième Bureau had concluded that a German move was inevitable.⁶¹ Two days later Czechoslovak secret intelligence telegraphed Paris that ‘our German friends will arrive on Wednesday’.⁶² Rivet noted in his diary that ‘Prague have confirmed all of the intelligence that has arrived over the past fifteen days indicating a German political and military operation in Moravia on 15 March’.⁶³ The following day the French SR post in Prague produced a detailed report on Hitler’s intention to march into Czechoslovakia on 15 March, to occupy the principalities to establish a protectorate.⁶⁴ After the 12th, the SAE received a virtual flood of reports of troop movements in eastern Germany from all four SR posts along the German frontier, from the SR station in Prague and from the Berlin embassy. On 13 March Gamelin informed the CSG that the 15th would be the ‘fatal date’ for the Czechs, who would not resist.⁶⁵ Although it did not evoke a bellicose response, the occupation of Prague came as no surprise. The truth is that the Czechs had long since been written off by decision makers in Paris.

III

The expectation that Germany would continue to disrupt the peace by resuming its drive to the east formed the context within which French policy was framed in late 1938 and early 1939. The intelligence picture provided to Daladier and to the Quai d’Orsay officials from Munich to the disappearance of Czechoslovakia provides a new perspective on French diplomacy and the coming of war. A number of historians have argued that from Munich to March of 1939, the Daladier government sought to forge a lasting understanding with Germany and was willing to acquiesce to German domination of eastern Europe in order to achieve this.⁶⁶ The key turning point, according to this interpretation,

Tchécoslovaquie’, 9 Mar. 1939 and SHAT, 7N 2525, ‘Compte-rendu de liaison hebdomadaire’, 8 Mar. 1939 also in *DDF*, 2ème série, xiv, no. 286.

⁶¹ SHAT, 7N 2524-1, ‘Note pour le commandement sur la situation en Europe centrale’, 9 Mar. 1939.

⁶² SHAT, 7N 2642-4, ‘Compte-rendu’, 11 Mar. 1939.

⁶³ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 11 Mar. 1939.

⁶⁴ SHAT, 7N 2642-4, ‘Compte-rendu’, 12 Mar. 1939.

⁶⁵ SHAT, 1N 38-3, ‘Procès-verbal de la séance d’études du 13 mars 1939’.

⁶⁶ Bellstedt, *Apaisement oder Krieg*; Schirmann, *Les Relations économiques*, 215-36; R. Girault, ‘La Politique extérieure française de l’après-Munich’, in Hildebrand and Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich*, 507-22; Adamthwaite, *France*, 264-99; R. Poidevin, ‘La Tentative

was the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and the subsequent annexation of the Lithuanian city of Memel on 20 March. According to Anthony Adamthwaite and René Girault, among others, it was only after these coups that French decision makers realized that hopes for an understanding with Hitler were illusory and reversed their policy of détente with Germany.

This interpretation of the course of French policy is flawed. Virtually all of the intelligence produced by the army and air force Deuxième Bureaux in the months preceding the occupation of Prague indicated that German military preparations had been intensified in preparation for another *coup de force*. The government had been informed of Hitler's resolution to liquidate the remainder of Czechoslovakia well in advance of the actual operation. No French action was taken because the Czechs had been discounted as a strategic factor after Munich. As Robert Young and J.-B. Duroselle have argued, the months which followed the Munich Agreement were a period of uncertainty and soul-searching for French strategic policy.⁶⁷ The government, foreign ministry, and the military services were all divided over the question of how to respond to the anticipated *Drang nach Osten*. What has been overlooked in the historiography, however, is that military and civilian planning for an eastern front began well before the Prague coup. Intelligence played a central role in the evolution of this policy.

The aftermath of Munich occasioned a wide-ranging reassessment of the strategic situation within the French defence and foreign policy establishment. The Munich Agreement had transformed the complexion of the European power balance. The removal of Czechoslovakia as a factor in European affairs had deprived a potential anti-German coalition of thirty-four well-equipped divisions. Equally serious was the grave blow to French prestige in this region which was an inevitable product of the Munich humiliation. Up for reconsideration was the future of France's traditional policy of searching for a counterweight to German military power in eastern Europe. Colonel Jean Delmas, the French military attaché to Romania, captured the essence of the dilemma facing French policy makers in the autumn of 1938 when he urged Premier Daladier that '[i]t is imperative that France either recognize German predominance in the east and accept the

de rapprochement économique entre la France et l'Allemagne, 1938-1939', in Bariéty, Valentin, and Guth (eds.), *La France et l'Allemagne entre les deux guerres mondiales*, 59-68.

⁶⁷ R. Young, 'The Aftermath of Munich: The Course of French Diplomacy, October 1938 to March 1939', *FHS* 8: 2 (1973), 305-22 and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 367-404.

consequences or, if the stakes are considered high enough, begin construction of a real eastern barrier to German expansion'.⁶⁸ To 'accept the consequences', however, would be to renounce France's status as a Great Power.

There were influential advocates of a fundamental change in French policy. François-Poncet stressed the need to re-examine France's security policy in the light of the new strategic realities presented by the Munich Agreement. In an assessment of the international situation prepared in early October, François-Poncet considered that the way was open for Germany to establish political and economic predominance in eastern and central Europe.⁶⁹ In Paris an influential political group advocated a policy of withdrawal from eastern Europe. This group included former Premiers Pierre-Etienne Flandin, Pierre Laval, Joseph Caillaux, and most notably Bonnet. Such a policy, it was hoped, would facilitate a durable rapprochement between France and Germany. To prepare the way for Bonnet's plans for détente with Germany, two of the most influential anti-*anti-munichois* officials within the Quai d'Orsay, René Massigli and Pierre Comert, were transferred out of Paris.⁷⁰ Before the Chamber foreign affairs commission in October, Bonnet stressed the need to 'restructure' France's obligations in eastern Europe and to 'renegotiate' agreements which might force war upon France 'when French security is not directly threatened'.⁷¹ The assumption upon which this policy rested, that a lasting understanding was possible between France and Germany, was completely at variance with the Deuxième Bureau's thesis that Germany would turn westward once it had secured control of eastern Europe and the natural resources it required to wage a long war. The climax of Bonnet's policy, which had marshalled an important following in the French press, occurred when Ribbentrop travelled to Paris and signed an agreement to consult with Bonnet in the event of a threat to the peace on 6 December 1938. The Franco-German declaration was followed by a series of studies within the Quai d'Orsay and ministry of finance on ways and means to bolster economic ties with Germany which ultimately amounted to very little.⁷²

⁶⁸ SHAT, 7N 3058, Delmas to Paris, 3 Oct. 1939.

⁶⁹ DDF, 2ème série, xii, no. 209. ⁷⁰ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 369.

⁷¹ AAN, Commission des Affaires Étrangères, 16ème séance, Carton 76, Bonnet audition, 17 Oct. 1938.

⁷² On French economic appeasement schemes, Schirmann, *Les Relations économiques*, 225–36; Poidevin, 'La Tentative'. On Bonnet's foreign policy in late 1938, see Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 371–3; Adamthwaite, *France*, ch. 15 and esp. Bellstedt, *Apaisement oder Krieg*.

Opposition to this policy of retreat within the foreign ministry owed much to information provided by the intelligence services. Beginning in the autumn of 1938 *Deuxième Bureau* assessments appear with regularity in the personal papers of important Quai d'Orsay officials.⁷³ It is at this juncture, significantly, that the view that Germany was determined on a policy of conquest began to prevail within the foreign ministry. Secretary general Léger considered the Munich Agreement an evil necessity which would provide France with breathing room to accelerate its rearmament. He was opposed, however, to further concessions to Hitler in eastern Europe.⁷⁴ Émile Charvériat, Massigli's replacement as political director and a member of the 'Léger Clan', was also deeply sceptical. He acknowledged that an attempt to bring Germany back into the international community would have to be made but expressed pessimism as to the prospects that such an approach might succeed. 'Hitler', he dryly observed in a note to Bonnet, 'appears more concerned with hegemony in Europe than with improving commercial relations with France'.⁷⁵ The deputy-director in charge of European Affairs, Roger Hoppenot, was of the same view. Hoppenot understood that, in order to obtain any kind of commitment from Germany, France would have to sacrifice its entire position in the east in exchange for more German promises of goodwill. 'We have already received enough of these assurances', he warned ironically, 'to establish their value.'⁷⁶

The same debate played out within the military. Renondeau warned that the German military power would only increase in the months to come while the prospects of resisting Germany's drive for continental hegemony were likely to diminish commensurately.⁷⁷ Gamelin concurred. He judged that the situation in central Europe was 'completely transformed' and that France must adjust her policies accordingly. In early October Gamelin drafted a bleak appreciation of the strategic situation for Premier Daladier. He judged that the consequences of the

⁷³ See the military intelligence reports in the personal papers of Political Director Émile Charvériat and Roger Hoppenot: MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Charvériat, vol. 2, and *Hoppenot*, vol. 1.

⁷⁴ Bédarida, 'La "Gouvernante anglaise"', 229, 231; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 369; and de Crouy-Chanel, *Léger*, 236–9.

⁷⁵ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Charvériat, vol. 2, 'Éléments d'une politique d'apaisement à l'égard de l'Allemagne: Questions politiques', 17 Dec. 1938.

⁷⁶ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Hoppenot, vol. 1, 'Note pour le Ministre: Relations franco-allemandes', 5 Dec. 1938.

⁷⁷ SHAT, 7N 2602, Renondeau to Paris, 9 Nov. 1938.

Anschluss and the Munich Agreement had provided Germany with de facto dominance in the Danubian basin and cleared the way for its expansion to the Black Sea. Characteristically, however, Gamelin did not suggest openly that France renounce its ties to eastern Europe. He advocated instead a 'new military policy' which would focus on ensuring territorial integrity, strengthening lines of communication and supply with the empire, and close cooperation with Great Britain.⁷⁸

Responding to this note, Daladier instructed the three service chiefs of staff, Vuillemin, Darlan, and Colson as well as General Jules Bührer, chief of the colonial army, to prepare their own strategic overviews to be submitted to him at the ministry of defence. All four officials endorsed Gamelin's emphasis on the importance of an entente with the British. Darlan took this opportunity to bid for a greater role for the navy in French strategic planning. Predictably, he endorsed Gamelin's emphasis on the empire and stressed the importance of the Mediterranean theatre in a future conflict. He also pointed to the need to undertake in-depth planning for war with Italy.⁷⁹ General Bührer, unsurprisingly, also stressed the increased importance of the empire to French security and argued that France could counterbalance German industrial and demographic superiority by mobilizing the human and material resources of its imperial possessions.⁸⁰ Vuillemin, the most pessimistic of the service chiefs, openly counselled that France should reconsider its ties to eastern Europe in order to avoid war with Germany. He also urged that priority be given to obtaining Italian neutrality and that France make a 'radical break' in its relations with the Soviet Union.⁸¹ A reorientation of French strategy towards the Mediterranean and the empire was thus under serious consideration within the defence establishment at this juncture.

The most important of these strategic overviews, because it advocated a policy diametrically opposed to that put forward by Gamelin, was that of Colson. The army chief of staff rejected the idea that France could 'withdraw inward upon itself and its colonial empire'. He argued that to allow German domination of eastern and east-central Europe would be to concede to the Reich the resources it required to withstand

⁷⁸ SHAT, 5N 579-1, Gamelin to Daladier, 'Note sur la situation actuelle', 12 Oct. 1938.

⁷⁹ SHAT, 2N 224-1, 'La Situation actuelle', 17 Oct. 1938. See also Salerno, 'French Navy', 82-9.

⁸⁰ SHAT, 2N 224-1, 'Conséquences stratégiques de l'occupation des pays sudètes', 19 Oct. 1938.

⁸¹ SHAT, 5N 579-1, Vuillemin to Gamelin, 25 Oct. 1938.

an economic blockade and to sustain a long war. He thus asserted that the search for an eastern counterweight 'must remain an axiom of our foreign policy'.⁸²

Colson's arguments derived primarily from Deuxième Bureau assessments of the strategic importance of eastern Europe and its natural resources. His views were therefore supported by the chiefs of army and air intelligence. In a widely circulated overview prepared in late December, Gauché stressed the importance of the raw materials of the Balkans and underlined the strategic possibilities of an eastern front for France. Hitler's success in 1938 had been achieved because he had managed to avoid 'the nightmare of a two front war'. German domination of eastern Europe, Gauché warned, would deprive France of this important reservoir of manpower and assure the Reich access to the raw materials it lacked to wage war successfully against Britain and France.⁸³ A bloc of eastern European states united in opposition to German aggression could, theoretically, improve the strategic situation significantly. In terms of raw soldiery, the Deuxième Bureau informed both Gamelin and Daladier that Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia together constituted a potential 110 divisions.⁸⁴ Gauché noted that if the productive capacities of Russian industry could be added to this equation the European balance of power would tip decisively in favour of an anti-German coalition.⁸⁵ Colonel de Vitrolles, in contrast to his superior Vuillemin, was equally opposed to allowing Germany *le champ libre* in eastern Europe. He judged that if Britain and France did not make a stand in the east, Germany would 'crush Poland, overrun Romania, seize the Ukraine and be unchallengeable mistress of Europe and the world'.⁸⁶

Opposition to a *dégagement à l'est* ultimately prevailed within the military. By December Gamelin had recovered his nerve and his attitude towards eastern Europe had changed. In early December he informed Daladier that it was in the French interest to unite Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Turkey in an eastern bloc which might receive material support from the Soviet Union.⁸⁷ Gamelin again urged an active

⁸² SHAT, 5N 579-1, Colson to Daladier, 'Note sur la situation actuelle', 26 Oct. 1938.

⁸³ SHAT, 7N 3056-2, 'Considerations sur la constitution d'un bloc oriental', 28 Dec. 1938.

⁸⁴ SHAT, 7N 3434-3, 'Note pour le Général Chef de l'État-Major de l'Armée', 29 Dec. 1938.

⁸⁵ SHAT, 7N 3056-2, 'Considerations sur la constitution d'un bloc oriental', 28 Dec. 1938.

⁸⁶ PRO, AIR 9/93, Colyer to the air ministry reporting a conversation with de Vitrolles of 13 Jan. 1939.

⁸⁷ SHAT, 5N 579-1, Gamelin to Daladier, 3 Dec. 1938. The best analysis of the growing importance of the USSR in French strategic planning is T. Imlay, 'How to Win

eastern policy in an emotional note to the Premier which concluded that 'the fate of human civilization, that of all democratic powers', depended on France's resolve to resist further German aggression.⁸⁸ During the last week in December the operations bureau of the army general staff produced the first of a long series of studies on the subject of constructing an eastern bloc capable of withstanding Germany's eastward drive.⁸⁹ From the military point of view, therefore, the strategic underpinning for a policy of resistance in eastern Europe was in place by early 1939.

The key to the future course of French foreign policy, however, lay with Edouard Daladier. Few freely elected officials have exerted such a wide-ranging authority over foreign and defence policy as did Daladier in France from spring 1938 to 1940. In addition to combining the portfolios of Premier and minister of defence, Daladier possessed the sweeping powers of decree obtained from Parliament the previous spring and renewed without difficulty in October. Divisions within the cabinet, moreover, permitted the Premier to exercise decisive control over the course of French policy. During the Munich Crisis a small but voluble anti-German faction comprised of Georges Mandel, Paul Reynaud, and Jean Zay had opposed the proponents of appeasement led by Bonnet and including Anatole de Monzie, Charles Pomaret, and Paul Marchandeau. A larger group had supported the policy of appeasement with deep reservations and included, among others, La Chambre, vice-premier Chautemps, minister of the Marine César Campinchi, and Daladier himself.⁹⁰ The leanings of this group of moderate Radical politicians, all fairly closely allied to Daladier, had been decisive during the Czechoslovak crisis the previous September and would be so again when tension increased over Danzig. Hence while Bonnet was permitted considerable freedom in the day-to-day management of French diplomacy, he could not challenge Daladier over differences in policy. In fact all of the key foreign policy decisions of 1939 were made by the Premier, often despite, rather than in agreement with, the views of the foreign minister. Bonnet's influence with the conservative wing of the Radical Party, however, prevented Daladier from

a War: Franco-British Planning for War against Germany, 1938-1940', Ph.D. thesis (Yale, 1997), 69-84.

⁸⁸ SHAT, 5N 579-1, Gamelin to Daladier, 19 Dec. 1938.

⁸⁹ SHAT, 7N 3434-3, 'Note pour le Général Chef de l'État-Major de l'Armée', 29 Dec. 1938.

⁹⁰ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 381; Young, *Origins*, 82-9; and Lacaze, *France et Munich*, 500-44.

replacing him with someone more committed to a policy of firmness. Bonnet therefore remained foreign minister right up to the outbreak of war.

Daladier's perspective on the international situation also differed markedly from that of the British Prime Minister. Chamberlain remained optimistic that peace had indeed been saved and adopted a relatively complacent attitude towards the German threat in the aftermath of Munich. There was no major diversion of resources to rearmament in Britain in late 1938. The French case was very different. There is little evidence that Daladier ever took Hitler's professions of good intentions towards France as seriously. The ardour with which the Premier defended his Munich policy publicly was an effort to exploit public support for the agreement as he led the Radical Party out of the Popular Front coalition.⁹¹ In private Daladier was much less optimistic. He confided to Jacques Kayser, the vice-president of the Radical Party and a trusted collaborator, that '[t]he Munich Agreement is really only a short respite. Hitler will find a pretext for an armed conflict before he loses his military superiority.'⁹² There was also palpable hostility towards Britain. Daladier was haunted by the memory of Munich and bitterly resented the personal diplomacy of Chamberlain immediately after the agreement had been signed. And this sense of betrayal had only increased in the months which followed. Although France had endured the dishonour of Munich in the hope that a strengthened Franco-British military relationship would emerge out of the wreckage of the alliance with Czechoslovakia, the bitter truth was that, in late 1938, the two states were no closer to a full military alliance than they had been before the crisis. The French defence establishment was deeply chagrined at the hollow character of conversations held between the French and British military representatives in November 1938, where the British government obstinately refused to enlarge its plans for an expeditionary force of two divisions. All of this brought Franco-British relations to a desperately low ebb in early 1939. Daladier's frustration with the British position boiled over in expressions of antipathy and even contempt. Chamberlain, in his estimation, was a fundamentally weak character, a 'desiccated stick', the British Empire reduced to little more than 'a frail reed', a completely unreliable alliance partner.⁹³

⁹¹ Berstein, *Crise du radicalisme*, 550–7.

⁹² Cited in du Réau, *Daladier*, 294.

⁹³ Cited in Bullitt in *For the President*, 308–11. See also du Réau, *Daladier*, 299–308 and Young, *In Command of France*, 214–21. See also the bleak report on British military preparedness

In this post-Munich mood of disillusion and uncertainty, Daladier received a sweeping overview of the international situation prepared by Louis Aubert, an academic historian and member of the French delegation to Geneva. A relative outsider, but also a confidant of Daladier, Aubert was able to circumvent Bonnet and advocate an alternative to a policy of withdrawal to Daladier. His lengthy memorandum summarized the views of many of the senior foreign ministry officials who were opposed to Bonnet's policy of retreat in the east. The interpretation of Nazi foreign policy which underpinned this appreciation was identical to that of military intelligence. Aubert warned that '[t]he idea that Germany will be permanently satisfied if given a free hand in the east is an illusion', and that '[f]or Germany the east is only a means to acquire the resources which will permit her to turn against France'. Although he acknowledged that France could not act effectively without British support, Aubert argued against renunciation of existing accords. He predicted that Hitler's 'hegemonic ambition' would eventually provide France with the necessary British support for a policy of rallying the forces of resistance in east-central Europe into an anti-German front which would include Poland, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and the Soviet Union. France could do little, however, under the present circumstances. 'We must wait,' he advised, 'but we must also prepare to act when the opportunity arises.'⁹⁴

Ultimately, the Aubert memorandum constituted something of a blueprint for French policy in eastern Europe. From October 1938 to the British commitment to defend Poland the following March, French policy was caught between an awareness of the grave threat which German domination of eastern Europe posed to France's security and the conviction that any challenge to Germany required full British support. The result was a *politique d'attente*. Commitments to the east were neither reinforced nor renounced. Bonnet was refused a mandate to bargain away French interests east of the Rhine and strict limitations were imposed on projects for appeasing Germany economically.⁹⁵ As a result, the Franco-German declaration signed in December did not develop into the more substantial understanding which Bonnet and his

despatched by the military attaché in London in AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr. 2, sdr. a, 17 Nov. 1938 and 'Information du Président: Conversations franco-britanniques', 22 Nov. 1938.

⁹⁴ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Fonds Daladier, vol. 2, 'La Politique extérieure de la France', 16 Nov. 1938. Other Aubert assessments are in *ibid.*, vol. 1, 26 Aug. 1938 and vol. 3, 27 Mar. 1939.

⁹⁵ Poidevin, 'La Tentative de rapprochement économique', 66-7.

supporters desired. By early January Daladier was convinced that France could not permit Germany to have its way in eastern Europe. He warned the Senate defence commission that '[o]nce assured of the resources of wheat and petrol it requires . . . there is every reason to believe that the Reich will turn definitively on France which would constitute the sole remaining element of resistance on the continent'.⁹⁶

It is within this context, keeping in mind the fact that Daladier and his staff at the ministry of defence had received ample intelligence of Italo-German collusion from the Deuxième Bureau, that France's hard-line response to Italian demands should be interpreted. Early in the new year Daladier made an ostentatious tour of France's North African possessions, proclaiming that 'not one inch' of French imperial territory would be ceded to any foreign power.⁹⁷ A firm response to Italy was a demonstration of France's commitment to its empire, an expression of its displeasure with Great Britain, and, most importantly, the first step in a more vigorous policy towards the dictators. Yet beyond this France was unable to go. Despite his frustration with British policy, Daladier realized that France could not embark on a vigorous policy of resistance without England's support. As he noted to a gathering of the three defence commissions of the Senate in early February: 'No Frenchman with any sense could have the illusion that France could face the prospect of war with Germany without English support'.⁹⁸

The result was that there were two contradictory directions to French strategic policy in the months following the Munich Agreement. At the same time that Bonnet and his followers were attempting a *dégagement à l'est*, an economic mission under the Direction of Hervé Alphand of the ministry of commerce was dispatched to Romania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria to explore ways and means of bolstering France's commercial presence in the Balkans.⁹⁹ Daladier refused to commit French policy. He did not oppose exploring the possibility of

⁹⁶ AS, Sous-commission de la Défense Nationale, 27 Jan. 1939.

⁹⁷ Daladier finally consented to sending an unofficial emissary, Paul Badouin, to Rome in the Spring, but his government remained utterly opposed to any significant territorial concessions to the Italians: Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 389–96; Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy*, 242–52; Du Réau, *Daladier*, 309–10, 329–34; and Young, *In Command of France*, 230–1.

⁹⁸ AS, Commission de l'Air, Carton S18, Daladier audition, 9 Feb. 1939. This observation echoed Daladier's position before the French cabinet at the very height of the Munich crisis, that '[n]ot one Frenchman can accept war with Germany and Italy without the assurance of immediate aid from England', which is cited in Zay, *Carnets Secrets*, 5.

⁹⁹ On the Alphand mission, see Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 379–80.

rapprochement with Germany based on closer Franco-German commercial ties. But he clearly doubted Hitler's good faith, judging that, if the Germans were sincere in their desire for good relations with France, they would have cooperated with recent French efforts to settle the Spanish affair peacefully. This had hardly been the case.¹⁰⁰ The steady stream of intelligence which reached Daladier indicating that the Germans were intensifying military preparations and were planning further adventures in eastern Europe could only have heightened the Premier's doubts about the wisdom of Bonnet's policy. It certainly gave impetus to the acceleration of French rearmament, especially in the air. The fundamental objective behind the brutal and politically costly revision of the 40-hour work week in November was to stimulate production in defence industries.¹⁰¹ Spending on rearmament increased dramatically after Munich. Estimates for the defence budget for 1939 rose from 25 billion francs in the autumn of 1938 to 37 billion francs by the following June. In April Daladier obtained fresh powers of decree that further accelerated the pace of rearmament by relieving the service ministries of the obligation to submit their estimates to Parliament for approval. In addition, a new *taxe d'armement* was created. Defence spending rose from 48 per cent of government revenue in 1938 to 135 per cent in 1939. And there was no end in sight to increases in the defence budget. On the eve of war the army staff was finalizing plans for yet another sixty-four billion franc armaments programme.¹⁰²

The air force benefited most from the acceleration of rearmament. In November the completion of air rearmament Plan V was pushed ahead once again to the spring of 1940. In June the entire programme was expanded to envisage a total strength of 8,094 modern aircraft

¹⁰⁰ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr. 2, sdr. c, 'La Visite du M. Ribbentrop', 5 Dec. 1938.

¹⁰¹ Historians who have argued that the 40-hour week was not responsible for the widespread bottlenecks in France's armaments industries and that this policy was therefore a political manoeuvre on the part of the Daladier government have ignored the important fact that the perception among French *décideurs* was that Popular Front labour legislation had hamstrung the rearmament effort. See e.g. La Chambre's entreaty to Daladier in mid-October that a minimum 45-hour work week was 'absolutely indispensable' to the air rearmament effort: MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Fonds Daladier, 'Perspectives d'avenir', La Chambre to Daladier, 21 Oct. 1938. See also Elisabeth du Réau, 'L'Aménagement de la loi instituant la semaine de quarante heures', in *Édouard Daladier, chef du gouvernement*, 129–49.

¹⁰² AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr. 1, sdr. b, Daladier before Senate finance commission, 17 July 1939. According to Robert Frank, rearmament spending more than tripled from 1938 to 1939. On spending figures, see Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 197–217 and 306. On the decree laws and spending, see also Jacomet, *L'Armement de la France*, 204–20.

by 1941. The funding granted to the air ministry for rearmament nearly quadrupled from 6.64 billion francs in 1938 to 23.9 billion for 1939. The proportion of credits allotted to air rearmament more than doubled during the same period from 23 to 48 per cent of total spending on rearmament.¹⁰³ Daladier played a key role in all of this. Insisting that 'our inferiority in the air is tragic', he brushed aside the protests of new finance minister, Paul Reynaud, and pushed a proposal by Guy La Chambre to purchase 1,000 aircraft from the United States through the CPDN on 5 December.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the French government also purchased several dozen transport aircraft from the Italian firms of Savoia-Marschetti and Isolta-Franschini.¹⁰⁵ In the long run, Germany's success in deceiving French intelligence into formulating vastly inflated estimates of its aircraft production was harmful. It served to sharpen the sense of urgency which drove the French government to redress the situation in the air in 1938–9.

IV

Two developments permitted the Daladier government to go beyond rearmament expansion towards a policy of resistance built around constructing a dam against German aggression in eastern Europe. The first of these was the British offer to undertake high-level staff conversations with France in late January. The second was the evolution of a British commitment to eastern Europe in the form of a guarantee to Poland. The development of Franco-British military cooperation in early 1939 demonstrates how intelligence can be used as an effective tool in relations between allies.

The chief tactic employed by French soldiers and statesmen in pursuing the British was to emphasize the danger of a possible German offensive into western Europe in late 1938. Accordingly, the emphasis on eastern Europe as the probable direction of German aggression was distinctly absent in the information forwarded to the British government

¹⁰³ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 5, sdr. d, 'Les Armements français'. See also Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 295–6, 306.

¹⁰⁴ SHAT, 2N 24, *Procès-verbal*, CPDN, 5 Dec. 1938. The financing of this project remained unresolved however.

¹⁰⁵ For reference to these Italian purchases, see SHAA, 1B 4, 9 Nov. 1938. So desperate were the French to improve the strength of their air force that negotiations were also under way, under intense secrecy, to purchase several hundred Daimler-Benz motors from Germany. See Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 453 and Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 129–32.

through ambassador Phipps and through military attaché Colonel William Fraser. Instead, these British representatives were provided with information that pointed to a German attack in the west through Belgium and Holland or through Switzerland. Both Gauché and Gamelin warned Fraser of the difficulties France faced in preventing Germany from overrunning Belgium and of the danger which German submarine and air bases in the Low Countries would pose to a Franco-British coalition.¹⁰⁶ Daladier, too, expressed great concern to Phipps over the possibilities of a German offensive through the Low Countries.¹⁰⁷ After receiving an alarmed note from the British foreign office in late January, the Quai d'Orsay responded that:

The French government has received analogous information to that of His Majesty. Although it has yet to be confirmed, this information suggests that a German action, if initially oriented towards eastern Europe, could be directed either suddenly or in conjunction with Italian ambitions, towards the west, that is to say Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.¹⁰⁸

Significantly, however, there is no evidence that rumours of a German attack in the west were taken seriously by French intelligence during this period. Indeed, the Deuxième Bureau's focus eastern Europe lasted right through to the outbreak of war. Rivet's diary contains no reference whatsoever to a possible German invasion of the lowlands in early 1939. The SIS station chief in Paris, who was in close contact with both Rivet and Gauché, reported correctly that French intelligence was 'entirely calm' and discounted rumours of impending German attacks in the west.¹⁰⁹ There can be no doubt, therefore, that the communications to London were, as Robert Young has perceptively judged, 'a carefully orchestrated scare tactic' intended to open British eyes to the need for closer military relations between Britain and France.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ For a sampling of these warnings, see PRO, FO 371, 21785, C 12144/1169/18, Phipps to London, 12 Oct. 1938; FO 371, 22922, C 345/281/17, Phipps to London, 9 Jan. 1939; FO 371 C 800, Foreign Office memo, 16 Jan. 1939, and a series of translated *comptes-rendus* in AIR 9/93b. See also M. Alexander, 'Les Réactions à la menace stratégique allemande en Europe occidentale: La Grande Bretagne, la Belgique et le "cas Holland"', décembre 1938–février 1939', *Cahiers d'Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (Brussels, 1982), 5–38 and du Réau, *Daladier*, 340–1.

¹⁰⁷ *DBFP*, 3rd series, iv, no. 94, Phipps to London, 29 Jan. 1939.

¹⁰⁸ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Rochat, vol. 18, Draft Communication to the British Embassy, 30 Jan. 1939.

¹⁰⁹ *Carnets Rivet*, ii, entries for Jan. and Feb. 1939 and Andrew, *Secret Service*, 584.

¹¹⁰ Young, *In Command of France*, 222–3. There is considerable evidence that the British

Despite the fact that the SIS remained highly sceptical,¹¹¹ the tactic succeeded brilliantly. French information concerning German ground and air offensives in the west corresponded with the disinformation emanating from the Abwehr and was received with great alarm by civilian decision makers in London.¹¹² Lord Halifax became convinced that war with Germany was imminent. He advised the foreign policy sub-committee of the cabinet that Britain needed to revise its continental policy to prevent Germany from overrunning Holland and Belgium and establishing air bases within easy striking distance of England. The only way this could be accomplished was to enter into the close military relationship with France that British policy had steadfastly refused to consider since 1919. The cabinet approved this decision, and on 29 January Britain proposed detailed staff conversations and joint military planning based on the hypothesis of war between an Anglo-French coalition and the Axis.¹¹³ France thus obtained the continental military commitment from Britain it had sought since 1919.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of this development for French policy. Its importance is perhaps illustrated in two of Daladier's discussions of the strategic situation. Before the Senate defence commission in mid-January the Premier had stressed the importance of the empire to French security but was very circumspect concerning France's ties with the states in eastern Europe.¹¹⁴ In mid-February, after the arrival of the British proposal, Daladier sketched a very different picture of the strategic situation in a meeting with the combined army, air, and naval commissions of the Senate. He argued that if Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia could be induced to make common cause against Germany, and if these states could receive the material support

War Office (also anxious for a policy change) collaborated in this project. See Jackson, 'Intelligence and the End of Appeasement', 246 and esp. Imlay, 'How to Win a War', 154-5.

¹¹¹ SIS chief Stuart Menzies discounted rumours of a German offensive in the west during a conference with SR officials in London on 31 Jan. 1939: SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 250, 'Compte-rendu de mission à Londres', 2 Feb. 1939.

¹¹² The following paragraph is from Watt, *How War Came*, 100-7; Andrew, *Secret Service*, 580-5; and Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, 654-6.

¹¹³ DDF, 2ème série, xiii, no. 454, 'Aide-mémoire du gouvernement britannique', 29 Jan. 1939. For the analysis of the Political Directorate, see *ibid.*, no. 460, 30 Jan. See also the informative discussion in Alexander and Philpott, 'Entente Cordiale', 70-2.

¹¹⁴ SHAT, 7N 2524-1, 'Le Problème militaire français', draft of an exposé given by Daladier, 13 Jan. 1939.

of the Soviet Union, 'we would have no need to fear the shadow of war in Europe.'¹¹⁵

The slow evolution of the Franco-British military alliance accelerated dramatically after Germany occupied the Czech principalities of Bohemia and Moravia on 15 March. This flagrant violation of the Munich Agreement, an agreement brokered by Neville Chamberlain, provoked both anger and disillusionment in London. Amid rumours of an impending move against Poland, the Chamberlain government decided to guarantee this state's independence. The British guarantee to Poland was another major departure from British inter-war policy. Having for almost twenty years avoided any commitments in eastern Europe, having, moreover, attempted to convince a succession of French governments to distance France from the states in this region, Britain had committed to go to war in defence of the most truculent and least cooperative of these states. This volte-face in British policy provided the Daladier government with an opportunity to press forward with plans to build a *barrière de l'est* capable of withstanding Germany's drive to the east. On 31 March General Gamelin's staff produced an overview which essentially mapped out the course of French strategic policy through to the outbreak of war. The two fundamental issues addressed by this overview were the importance of the natural resources of eastern Europe to German and Italian military potential and the important contribution the populations of this region could make to an allied coalition.¹¹⁶ From the beginning of April to the outbreak of war the French government assumed the initiative in insisting on a guarantee for Romania and pressing both the British and the Soviets to negotiate a tripartite military alliance.

V

Although the British commitment to oppose further Nazi aggression in eastern Europe was a central factor in the vigour with which French policy sought to reconstruct a counterweight to German aggression in the east, the beginnings of a national recovery in France in 1938–9 also influenced this undeniably dramatic shift in French policy.

¹¹⁵ AS, Commission de l'Air, Carton S18, Daladier audition before the three commissions of national defence, 9 Feb. 1939.

¹¹⁶ SHAT, 7N 3434–3, 'Étude des données et du problème stratégique d'ensemble', 31 Mar. 1939.

Clear improvements in the French economy during late 1938 and 1939 were a crucial factor in improved French confidence. Stimulated by a return of investor confidence which, in turn, rested on the government's implementation of resolutely liberal economic policies under new finance minister Paul Reynaud, national production increased dramatically. Figures for production in such key industries as coal-mining, chemicals, construction, steel, and textiles rose by 20 per cent during the first quarter of 1939. The index of industrial production, which had fallen to 76 (1929 = 100) in October 1938, had risen to 90 by May 1939. The impact of this industrial recovery on French self-perception was immense. It is evident in Daladier's proclamation the following June that '[our] confidence finds its most solid base in the steady increase of our production'.¹¹⁷

The economic growth was due mainly to a much brighter financial situation. The majority of the capital which had fled France during the era of the Popular Front had returned by the spring of 1939. The resolve demonstrated by the Daladier government in breaking the strikes at Renault in November of 1938 had impressed French capitalists. Renewed confidence in the French economy prompted a fairly massive return of gold. Between November of 1938 and August of 1939 more than 26 billion francs worth of French foreign investment returned to swell the coffers of the Bank of France. In late March 1939 Daladier received a report from Reynaud which assured that '[t]he force of France increases each day, not only in the military domain but also in the economic and financial domain'. Gold reserves, Reynaud exulted, had increased sixfold since the beginning of November with corresponding increases in national production.¹¹⁸ In addition to providing an obvious stimulus to the whole economy, the return of French gold provided the government with a vital source of capital with which to finance its ever-expanding rearmament effort. It also boded well for the long war which French leaders anticipated. Indeed when hostilities commenced the following September the finance ministry had amassed an impressive war-chest. In fact French gold reserves in August of 1939 were more than double those available in July of 1914.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Cited in Imlay, 'How to Win a War', 119. On the economic recovery, see M. Margairaz, *L'État, les finances et l'économie: Histoire d'une conversion*, i (Paris, 1991), 473–85.

¹¹⁸ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr. 4, sdr. b, Reynaud to Daladier, 24 Mar. 1939.

¹¹⁹ Sauvy, *Histoire économique de la France*, ii. 338–9; R. Frank, 'Réarmement français, finances publiques et conjoncture internationale, 1935–1939', *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire Moderne*, 9: 1 (Jan. 1981), 7–18. See also Reynaud, *La France a sauvé l'Europe*, i. 529–35.

Equally important was the slow but steady progress of rearmament. The agonizing delays in the production of weapons and material which had hamstrung efforts to rearm in 1937 and in 1938 had begun to disappear in early 1939. Robert Jacomet, secretary general at the ministry of defence, provided the government with regular updates on the progress of the armaments industry and by the late spring it was clear that rearmament had taken off. On 24 May the army high command was informed that production of light and heavy tanks, armoured troop carriers, anti-tank guns, and mortars had all doubled and in some case tripled from the levels of the previous year.¹²⁰ In May, monthly aircraft production had risen to 224 aircraft per month. By the middle of this month, in fact, French factories had produced 636 military aircraft, over 100 more than in all of 1938.¹²¹ La Chambre predicted that France would be producing 350 planes per month by the end of the year. This figure was actually surpassed in September as French factories turned out 443 combat aircraft. Moreover, by September the French air force had begun receiving deliveries of a first instalment of 550 Curtiss fighters that had been purchased from the United States. The Americans had also indicated a willingness to sell France up to 1,500 planes per year.¹²² In June La Chambre was able to assure the Chamber sub-commission on national defence that all first-line fighters would be modern by the end of August.¹²³ So bright were the prospects for the armaments situation that in June the army and air force chiefs of staff began planning future arms shipments to France's allies in eastern Europe.¹²⁴ This was something France's military leadership had steadfastly refused to contemplate for the past three years. When war broke out in September, although its leaders

¹²⁰ SHAT, 1N 44-7, 'Compte-rendu de la réunion des Chefs d'État-Major du 24 mai 1939'.

¹²¹ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12932-1, 'Production d'avions de guerre', and SHAT, 5N 583-9, 'Information du Président: Production aéronautique', 1939.

¹²² SHAA, 3D 493, 'Chambre des Députés, Sous-Commission de Défense Nationale', 11 June 1939. The Sept. production figures are those provided to Daladier by his military cabinet and are in SHAT, 5N 583-9, 'Information du Président: Production aéronautique', 9 Nov. 1939. On purchases of American aircraft, which were threatened by President Roosevelt's failure to repeal the US arms embargo, see Haight, *American Aid to France*, 24-47, 69-102 and W. Keylor, 'France and the Illusion of American Support 1919-1940', in J. Blatt (ed.), *The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments* (London, 1997), 235-44.

¹²³ SHAA, 3D 493, 'Chambre des Députés: Sous-Commission de Défense Nationale', 11 June 1939.

¹²⁴ SHAT, 2N 225-2, 'Procès-verbal de la réunion des Chefs d'État-Major Généraux du vendredi 16 Juin 1939'.

did not know it, France was out-producing Germany in both tanks and fighter aircraft.¹²⁵

To the improvements in the economic situation and the progress made in rearmament must be added a palpable resurgence in French national resolve during the first six months of 1939 which the Daladier government played a key role in stimulating. The Premier was able to exploit widely expressed desire among the centre and right in France during the period immediately following the trauma of the Munich crisis for a 'Government of National Unity'. Assuming the role of the strong leader he set about restoring the authority of the state and rebuilding morale. The 40-hour week was to serve as the test case for this policy. Daladier had begun his attack on this legislation with a radio broadcast of 21 August 1938 where he had insisted on the necessity of 'putting France back to work' and appealed to Frenchmen to place national security before class interest. Powers of decree were then used to implement a series of reforms inspired by Reynaud, the most notorious of which was the drastic revision of the 40-hour legislation in November. The response of the trade unions was a call for a general strike. The government's heavy-handed but generally popular and successful response to this strike was an important step in the crafting of a 'strong man' image for the Premier.¹²⁶

The media was another important tool employed by the government in its campaign to rebuild national morale. Daladier's frequent radio broadcasts which continually hammered home the importance of national unity and the progress of the 'national recovery which is underway in France'.¹²⁷ Throughout the last six months of peace the army in general and Gamelin in particular were featured constantly in newsreels, documentaries, and news broadcasts as the government cooperated with alacrity in the making of a series of documentaries that put forward the image of a strong France. The military parade on Bastille Day 1939 took place in such an atmosphere of pomp and enthusiastic nationalism as had not been seen in France since the end of the last war.¹²⁸ The most successful documentaries were *Le Voyage de*

¹²⁵ Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 281–319; Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 223; and R. Jacomet, *L'Armement de la France* (Paris, 1945), 133–53.

¹²⁶ Excellent discussions of these issues are in Berstein, *Crise du radicalisme*, 542–65; Crémieux-Brilhac, *La Guerre: Oui ou non?*, 135–47 and J.-P. Azéma, *From Munich to the Liberation*, 10–17.

¹²⁷ Daladier broadcast of 29 Mar. 1939 cited from du Réau, *Daladier*, 312. See also A.-J. Tudesq, 'L'Utilisation gouvernementale de la radio', in *Édouard Daladier, chef du gouvernement*, 255–64.

¹²⁸ See the excellent discussion of these issues in Girardet, *La Société militaire*, 238–50.

M. Daladier en Corse, Tunis, et Algérie and especially *Somme-nous défendus?* (which was named best French documentary film of 1939).¹²⁹ In July of 1939 a Commissariat de l'Information was established under the direction of novelist and former diplomat Jean Giraudoux to present France as the guardian of liberty and reason and to juxtapose conditions in France with society in the Fascist states.¹³⁰

The theme of French imperial strength was also revived and exploited. Daladier's much publicized tour of Corsica and Tunisia, an act of defiance aimed directly at Italy, made for excellent newsreel footage and generated much enthusiasm for both the empire and for a policy of firmness.¹³¹ In particular, the demographic and natural resources of the empire were promoted as a decisive counter-weight to Germany's larger population and industrial base. As Charles-Robert Ageron has shown, public and parliamentary opinion rallied behind defence of the empire in late 1938 and early 1939 with greater enthusiasm than at any point during the inter-war period. Opposition to any cession of France's imperial possessions was one of the very few issues on which there was unanimous agreement within the Chamber and the Senate in 1939.¹³² The government seized on the notion of '*La plus grande France*' and '*La France de cent millions*' as a means of boosting national confidence. Minister of the colonies Georges Mandel estimated extravagantly that the empire could provide a war effort with two million soldiers and 500,000 workers. Even more fantastic was General Bühner's subsequent estimate that six million soldiers could be raised in Africa if necessary.¹³³

These efforts to prepare the nation psychologically for the prospect of war achieved undeniable successes. Daladier's personal popularity

¹²⁹ J. P. Jeancolas, *15 ans d'années trente: Le cinéma des français 1929-1944* (Paris, 1983), 240-4; M. Bentelli, D. Jay, and J. P. Jeancolas, 'Le Cinéma français: Thèmes et public', in *La France et les Français en 1938-1939*, 37 and C. Rearick, *The French in Love and War: Popular Culture in the Era of the Two World Wars* (New Haven, 1997), 234-5. Rearick is more sceptical that film documentaries were successful in engendering patriotism.

¹³⁰ After 22 Aug. the Soviet Union could be added to the list of totalitarian states whose institutions posed a menace to the freedom and democracy of the Western states. A number of the propaganda broadcasts from 1939 to 1940 have been published. See J. Giraudoux, '“Messages du Continental” Allocations radio-diffusées, 1939-1940', *Cahiers de Jean Giraudoux*, 16 (Paris, 1987). See also R. Young, 'A Douce and Dextrous Persuasion: French Propaganda and Franco-American Relations', in Boyce (ed.), *French Foreign and Defence Policy*, 195-214.

¹³¹ On this question, see above all C.-R. Ageron, 'La Perception de la puissance française: Le mythe impérial', in Girault and Frank (eds.), *La Puissance en Europe*, 227-44.

¹³² C.-R. Ageron, 'Les Colonies devant l'opinion publique française (1919-1939)', *Cahiers de l'Institut de la presse et de l'opinion*, 1 (1978), 31-9.

¹³³ Girardet, *L'Idée coloniale en France*, 186-9; Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, *France Overseas*, 250; and Ageron, 'Mythe impérial', 232.

increased dramatically. Historians looking backward through the prism of 1940 have often lost sight of the fact that Daladier was certainly the most popular national leader in France since Clemenceau.¹³⁴ The explosion in the membership of the Radical Party during the final months of peace is further testimony to the extent of public support for the Daladier government and its policies. In some regions membership increased by 1,000 per cent.¹³⁵ The revision of the 40-hour week, the repression of the general strike, and the liberal economic policies of Paul Reynaud secured the support of the majority of the French *patronat* for the government's programme of rearmament and national *redressement*. The economic recovery of 1939 was based on an alliance between business and government.¹³⁶ A sharp decline in pacifism was yet another indication of the revival of national confidence. The pervasive sense of shame which followed close on the heels of the Munich reprieve prompted a change in the attitudes of the governing bodies of the two most powerful veterans organizations, the Union Fédérale and the Union Nationale des Combattants.¹³⁷ For the first time since the end of the war, the annual commemoration of 11 November 1938 was as much a celebration of victory as a ceremony of remembrance. The publications of both veterans groups in late 1938 called for strong leadership, emphasized the need for national unity, and the importance of 'preserving the victorious spirit of 1918'.¹³⁸ This evolution in the attitudes of veterans organizations was accompanied by an erosion of pacifist sentiment within the *paysan* class, hitherto the stronghold of pacifism in France, during the course of 1939. These trends provided the government with crucial support for its more resolute policy.¹³⁹

This support is illustrated by the results of a series of public opinion polls conducted in France during the final eleven months of peace. *Sondages* conducted by the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique, and followed carefully by Daladier's civilian staff, testify to an increase in public support for resistance to future aggression. In October 1938

¹³⁴ Zay, *Camels secrets*, 67. For excellent analyses of Daladier's 'personification' of French recovery, see Crémieux-Brilhac, *La Guerre: Oui ou non?*, 145–7; Berstein, *Crise du radicalisme*, 563–78; du Réau, *Daladier*, 312–22; and Young, *France and the Origins*, 126–9.

¹³⁵ S. Berstein, 'Le Parti radical-socialiste, arbitre du jeu politique français', in *La France et les français, 1938–1939*, 299.

¹³⁶ Vinen, *The Politics of French Business*, 73–94; P. Fridenson, 'Le Patronat français', in *La France et les français en 1938–1939*, 139–58; and Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 292–5.

¹³⁷ Prost, *Les Anciens Combattants*, iii, 296–304.

¹³⁸ J. Bourdin, 'Les Anciens Combattants et la célébration du 11 novembre 1938', in *La France et les français en 1938–1939*, 95–114.

¹³⁹ I. Boussard, 'Le Pacifisme paysan', in *La France et les français en 1938–1939*, 59–75.

57 per cent of French people polled approved of the Munich Agreement. In February 1939 over 70 per cent supported a policy of firmness to future German or Italian demands. In the aftermath of the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, this figure rose to 77 per cent. The same poll revealed that more than 47 per cent of French people believed that war was inevitable in 1939. Most significantly of all, only 17 per cent of those polled were opposed to war in the event of a German seizure of Danzig.¹⁴⁰ Although it is difficult to be precise in any study of public opinion, it is clear that the mood in France had changed significantly since the previous summer. Historians too often forget that the decision for war the following September was approved overwhelmingly by both the Chamber and the Senate. Only Gaston Bergery in the Chamber and Pierre Laval in the Senate tried to oppose the declaration of war.¹⁴¹

It would be a mistake to overestimate the importance of the *redressement nationale* of 1938–9. The economic upswing and the changes in public attitudes were late in arriving and behind the façade of national resolve were deep structural flaws that would not go away. The myth of empire, for example, was in large part bravado employed to mask a profound sense of inferiority in relation to Germany. And the improved financial situation could not alleviate the tremendous strains that rearmament placed on the national treasury. Reynaud warned repeatedly that the ‘ruinous level of spending’ might compromise the economic turnaround and that such expenditure could not go on indefinitely. Finally, the recovery had failed to repair the deep ideological fissures that had beset French political life throughout the pre-war decade. Daladier’s efforts to build morale and unity under his leadership were flawed by his government’s confrontational social and economic policies. The French labour movement was alienated by the unilateral revision of the 40-hour week and by the strike-breaking that followed. There would be no reconstruction of the *Union Sacrée* of 1914.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ C. Peyrefitte, ‘Les Premiers Sondages d’opinion’, in *Édouard Daladier, chef du gouvernement*, 265–78. See also C.-R. Ageron, ‘L’Opinion publique française pendant les crises internationales de septembre 1938 à juillet 1939’, *Cahiers de l’Institut d’histoire de la presse et de l’opinion*, 3 (1974–5), 203–23.

¹⁴¹ Azéma, *From Munich to the Liberation*, 19. See also P. Ory, ‘L’Opinion publique et la “puissance” française vers 1938: Quelques jalons’, in Girault and Frank (eds.), *Puissance en Europe*, 341–8.

¹⁴² Reynaud cited in Imlay, ‘How to Win a War’, 133. See also Margairaz, *L’État*, i. 483. On empire propaganda and reality, see Ageron, ‘Mythe impérial’, and M. Thomas, ‘At the Centre of Things? French Imperial Defense in the Late 1930s’, *FHS* 21: 2 (1998), 356–61.

Yet there is no doubt that there was at least the beginnings of a true national recovery by the spring of 1939. If the better internal situation greatly improved French self-perception, it also created new pressures for the Daladier government. The propaganda effort to restore confidence and build national unity, the rhetoric of a strong and determined France, the tremendous sacrifices which the government had demanded in the name of national defence, and the resulting profound shifts in public opinion combined to create a psychological imperative for decision makers which made further capitulations to dictators unacceptable. Daladier sensed this and warned his cabinet colleagues that '[p]ublic opinion will sweep aside a weak and hesitant government'. What was required, he judged, was a '*politique de virilité*'.¹⁴³

An equally important consideration in seeking to understand the changes in French policy in early 1939 is the recognition among key decision makers that France must act or forever lose its status as a European power. This conviction is apparent in Gamelin's warning to Daladier in late December 1938 that '[t]he question which must be addressed is whether France wishes to renounce its status as a European Great Power and abandon to Germany hegemony of not only central but of eastern Europe'.¹⁴⁴ Daladier agreed. He advised the Chamber army commission that '[i]f we want to ensure that France retains its position among the great states and if we want the ideas for which it stands to endure . . . we must be resolved to make the necessary sacrifices'.¹⁴⁵ After the considerable soul-searching, and only once assured of British support, the Daladier government had chosen the path of resistance.

In the aftermath of Munich, France's policy making élite accepted the risk of war and began the task of building an eastern front capable of withstanding German expansion. Intelligence on German intentions, in particular, played a central role in this turnaround. The steady stream of reports indicating that Germany was intensifying preparations for war provided crucial ammunition for opponents of further appeasement. Significantly, however, the end of appeasement altered the French perspective fundamentally, changing the way intelligence was used. Instead of searching for arguments against war, *les décideurs* began looking for reasons to believe that France could face the prospect

¹⁴³ Zay, *Carnets Secret*, 56.

¹⁴⁴ SHAT, 5N 579-1, Gamelin to Daladier, 19 Dec. 1938.

¹⁴⁵ AAN, Commission de l'Armée, 16ème législature, Daladier audition, 31 Aug. 1938.

of war with Germany. The striking transformation in attitudes towards eastern Europe provides a good illustration of this change in perspective. Intelligence officials and members of the high command who had preached caution and sought to dissuade the government from going to war over Czechoslovakia only a few months earlier were now trumpeting the importance of an eastern front to French grand strategy. In late December Gamelin reminded Daladier that a lack of vital strategic raw materials was 'the critical flaw' in the German war machine and that the fundamental motivation of Germany's 'initial campaign towards the east' was to obtain the natural resources it required to sustain a prolonged war effort. He also judged that Germany was pushing events 'to deny France and England the time necessary to constitute an anti-German front in eastern Europe'.¹⁴⁶ This was a dramatic shift from the position the commander-in-chief designate had assumed the previous September and October.

There was also an appreciable difference in attitudes towards a possible conflict with Germany within both the high command and the ministry of defence. Addressing the three Senate defence commissions in February, Daladier was reassuring:

At the moment I do not believe that France could be attacked successfully by another state acting on its own. . . . If it comes to a duel between France and one other nation, I would have no mortal concerns as to the outcome. We might, in certain areas, be inferior; we certainly would be inferior in certain arms, we would also be clearly superior in others.¹⁴⁷

This was not mere bravado. A few weeks previously, before the British offer of staff talks, Gamelin had assured the Premier that the French frontier remained secure from a German invasion. He also judged that 'we can envisage with calm the possibility of a conflict pitting France and Britain against the totalitarian states of the Rome–Berlin Axis'.¹⁴⁸ By early 1939 France was girding for war.

¹⁴⁶ SHAT, 7N 2522–2, Gamelin to Daladier, 27 Dec. 1938.

¹⁴⁷ AS, Commission de l'Air, no. 518, Daladier audience before the three national defence commissions of the Senate, 9 Feb. 1939.

¹⁴⁸ SHAT, 2N 224–1, Gamelin to Daladier, 7 Jan. 1939.

Girding for War

IN THE spring and summer of 1939 the Daladier government adopted a policy of deterrence. The hope was that Hitler and the Nazi leadership would hesitate to risk war with a solid Franco-British alliance that had abandoned appeasement and given priority to rearmament. Crucially, however, behind hopes for deterrence lay a determination to make war if necessary. Once the decision had been made to stand up to further aggression, the French military began formulating precise plans to defeat an Axis coalition. The war plan which emerged in the spring of 1939 gave priority to securing France's frontier with Germany while at the same time waging economic warfare and forcing Germany and Italy to fight on several fronts. This was consistent with the fundamental principles on which French military planning had been based throughout the 1930s.

The reports and overviews produced by the intelligence services during the spring and summer of 1939 provided consistent reinforcement for this war plan. Intelligence appreciations confirmed the vital assumption that the German army would be incapable of breaking through the French *front continu*, endorsed the conviction that the German economy would not be able to sustain a long war, and played a pivotal role in the rebirth of France's eastern policy. In addition, assessments of the political situation were more positive. During the final months of peace, intelligence reports alluded with increasing frequency to evidence that Hitler faced a crisis in public support for his war policy. This information strengthened the growing conviction that Germany could be deterred by a policy of firmness.¹

The more optimistic 'net assessment' produced by the intelligence services was based not on new information but instead on a more

¹ For a challenging and insightful discussion of perceptions and misperceptions in Britain, Germany, and France on the eve of war (based primarily on British and German sources) that complements in many ways the analysis offered in this chapter, see Richard Overy's 'Strategic Intelligence and the Outbreak of the Second World War'.

positive interpretation of the very intelligence available the previous September. To understand the evolution in perceptions of the German threat it is necessary to remember that intelligence assessments are not formulated in a vacuum. Accordingly, the development of the French 'net assessment' during this period cannot be fully understood without taking into account the effects of the national recovery discussed in the previous chapter. A former director of France's post-war secret service has remarked recently that 'even an institution as insular as a secret service cannot avoid being influenced by the prevailing general spirit'.² This was as true in 1939 as it is today. In the spring and summer of 1939 intelligence analysts and decision makers were able to look across the Rhine and observe events in Germany with a greater sense of self-confidence than had been the case at any point since the onset of the Great Depression. On another level, the dramatic shift in French diplomacy after Munich must have generated pressure on analysts to produce assessments that reinforced the wisdom of France's new policy of firmness. Self-perception and predetermined policies continued to play a fundamental role in shaping estimates of the strategic situation on the eve of war.

I

The chief difference in assessments of German capabilities was one of emphasis. The limitations to German military effectiveness, the vulnerability of the German economy, and the potential for civil unrest which might threaten the Nazi regime were all considered by French observers in greater detail than ever before. And they were integrated into French plans to defeat Germany.

In May of 1939 the air force *Deuxième Bureau* estimated German air strength at 285 squadrons, 3,420 first-line combat aircraft, and over 4,800 reserves. It also reported that improved prototypes of the Messerschmidt Me 109 and the Junkers Ju 87, both equipped with the powerful new Daimler Benz 601 motor, would begin leaving German factories by the end of the summer.³ The *Deuxième Bureau* had also

² C. Silberzahn with J. Guisnel, *Au coeur du secret. 1500 jours aux commandes de la DGSE, 1989-1993* (Paris, 1995), 268. Robert Jervis has identified this phenomenon as an obstacle to effective assessment: 'What's Wrong with the Intelligence Process?', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence*, 1: 1 (1986), 28-41.

³ SHAA, 2B 61, 'Aviation allemande', 28 May 1939. An assessment prepared for Guy La

received intelligence on the fantastic rearmament programme decreed by Göring the previous November. A 'personality close to the Chancellor' (who cannot be identified) had indicated that 20 billion marks per year would be devoted to rearmament and that the German air force would comprise 18,000 modern aircraft by 1941.⁴ Despite these intimidating figures, however, the assessments of German air power produced in 1939 were more balanced and accurate than those of the previous year.

Significantly, during the Munich crisis air intelligence chief de Vitrolles had been less alarmist about the strength of German air power than his superior Vuillemin. He had judged the Luftwaffe to be seriously deficient in trained personnel. This, he considered, was an inevitable consequence of its phenomenal growth since 1935.⁵ He had also expressed disapproval of an over-reliance on number crunching in assessments of German air power. He deemed it 'much better to consider the number of aircraft and the number of trained air crew'. He judged that only half of the estimated 4,000 aircrew in Germany were properly trained. The remainder had only recently graduated from training academies and were of low value. In a conversation with the British air attaché he 'doubted whether most of them would show up very well in a war'.⁶ These views were obscured during the Czech crisis amid concerns over the pathetic state of the French air force.

In the wake of the Munich Agreement, however, de Vitrolles elaborated on the deficiencies of the Luftwaffe in a lengthy analysis presented to a gathering of officials from both the Conseil Supérieur de l'Air and the Conseil Supérieur de Guerre. Stressing the importance of qualitative factors, the chief of air intelligence outlined a very uncomplimentary picture of Luftwaffe personnel at every level. The high command was both inexperienced and heavily politicized, divisional staffs were 'clearly inferior' in relation to their French counterparts, officers were 'in general either too young, having just graduated from

Chambre at the same juncture added general staff aircraft and trainers for a total of 293 squadrons and 4,561 first-line aircraft: Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12491, 'Tableau comparatif de la situation des armées de l'air à la date du 1 mai 1939'.

⁴ SHAT, 7N 2697, 'Note sur la réorganisation et le développement de l'armée de l'air allemande: source—EMAA Deuxième Bureau', 10 Mar. 1939. See also 7N 2525, 'Liaison hebdomadaire', 26 Apr. 1939.

⁵ PRO, FO 371, 21710, C 8787/1425/18, Colyer report of an interview with de Vitrolles, 25 Aug. 1938.

⁶ PRO, FO 371, 21710, C 10674/1425/18, Account of an interview between Colyer and de Vitrolles, 23 Sept. 1938.

training academies or too old, being veterans of the Great War'. The level of training of pilots and groundcrew was 'very uneven'. These deficiencies meant that 'many units lack the cohesion necessary for effective operations'. He concluded that, while morale was 'truly remarkable', the Luftwaffe was still going through a *crise de croissance*. The huge quantitative advantage it possessed would be undermined in the event of war by a lack of training and a lack of experience at every level.

De Vitrolles went further to predict that Germany would be unable to maintain its current quantitative superiority. Military aircraft were outmoded an average of three years after leaving the factory. Germany would be unable to maintain sufficient aircraft production to refurbish its fleet if its economic difficulties remained unresolved. He submitted that '[f]or the past two months economic life in this country has been completely regimented' and that 'everything has been subordinated to the demands of national defence'. He then argued that 'the moment when the majority of the Nation is producing only armaments this economic system is no longer viable. Germany needs either abundant raw materials or large reserves of foreign currency to make such an economic policy work. It has neither.' Germany, he concluded, was facing an agonizing decision. To obtain the raw materials it required for rearmament, it must expand. But with expansion came the risk of war with the Western powers—a war which the Reich lacked the natural resources to sustain.⁷

This exposé by de Vitrolles marked the first time an air intelligence assessment had explored comprehensively the implications of labour and raw material shortages on the productive capacity of the German aircraft industry. No longer did analysts merely assume that Göring's position in the Nazi hierarchy would assure the aviation industry of unlimited resources. This approach was given further impetus when intelligence sources had reported that production levels in December were way down from what they had been in September and October. In late December the Deuxième Bureau estimated monthly German aircraft production to be 400 aircraft per month, only 300 of which were combat aircraft. This was actually a slight underestimation. The sharp decline in production was attributed to the strains which the intense activity of September and October had placed on stocks of

⁷ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12941, 'Conférence sur l'armée de l'air allemande', no date but post-Munich.

raw materials.⁸ The true explanation was that German production had not declined at all in late 1939 but the accuracy of intelligence estimates had recovered from the fright of the previous summer.⁹

In early January de Vitrolles informed the British air attaché in Paris that German aircraft production was 'fluctuating badly' and that the bulk of German planes were rapidly becoming obsolescent.¹⁰ This conclusion, which was utterly rejected in London, was central to a widely circulated study of the Munich crisis prepared for the air minister by the Deuxième Bureau in March. This document sounded an unmistakably positive note relative to the dismal appreciations of the summer of 1938. It noted that many of the squadrons which had been mobilized in the first-line during the previous September consisted of outdated aircraft and concluded that estimates of modern aircraft had been greatly exaggerated. Yet, at the same time, air intelligence refused to consider the possibility that it had been deceived into overestimating German aircraft production during the Sudetenland crisis. The conviction remained that Germany possessed the plant capacity to manufacture between 1,200 and 1,600 aircraft per month. This impression was qualified, however, by the realization that scarcities in labour and raw materials would limit levels of production.¹¹

The significantly brighter picture of the air balance painted by the Deuxième Bureau found a receptive audience with civilian leaders who had determined to adopt a policy of firmness towards Germany. Both the air minister and the Premier referred to weaknesses in German air power before the parliamentary commissions during the first half of 1939. La Chambre advised the Senate air commission that Germany's numerical superiority was deceptive and that 'serious gaps persisted in the training and experience of personnel'.¹² Daladier informed the Senate defence commission that Germany and Italy were desperately short of trained pilots and that this shortage would limit the effectiveness of the Luftwaffe in the event of a conflict.¹³ In

⁸ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12941, 'Tableau comparatif de la situation des armées de l'air à la date du 1 janvier'.

⁹ For German production figures, see Wagenführ, *Die deutsche Industrie im Kriege*, 74.

¹⁰ PRO, AIR, 9/93, Account of a conversation between de Vitrolles and Colyer, 13 Jan. 1939.

¹¹ SHAA, 2B 60, 'Tension Septembre', undated but after the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and before the seizure of Albania. On British views, see Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 71 and Overy, 'Strategic Intelligence', 465–8.

¹² AS, Commission de l'Air, Carton S17, La Chambre note read to the commission, 28 Apr. 1939.

¹³ SHAT, 7N 2524-1, Draft of Daladier's exposé before the commission in early Jan.

June he predicted to Bonnet that Germany would have trouble sustaining its aviation industry during wartime once an Allied blockade had been imposed.¹⁴ There was also reason for optimism regarding the state of the French air force. There were high hopes for the new Dewoitine 520 fighter which was considered (with justification) to be equal or superior to any fighter in the world. In addition, the first fighters ordered in the United States were due to arrive at the end of June.¹⁵

II

The entire long-war strategy was based on the assumption that the French army could halt an initial German offensive on the eastern and northern frontiers. And the consensus within the army general staff was that the Wehrmacht was incapable of quickly smashing its way into France. This conviction was not born of ignorance. The general staff possessed a very detailed knowledge of the new principles of warfare which were in the ascendant in Germany and which would prove so successful on the battlefields of northern France in May and June of 1940. It was instead a product of the unquestioned faith which the army high command placed in the French way of warfare—the superiority of defensive positions, the importance of the methodical battle, and the potency of concentrated firepower.

In early 1938 the general staff had been provided with a detailed analysis of General Guderian's treatise on mobile warfare *Achtung Panzer!* in conjunction with intelligence on the Wehrmacht manoeuvres of September 1937. The SAE considered that the principles of speed and mobility stressed by Guderian appeared to have won over much of the German high command.¹⁶ Armour was employed en masse, often without infantry or artillery support but always with close air support, in an attempt to breakthrough enemy artillery fire and destroy command and communications centres in the rear. Artillery concentration was sacrificed deliberately in order to obtain space to manoeuvre. The analysis of the SAE left no doubt, moreover, that the

¹⁴ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 32, dr. 3, Daladier to Bonnet, 18 June 1939.

¹⁵ AS, Commission de l'Air, 'Séances du 7 mai 1936 au 12 octobre 1939', 16 Mar. 1939 and AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 33, dr. 1, 'Note au sujet de l'aviation de chasse', no date. On the Dewoitine 520, see Vivier, 'L'Armée de l'air et la révolution technique', 38–9.

¹⁶ SHAT, 7N 2506, 'Études Allemagne', May–June 1938 and Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 288–9.

entire Luftwaffe would be employed to support the ground forces during major operations.

On the eve of war the Section Allemande produced a series of studies of German doctrine which reinforced the impression that the German army was committed to a war of mobility.¹⁷ Armour would be deployed in large formations of at least divisional strength but possibly even in entire corps. Operations would be supported by the Ju 87 'Stuka' dive-bomber, which was singled out for its uncommon accuracy as a bomber, as well as the Me 109 fighter and the He 111 and Do 17 medium bombers. The Deuxième Bureau had collected a mass of information on the difficult forced marches which were part of German infantry training, the adoption of road trailers for heavy armoured vehicles, the renovation of the military fuel supply system, and the major new motorways near the eastern and western frontiers which could facilitate troop concentrations.¹⁸ All of these measures were interpreted as evidence of the emphasis on speed and surprise in German operational doctrine.

It is clear from the work of recent historians that the French general staff was well-informed about the evolution of what the Deuxième Bureau described as 'the Guderian notion of war'. Indeed the French army possessed a better understanding of German operational doctrine than did the war office in Britain.¹⁹ It is also clear that the French general staff remained confident that the French army could set up a field of fire in Belgium and along the Franco-German frontier which would blunt the advance of large German armoured formations. Intelligence on German doctrinal innovations was interpreted within the immutable context of French military thinking. To understand this context, it is essential to remember that these intelligence officers, as members of the army general staff in Paris, were successful members of what has been perhaps best described as 'a humming pedagogic hive'.²⁰ They worked in an atmosphere of 'stiffing military conformity' where 'orthodoxy was rewarded all around' and a willingness to question the accepted wisdom was actively

¹⁷ SHAT, 7N 2680-2, *BdR*, 'L'Armée allemande au 1ère janvier 1939, Jan.-Feb. 1939; 7N 2677, 'Note sur l'arme blindée', 15 Mar. 1939.

¹⁸ Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 289.

¹⁹ Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 57-65; Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 323-6; and Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany'. On the shortcomings of British assessment of German doctrine, see T. H. Place, 'British Perceptions of the Tactics of the German Army, 1938-1940', *IAS* 9 (1994), 494-519.

²⁰ Cited from Bloch, *Strange Defeat*, 114-15.

discouraged.²¹ General staff officers may therefore have been incapable of accepting the possibility that German speed and mobility might overcome French firepower. The lessons taken from the Spanish Civil War are a case in point. Whenever artillery, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft weapons proved effective these successes were consistently interpreted as confirmation of the inherent superiority of defensive fire. When armoured formations or aircraft achieved decisive success in frontal assaults without the benefit of infantry support, this was attributed to inadequate defensive preparations or insufficient firepower. These were conditions which analysts assumed would not prevail in a Franco-German war. A lengthy study on the war in Spain prepared in March of 1938 reported 'nothing which might cause us to renounce the fundamental principles upon which our doctrine is based'.²² Similarly, Didelet judged that '[t]he tactical principles of speed, mobility, and decentralization which are currently taught in the *Kriegsakademie* are not suitable for combat against armies with modern equipment and powerful armaments'.²³ The SAE concurred. German light and medium tanks were not considered heavy enough to endure concentrated anti-tank fire. The conclusion was that a well-trained and equipped army could slow up the advance of these armoured divisions and then throw them into disarray by counter-attacking with both armour and infantry at the right moment.²⁴

This was the consensus within the high command. The CSG concluded that the French army could be confident of turning back an *attaque brusquée* provided it established the necessary 'continuous fire'.²⁵ Gamelin considered a German breakthrough 'possible only if we are caught off guard'.²⁶ Daladier was equally confident on this score and accepted without reservation the views of the general staff concerning German military doctrine. He explained to the Chamber army

²¹ Quotations from A. Beaufre, 1940: *The Fall of France* (London, 1967), 59. See also Dutailly, *Les Problèmes*, 253–65.

²² SHAT, 7N 2506, 'Études: Enseignements de la guerre d'Espagne', Mar. 1938 and 7N 2680–2, 'L'Armée allemande au 1^{er} janvier 1939', Jan.–Feb. 1939. See also M. Astorika, 'L'Aviation et la guerre d'Espagne: La cinquième arme face aux exigences de la guerre moderne', in Hildebrand and Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich*, 325–48 and Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 302–5.

²³ SHAT, 7N 2602–2, 'Rapport sur la situation générale', 11 Apr. 1939. See also 7N 2676, 'Note sur la *Kriegsakademie*', 5 Mar. 1939.

²⁴ SHAT, 7N 2677, 'Note sur l'arme blindée', 15 Mar. 1939.

²⁵ SHAT, Fonds Gamelin, 1N 224–8, dr. 3, 'Note sur la conduite de la bataille dans l'hypothèse d'une défensive initiale', 15 July 1937.

²⁶ SHAT, 1N 38–3, 'Procès-verbal de la séance d'études du 13 mars 1939'.

commission that 'German military doctrine is designed for large-scale operations against armies relatively poorly equipped with artillery. Artillery will play a much more considerable role in the next war than it did in the last war.'²⁷ He also discounted the possibility that German armour could break through prepared defences:

In Germany the idea is that divisions of tanks will open up a breach in the enemies defences which will clear the way for an invasion. I do not believe in this idea. . . . I believe, and the experience of the war in Spain fortifies this point of view, that to hurl such machines at even lightly fortified zones is to invite catastrophe.²⁸

In early 1939 he assured the Senate army commission that German and Italian tanks in Spain had been unable to withstand artillery and anti-tank fire and concluded that '[t]hanks to the fortifications which have been constructed, France is able to resist any attack and to safeguard the integrity of its territory'.²⁹

From the officers of the Section Allemande all the way up to the Premier, French officials were inclined to view with scepticism a doctrine of war which was in complete opposition to the principles laid down in French military manuals. In the atmosphere of conformity which predominated within the general staff it is hardly surprising that French officers refused to consider that the Wehrmacht could impose a war of mobility on the French army in the west.³⁰ On another level, belief in the superiority of the French way of warfare was an important source of hope in the face of German demographic and industrial superiority. It was linked to the conviction that, while the Germans might have more soldiers, tanks, and aeroplanes, the native intelligence of the average Frenchman was clearly superior to that of the average German. Daladier declared that '[w]e will make war with the best military chiefs in the world', and that 'the superiority of command rests clearly on the side of France'.³¹ But there was no alternative to the methodical battle in French war planning. The possibility that these men might be wrong

²⁷ AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème Législature, Carton 15, Daladier audition, 17 Dec. 1936.

²⁸ AAN, Commission de l'armée, 16ème Législature, Carton 15, Daladier audition, 24 Feb. 1937.

²⁹ SHAT, 7N 2524-1, 'Le Problème militaire français', draft of an exposé given to the Senate army commission, 13 Jan. 1939 and AS Commission de l'air, S18, Daladier before a gathering of the army, air, and naval commissions of the Senate, 9 Feb. 1939.

³⁰ Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 300.

³¹ AS, Commission de l'air, S18, Daladier audition before a gathering of the army, naval, and air commissions of the Senate, 9 Feb. 1939.

was too terrible to contemplate. The interpretation of German war doctrine by French military observers can only be understood when viewed in this context.

The belief that the German army would break itself in an attempt to overrun France received powerful reinforcement from the more critical assessment of the German army with which army intelligence provided decision makers. There was no attempt to gloss over the fact that Germany was potentially much more powerful than had been the case in 1938. A study of German military power produced in January 1939 stressed that the German army had increased in size from forty to fifty-four regular strength divisions during 1938. The number of armoured divisions had increased from three to six, light mechanized and motorized from four to seven and infantry divisions from thirty-six to forty-one. The total number of effectives in the active army was reckoned to be over 900,000.³² The demographic imbalance had also worsened. Moreover, the military booty obtained with the occupation of the Czech principalities was extensive: several hundred tanks and aircraft, nearly two thousand anti-tank guns, over one million small arms, and, equally important, the Skoda munitions factories.³³ And with the absorption of the Austrian, Sudeten, and Czech populations, the SAE reckoned the population of 'Greater Germany' to be close to 85 million. It estimated that 3 million Germans would reach their twentieth year between 1940 and 1944 as compared to 1.3 million Frenchmen.³⁴ Gauché informed the CSG that Germany could field an army of nearly 2.5 million effectives in 120 to 130 divisions and 3,000 medium and light tanks within 72 hours of the decree of mobilization.³⁵ In terms of size, he concluded, the Wehrmacht was superior to the German Imperial Army of 1914. For the first time since the early 1930s the Deuxième Bureau was able to provide the general staff with both a precise breakdown of the size and composition of the regular German army and an accurate estimation of the size of the Germany field army. In fact, while it overestimated the number of reservist divisions, the Deuxième Bureau actually underestimated the total number of

³² SHAT, 7N 2680-2, 'L'Armée allemande au 1ère janvier 1939'; 7N 2676, 'Les Forces armées en Allemagne', 1 Jan. 1939.

³³ See the note prepared by this section hours after the German occupation of Prague in SHAT, 7N 2524-1, 'Note sur la situation créée par la disparition de la Tchécoslovaquie', 16 Mar. 1939.

³⁴ SHAT, 7N 2516, 'Bulletin de Renseignements no. 12', 9 June 1939.

³⁵ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur l'armée allemande', and attached 'Possibilités de l'Allemagne en cas de conflit', 27 Mar. 1939.

effectives mobilized in September 1939. At the outbreak of war the German army after mobilization comprised forty-two infantry, six armoured, four light mechanized, and one cavalry division. The total strength of this army was actually 2,758,000 effectives in 103 divisions.³⁶

Intelligence reports were also more accurate in assessing the combat worthiness of this force. In terms of quality the Deuxième Bureau considered the German army of 1939 to be vastly inferior to its Imperial predecessor. The *bulletin de renseignements* of early 1939 judged the German army more critically lacking in officers and non-commissioned officers than ever. A more critical approach was taken to evaluating the effectiveness of reservist units. The massive convocation of reservists during the Munich crisis had provided the Deuxième Bureau with an opportunity to evaluate the mobilization process in Germany and the level of training German reservists had received. It concluded that 'previous studies may have overestimated the quality and level of equipment of reservist formations', and that 'the lack of trained reservists is in effect one of the greatest weaknesses in the German army at present'.³⁷ Didelet characterized the Wehrmacht as 'a young giant which has been pushed too quickly'. He added that 'not only is [the German army] not finished growing, it also needs to "fill out"'. A relatively tiny army of 100,000 cannot instantly be transformed into the maximum armed force of a nation of 86 million inhabitants.³⁸ These were fairly accurate assessments of the state of the Wehrmacht. The German military leadership deemed the army to be unready for war in 1939. There were, as French military intelligence had reported, glaring shortfalls of experienced officers and trained reservists. These deficiencies were overcome in no small part thanks to the experience gained from the Polish campaign.³⁹

III

The more positive trend in the assessments of army and air intelligence were not paralleled in naval Deuxième Bureau studies. Intelligence received on the acceleration of German naval rearmament in the

³⁶ Deist, 'Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 454.

³⁷ SHAT, 7N 2680-2, 'l'Armée allemande au 1ère janvier 1939'.

³⁸ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Rapport sur la situation générale', 11 Apr. 1939.

³⁹ Deist, 'Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 454-6 and W. Murray, 'The German Response to Victory in Poland: A Case Study in Professionalism', *Armed Forces and Society*, 7 (1981), 285-98.

spring of 1939 led to a series of unduly pessimistic assessments of the maritime situation. The new German 'Z' programme was conceived to enable Germany to wage a naval war against Great Britain and envisaged a fleet of fifteen capital ships (including six mammoth battleships of 56,000 tonnes), fifteen pocket battle-ships, twenty-nine heavy and medium cruisers, eight aircraft carriers, and 250 submarines. But, like so many of the rearmament schemes conceived during the Nazi era, the 'Z Plan' was divorced from reality and was never implemented. Nevertheless, the navy was given priority in the allocation of precious raw materials from January to the outbreak of war.⁴⁰

Intelligence on the Kriegsmarine's new programme was slow to reach Paris. In January the Deuxième Bureau reported that the construction of submarines had been intensified. It was not until late May, however, that the naval staff was informed that the Germans had decided to build an additional six new 42,000-tonne battleships, three 8,000-tonne cruisers, and two new aircraft carriers.⁴¹ This was considered the extent of the new naval programme underway across the Rhine. French observers appear to have been ignorant of the true dimensions of the 'Z plan' right up to the outbreak of war. But even this underestimate of German naval ambitions created alarm on the rue Royale. This was due mainly to the persistent tendency of French analysts to overrate the pace of German shipbuilding. The emphasis on raw material and skilled labour shortages in army and air intelligence reports for 1939 is not evident in naval staff estimates of future German construction. The Section d'Études calculated that there was 342,000 tonnes in warships under construction in Germany. The estimated size of the German fleet by 1943 was once again revised upward from 428,000 to 560,000 tonnes. The Italian fleet was expected to reach 600,000 tonnes at the same stage.⁴² There is little trace in the memoranda produced by the Deuxième Bureau or the Section d'Études

⁴⁰ The German naval staff calculated that during wartime the 'Z-Plan' fleet would consume as much fuel as the entire German economy in peacetime. On German naval rearmament at this stage, see Düllfer, *Hitler und die Marine*, 492–510 and Deist, 'Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', 474–80.

⁴¹ SHM, iBB2 172–1, 'Négociations navales anglo-allemandes', 9 Jan. 1939; iBB2 220–4, 'Les Constructions navales', 21 Mar. 1939; iBB2 172–3, 'Tranche de remplacement 1940', 3 Apr. 1939; and iBB2 92, *BdR*, 3 June to 6 July 1939.

⁴² SHM, iBB2 172–1, 'Situation prévue pour les principales flottes au 1er janvier 1943', 21 Mar. 1939; iBB2 220–4, 'Les Constructions navales', 21 Mar. 1939; iBB2 172–3, 'Note sur les programmes de la Marine et le compte des investissements de 1940', 29 July 1939; 'La Part de la Marine dans le réarmement de la France', 18 Aug. 1939.

during this period of any attempt to take the capacities of the German shipbuilding industry or the availability of raw materials into consideration in estimating the rate of German naval construction. French naval observers assumed that shipbuilding would simply keep pace with the decrees of the Führer.

Nor were Marine planners counting on receiving much help from Great Britain in the event of war. Staff papers stressed repeatedly that British sea power was stretched extremely thin and that the Admiralty rearmament scheme would not begin to pay significant dividends until 1942. Darlan argued that the Czechoslovak crisis demonstrated that the British would require French assistance against Germany in the Atlantic while the Marine would have total responsibility for securing the western Mediterranean against Italy. Moreover, the situation in the Mediterranean was expected to become particularly difficult in late 1940, when four new or modernized Italian battleships were expected to come into service.⁴³

Intelligence on the German naval build-up and the corresponding vulnerability of French maritime security were marshalled in the Marine's campaign for accelerating its building programme and obtaining a supplementary programme for 1940. The planned tranche for 1940 aimed primarily at replacing outdated smaller ships and improving the navy's anti-submarine capabilities. Concerned that naval rearmament was being forced once again into a secondary role by the more immediate threats on land and in the air, Darlan wrote a series of imploring notes to both Campinchi and Daladier arguing the case for a strong fleet.⁴⁴ The lobby for more credits was combined with a bid for a greater role for the Marine in French strategic planning. From the autumn of 1938, Darlan's staff produced a host of memoranda arguing for a shift in the focus of French strategy towards the Mediterranean. Such a shift would naturally secure a greater role for the navy in French strategy and ensure that there would be no repeat of the Marine's ignominious role in policy making during the Great War. The naval staff argued that allied planning should target Italy from the

⁴³ SHM, 1BB2 181-2, 'Étude sur la participation de l'Angleterre dans l'éventualité d'une action commune franco-britannique en cas de guerre', 12 Nov. 1938 and 1BB2, 181-5, 'Le Réarmement britannique', 27 Oct. 1938. For Darlan, see 1BB2 208, 'Note', 31 Dec. 1939.

⁴⁴ SHM, 1BB2 220-4, 'Les Constructions navales', 21 Mar. 1939; 1BB2 222-3, 'Crédits supplémentaires', 1BB2 172-2, 'Tranche de remplacement 1940', 3 Apr. 1939. For Darlan's lobbying, see 1BB2 208, 'Note des conditions de la guerre dans la situation internationale présente', 12 Nov. 1938; 'Note', 31 Dec. 1938; 'Nécessité de la tranche de 1940', 4 Apr. 1939.

outset of a conflict. It called for a land offensive against Libya, naval action in the Mediterranean, and a bombing offensive against the Italian mainland.⁴⁵ Both the campaign for more funding and the effort to refine strategic planning were successful. In April the Marine received approval for the new tranche and its budget was increased by 1.6 billion francs. Similarly, French war plans in the summer of 1939 aimed at striking hard at Italy in the Mediterranean should it enter a war on the side of Germany.⁴⁶ These developments owed much to the evolution of both official and popular perceptions during the crises of March and April 1939. But they were driven by a steady flow of intelligence on the intensification of Axis naval construction after Munich.

IV

A more nuanced reading of German military effectiveness by army and air intelligence, in particular, was accompanied by a more comprehensive consideration of the effects of Nazi policies on economy and society in Germany. Both the Deuxième Bureau and the SGMN laid greater emphasis on German financial weakness and economic vulnerability in their assessments of German military power on the eve of war. The accuracy of French assessments is difficult to evaluate. Over fifty years after the outbreak of war, the state of the German economy during the final months of peace remains the subject of intense historical debate. One school of interpretation argues that the increasing financial and social tensions brought on by the Nazi regime's rearmament policies pushed Hitler into taking the decision for war in September of 1939 in an effort to improve Germany's financial situation and to divert domestic-political conflicts to a patriotic war effort.⁴⁷ This view has been challenged by Richard Overly who argues that the economic, financial, and social problems in Germany at this juncture did not constitute a crisis and that, with the continued success

⁴⁵ On this question, see Huan and Coutau-Bégarie, *Darlan*, 146–9; Salerno, 'French Navy', and esp. Imlay, 'How to Win a War', 94–9. Imlay has disproved Salerno's assertion that French planners favoured a pre-emptive attack on Italy should it remain neutral.

⁴⁶ SHM, 1BB2 172–3, 'Note sur les programmes de la Marine et le compte des investissements de 1940', 29 July 1939 and Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 209–13 and 303. On strategic planning, see below, pp. 228–9.

⁴⁷ The most prominent advocate of this interpretation was T. Mason, whose essays on this question are part of J. Caplan (ed.), *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class: Essays by Tim Mason* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. 1–52 and 104–30. See also Murray, *Path to Ruin*, 18–27.

of its economic offensive into south-eastern Europe, Germany was better able to face war than either of Britain or France.⁴⁸ The analysis of French military intelligence was an interesting mixture of these two interpretations. French observers did not consider that the German economy was teetering on the brink of collapse. They did judge, however, that the absolute priority given to war preparations had placed major strains on the economic, financial, and social situation in Germany. These problems would be exacerbated in wartime provided that Germany could be denied access to the natural resources it lacked to sustain a prolonged war effort.

Two developments in Germany in early 1939 suggested to the Deuxième Bureau and the SGDN that the German economy had crossed the Rubicon and was operating under close to wartime conditions. The first was the resignation of Dr Schacht as President of the Reichsbank in mid-January. This was interpreted as evidence that the last ties to economic orthodoxy had been severed and that Schacht had 'given up all hope' of returning Germany to 'economic sanity'. French observers considered that Dr Funk and the group of Party hacks who were now in charge of the ministry of national economy:

are in no way the equals of their predecessors in terms of technical skill or in terms of character. From the articles they have written and the public statements they have made it is clear that these men are no more than disciplined schoolboys who will obey the directives of their master, without troubling themselves as to the consequences.⁴⁹

Military intelligence analysts did not take Hitler's subsequent 'export or die' speech of 30 January as a sign that Germany was considering returning to the world economy. They instead interpreted it as evidence that the raw material situation had not improved and that the Reich intended to intensify its economic offensive into south-eastern Europe.⁵⁰

The second development was yet another seminar on war economy given to senior German Commanders in Weimar by General Thomas of the *Wehrwirtschaftsstab* on 7 February. Much of what Thomas had to

⁴⁸ R. Overy, 'Hitler's War and the German Economy: A Reinterpretation', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 35 (1982), 272–91; *id.*, 'Germany, "Domestic Crisis" and War in 1939', *Past and Present*, 116 (1987); and *id.*, 'Hitler's War Plans and the German Economy', 96–127. See also D. Kaiser, R. Overy, and T. Mason, 'Debate: Germany, Domestic Crisis and War', *Past and Present*, 35 (1989), 205–21.

⁴⁹ SHAT, 2N 152–2, 'Le Départ du Dr. Schacht', 23 Jan. 1939.

⁵⁰ SHAT, 7N 2602–2, 'Étude sur l'économie des pays de l'Europe du Sud-est et du Nord considérée dans ses rapports avec le potentiel militaire allemand', 28 Apr. 1939.

say was reassuring for French observers placing their hopes in a long war of attrition in which economic strength would prove decisive. He warned his audience of the danger of anticipating a 'lightning war' and warned that the prospect of a long war was 'less favourable but much more likely'. In such a war economic strength would play 'at least as decisive a role as military resources'. Thomas expressed great concern over the financial and raw material situation and stressed the necessity of preparing Germany against the 'strangling effects of an economic blockade'. His views were interpreted in Paris as confirmation that the Germans feared the consequences of a long war and that preparations for economic warfare were 'in effect the principal lacuna in the organization conceived by the leaders of the Third Reich'.⁵¹

There was plenty of evidence of Germany's vulnerability to the effects of a long war. The supply of foodstuffs was considered potentially critical. In a report on the agricultural situation prepared for Daladier's military cabinet in February the SGDN reported that German planners were 'still terrified by the memory of famine during the last war' and had assumed total control over the distribution of agricultural produce imposing an 'agricultural war economy' on the state. Stocks of foodstuffs were estimated to be sufficient for just five months at the current levels of consumption and up to eight months if the regime imposed further measures of rationing.⁵² The strains which these deficiencies placed upon economic life in Germany were an increasingly recurrent theme in the situation reports forwarded to Paris by the French embassy in Berlin during the final months of peace. In early January Didelet reported that the government had begun requisitioning iron fences, gates, and lamp-posts in Berlin.⁵³ Some weeks later he cited a conversation with a 'high ranking industrialist' who advised him that, despite Göring's assurances to the contrary, Germany was critically short of petrol, iron ore, and stocks of foodstuffs.⁵⁴ In June Didelet reported that a 'profound pessimism' had 'reigned for some time among the National-Socialist milieu responsible for supplying Germany with raw materials and foodstuffs', and that a 'very serious

⁵¹ Analyses of Thomas's seminar by the Berlin Embassy were widely circulated within both the Quai d'Orsay, the general staff, and the SGDN. See SHAT, 2N 224-3, 'Conduite de la guerre économique', 11 Feb. 1939; 2N 51-1, 14 Feb. 1939; and 7N 2524-2, 13 Feb. 1939.

⁵² SHAT, 2N 152-6, 'La Politique agricole de l'Allemagne et le problème des stocks', 1 Feb. 1939.

⁵³ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Information', 17 Jan. 1939.

⁵⁴ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Situation économique de l'Allemagne', 20 Mar. 1939.

informer' had indicated that German reserves of iron ore were sufficient for only a few weeks of wartime production.⁵⁵

A more precise picture of the economic situation in Germany was provided to decision makers in mid-April when the Deuxième Bureau produced a memorandum entitled 'Ways and means of waging an economic war against Germany'. This study concluded that neither the efforts to achieve self-sufficiency under the auspices of the Four Year Plan nor the annexation of Austria, Bohemia and Moravia, and important areas of Czechoslovakia had improved Germany's raw material situation. According to French intelligence, 'Greater Germany' was still importing 65 per cent of its total consumption of iron ore, 95 per cent of its bauxite, 72 per cent of its pyrites, and 78 per cent of its oil. Germany was, more than ever, 'an over-industrialized country', producing less than 80 per cent of the agricultural products it consumed. The priority given to defence-related industry over agriculture in Nazi economic policy had only exacerbated this trend. Nor, crucially, had the Reich been able to overcome its 'critical lack of currency reserves' which forced it to barter for its raw material imports.⁵⁶

In May the SAE reported major structural problems in the *Wehrwirtschaft* system which had been worsened by the mobilization measures during the Czechoslovak crisis. It was estimated that German agriculture lacked as many as 300,000 labourers, heavy industry was short approximately 1 million workers, and that there was a desperate shortage of engineers.⁵⁷ A few weeks later the SGDN prepared another study which concluded that these financial and economic contradictions showed no signs of abating. Since the previous June Germany's balance of trade and balance of payments had worsened and production in all sectors but defence had declined. The only way these deficiencies could be remedied was for Germany to renounce the primacy of rearmament and autarky, but in the summer of 1939 no one in Paris held out much hope that this would happen. The SGDN dismissed the possibility outright and judged that the central question was

⁵⁵ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Réerves de l'Allemagne en produits alimentaires et matières premières', 21 June 1939. See also Young, 'Reason and Madness', 66-9.

⁵⁶ SHAT, 7N 2524-1, 'Note sur les moyens que pourraient être employés pour mener contre l'Allemagne une guerre économique', 14 Apr. 1939. These themes had been consistently reiterated by the Deuxième Bureau since the report of 1935. See e.g. 7N 2644-1, 'L'Approvisionnement de l'Allemagne en matières premières', 29 Nov. 1937 and 7N 2629-3, 'Note sur la situation économique de l'Allemagne', Nov.-Dec. 1936.

⁵⁷ SHAT, 7N 2515, *RH*, 8-15 May 1939 and 7N 2516, 'Bulletin de Renseignements #11', 25 May 1939.

not whether Germany would change its policies but whether its current policies would drive its economy over the brink and into ruin.

Judgement was reserved. The analysts of the SGDN underlined the difficulties in applying the rules of the free-market to economic and social conditions in Nazi Germany. The study concluded, however, that, should Hitler's government lose control of the situation, the most tempting remedy would be to make war given 'the fanaticism which animates these men and their determination to subordinate everything to the realization of their political ambitions'.⁵⁸

Directly linked to the state of the economy was a perceived decline in morale, reports on which surfaced with increasing regularity in intelligence reports. The opposition of the great bulk of the German population to war and general discontent with the regime, which had been a constant theme in intelligence reports right through the Nazi period, received much more attention during the course of 1939. The Munich crisis was once again a watershed in the development of a new perspective on the situation in Germany. Reports in August and September of 1938 had revealed extensive opposition to war with the West. The near delirious reception he had received from the Munich crowds as a saviour of peace had made a powerful impression on Daladier the previous September.⁵⁹ The sense that the German people did not share the views of their Führer was reinforced by a number of intelligence reports received by the Premier and the high command during the crisis over Czechoslovakia. One such report prepared on 16 September judged that 'Germany will enter into a conflict in moral conditions which are, beyond any doubt, very unsettling and which can only worsen if the war drags on for some time and especially if serious losses are incurred'.⁶⁰ Another analysis concluded that the general population was 'profoundly troubled' by the military preparations and that, although the people would follow Hitler into war, there was 'no enthusiasm either in the troops or in the public'.⁶¹ De Vitrolles had underlined a 'fear and hatred of war in the German people as a whole'.⁶²

⁵⁸ SHAT, 2N 152-2, 'Les Difficultés économiques de l'Allemagne et les dangers de guerre', 19 June 1939.

⁵⁹ AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 8, dr. 3, 'Munich', unpublished memoir written by Daladier. See also du Réau, *Daladier*, 276.

⁶⁰ SHAT, 7N 2523-1, 'État d'esprit', 16 Sept. 1938. Initialled by Colson, Georges, and Gamelin and marked 'Exploité par le ministre'.

⁶¹ SHAT, 7N 2523-1, 'Compte-rendu de renseignements', 30 Apr. 1938.

⁶² PRO, FO 371, 21710, C 8787/1425/18, Colyer report on an interview with de Vitrolles, 25 Aug. 1938.

After the Munich crisis the intelligence services took more seriously the possibility of unrest in Germany. From Berlin, naval attaché Tracou concluded that Hitler agreed to a four-power conference because he 'realized for the first time that *his people would not follow him*'. He also reported that Germany remained in a 'state of siege' where individual rationing had been intensified since the Sudeten crisis. He added that '[i]t is worth underlining that, in the aftermath of an immense political victory, the Führer must rehabilitate himself in the eyes of many of his people. . . . the German people are profoundly and sincerely devoted to peace, there can be no doubt of this.'⁶³ In January the SAE considered the tensions in German society which Nazi policy had created:

It is evident that the Nazi revolution and unrestricted rearmament has not been imposed without great difficulty resulting from its consequences: the social upheaval, the persecutions and injustices revolting to the conscience, the nervous tension provoked by external events, the rationing of certain essential foodstuffs, the restrictions imposed on private spending, the strict control of salaries, and the imposition of crushing taxation.⁶⁴

Gauché described Nazi social policy as having 'suspended all civil and social liberties' and being aimed at 'transforming the entire state into an immense barracks'.⁶⁵ In early 1939, for the first time, a major 'net assessment' alluded to the possibility of a threat to the Nazi regime. The *Bulletin de Renseignements* for January–February cautioned that 'when calculating the prospects of the survival of the regime' it was essential to consider the 'unique passivity' and the '*untertan* mentality' of the average German, along with the force of Nazi terror. It concluded however that '[i]t is evident nonetheless that National-Socialist Germany carries germs of a weakness which could, if the situation deteriorates, pose a grave menace to its cohesion and stability'.⁶⁶

This impression was reinforced by reports from Berlin that many of the most powerful Ruhr industrialists, staunch allies of the regime through most of the decade, had become disenchanted with Nazi policy. Didelet reported, accurately as it turned out, that many of them were hoping for the outbreak of war which 'would result in the seizure of power by the army'.⁶⁷ In April he concluded unequivocally that

⁶³ SHM, 1BB2 181–1, 'Situation politique', Tracou to Paris, 29 Sept. 1938 (emphasis in original) and 'Allemagne: situation politique', 10 Nov. 1938.

⁶⁴ SHAT, 7N 2680–2, *BdR*, Jan.–Feb. 1939.

⁶⁵ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur l'armée allemande', Mar. 1939.

⁶⁶ SHAT, 7N 2680–2, *BdR*, Jan.–Feb. 1939.

⁶⁷ SHAT, 7N 2602–2, 'Industriels de la Ruhr', 21 Mar. 1939.

'opinion [in Germany] is certainly not ripe for a real war'.⁶⁸ In June Aris assembled a detailed study of the quality of life of the German worker which was circulated to the SGDN, the Deuxième Bureau, and the Quai d'Orsay. According to this report German workers were bearing the brunt of the sacrifices imposed in the name of rearmament. Labourers in defence industries were forced to work up to 60 hours per week, to endure periodic rationing of daily staples such as butter and coffee and to pay ever higher taxes to support the crushing weight imposed on the nation's finances by rearmament. The conclusion was that the buying power of the average German worker had decreased by 15 to 18 per cent since the advent of the Nazi regime (the fact that unemployment had been eradicated was not mentioned). Aris judged that the combination of effective propaganda and suffocating security measures had kept dissension to a minimum. He predicted, however, that in the event of a long war '[i]t will be to the working class that one will look for the earliest signs of a wavering of national morale and the most widespread and formidable opposition to the Nazi government'.⁶⁹ Much effort was therefore devoted to monitoring the mood of the German populace on the eve of war. During the final weeks of August Daladier, Gamelin, and the air and Marine ministries received daily *comptes-rendus* on the *état d'esprit* in Germany which were syntheses of telegrams and reports from the embassy in Berlin and from the network of French consulates in Germany.⁷⁰ Evidence of opposition to war continued to arrive via these channels until the very outbreak of war.

Daladier paid careful attention to this information and many of these reports are still to be found in his papers.⁷¹ Significantly, this intelligence fostered an ill-founded but widespread hope in Paris that Hitler might back down if France held firm. Two of the aforementioned *comptes-rendus*, in particular, provide eloquent testimony to the greater emphasis on a perceived lack of popular support for the war in intelligence appreciations. On 25 August Gauché forwarded a report to the Premier which underlined 'the multiplicity of intelligence reports and the variety of sources, all of which indicate a breakdown in German

⁶⁸ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Rapport sur la situation générale', 11 Apr. 1939.

⁶⁹ SHAT, 2N 151-7, 'Les Salaires en Allemagne et le niveau de vie des ouvriers', 22 June 1939. See also MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Cabinet Bonnet, 'Conditions de vie d'un ouvrier en Allemagne', 20 Jan. 1939.

⁷⁰ SHAT, 7N 2517, 'Note de Service: Diffusion des compte-rendus de renseignements', 28 July 1939.

⁷¹ See e.g. AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr. 5, and 496 AP 14, drs. 4, 5, and 6.

morale'.⁷² The report cited accounts of a lack of enthusiasm among mobilized reservists, the distribution of subversive tracts in factories, consternation over increased restrictions on consumption, and opposition to Hitler's policy within the high command. Léger used evidence of a 'general malaise' and the 'possibility of a moral and physical collapse on the part of Hitler' as arguments in favour of rejecting any mediation of the German–Polish dispute by Italy.⁷³ Hopes for an eventual collapse in German morale were an important component of French strategic decision making well into the phoney war.

In sum, the major difference in the assessments of 1939 from those of 1938 was one of proportion. Information on the economic and political situation in Germany had always been integrated into intelligence assessments. In 1939, however, the volume of economic and political intelligence produced by the Deuxième Bureaux and the SGDN increased dramatically. The emphasis on the problems Germany would have supporting a prolonged war provided a reassuring background to the economic recovery under way in France. The *redressement nationale*, along with perceived progress towards an alliance with the Soviet Union (Moscow had agreed in principle to a political accord with Britain and France), began to transform some of the fundamental assumptions on which assessments had been based.

These developments, in turn, led to the ill-founded hope that Nazi Germany could be deterred by a firm policy. Even the habitually sceptical and taciturn Gauché was moved to speculate that changes in the economic and political landscape of Europe, when combined with the clear lack of support for a warlike policy within the German populace, might dissuade Hitler from risking a world war over Danzig.⁷⁴ A more optimistic reading of the strategic situation extended all the way up to the Premier. In June Daladier judged Hitler 'most hesitant to begin a war' because 'the military position of France is much stronger than last September'.⁷⁵ Although they were prepared for the prospect of war, by the summer of 1939 both intelligence officials and policy makers began to hope that war could be avoided with a policy of firmness.

⁷² AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 14, dr. 5, sdr. c, 'Note sur l'état d'ésprit en Allemagne', 25 Aug. 1939.

⁷³ AN, 496 AP 14, dr. 5, sdr. a, Léger to Daladier, 31 Aug. 1939.

⁷⁴ SHAT, 1N 44–7, 'Compte-rendu de la réunion des Chefs d'État-Major du 24 mai'. Paillole erroneously alleges that, at this juncture, the SR communicated precise information that Hitler had decided to invade Poland using Danzig as a pretext. See *Notre espion*, 146.

⁷⁵ Cited in Adamthwaite, *France*, 328.

An improved perspective on the Franco-German military balance was integral to a grand strategic overview prepared by Gamelin's staff for the Premier in mid-April 1939. This document, which essentially mapped out the course of French strategic policy through to the outbreak of war, outlined three central objectives in French planning for a war against Germany and Italy.⁷⁶ The first priority would be to secure the frontiers of metropolitan France, Belgium, and the lines of communication with the empire. The second imperative would be to apply economic pressure on the Axis states whose economies lacked essential raw materials to sustain a prolonged war effort. The third aim was to unite the states of eastern Europe into a broad anti-German front sponsored by France and Britain and supplied with war material by the Soviet Union. The latter two objectives were integrally linked. The formation of a durable eastern front would redress the glaring numerical imbalance between the Anglo-French and Axis powers. At the same time it would deny Germany and Italy access to natural resources which their war efforts vitally required. This strategy was based on the assumption that '[t]he Axis powers cannot at the present time sustain a long war'. Stocks of foodstuffs and raw materials were inadequate in both states. Germany and Italy would 'place their hopes of success in a short war'. The French and the British, as a result, would have to withstand the initial onslaught then hold until the time came to assume the offensive. The key consideration in French planning was the assumption that:

Germany and Italy cannot hope to significantly increase their resources during the course of a war . . . France and England are, by contrast, able to anticipate that their war potential will augment itself with each passing month as long as their industry and maritime communications are protected from enemy attack.

Underpinning this strategic vision were two further assumptions both of which were expressed to Daladier by Gamelin in a survey of the situation in early January. The first was the frequently expressed conviction that 'time is working for us'. The second was the rarely articulated but equally important anticipation that 'with the aid of American

⁷⁶ SHAT, 7N 3439-1, 'Étude du problème stratégique à la date du 10 avril 1939', 15 Apr. 1939. See also 7N 3434-3, 'Étude des données et du problème stratégique d'ensemble', 31 Mar. 1939.

industrial power we will be able to engage [the Germans and the Italians] in a war of material'.⁷⁷

Planning for a *guerre de longue durée*, in which Germany would be forced to fight on two fronts and would be deprived of the raw materials it required, made a great deal of sense. There was a seductive internal logic to this scheme, particularly for civilian leaders seeking reassurance that, despite the mass of intelligence which had arrived concerning the growth of German military power, France could indeed triumph in a war with her mortal enemy. The identification of the economy as the vital weakness in the German war machine was also welcomed. On the eve of war France's civilian leadership came to view the recovering French economy as the key to victory over Germany. The conviction was that the liberal economies of Britain and France, enjoying free access to the international market, would slowly strangle the war effort of a tightly blockaded Germany. The rapid growth of the French national treasury after Reynaud's financial reforms was contrasted with Germany's desperate lack of foreign currency as confirmation of this view.⁷⁸ However, the entire conception was based on the dubious assumption that Germany could be prevented from securing control of the resources it required in the east either by political pressure or by force. To achieve this a united front in the east would have to be constructed and Soviet support for this bloc would have to be secured. French leaders, both military and civilian, overestimated the prospects of success for this plan.

The importance attributed to economic warfare in French planning increased along with the likelihood of war. When war appeared imminent in late September of 1938 Gamelin's staff had prepared a strategic overview for the Premier which stressed that:

We are about to embark on a long war where all of the resources of the nation must be devoted to achieving the destruction of Germany and, by consequence, a new order in Europe. . . . In order to ensure the integrity of our frontiers, the maintenance of our imperial lines of communication, and the defeat of Germany, it is absolutely necessary that we impose an immediate blockade which must not be relaxed under any pretext.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ SHAT, 2N 224-1, Gamelin to Daladier, 7 Jan. 1939. See also Keylor, 'Illusion of American Support', 232-44.

⁷⁸ The best discussion of this often-neglected supposition is in Frank[enstein], *Le Prix*, 271-88. See also Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 443-5 and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 135-6.

⁷⁹ SHAT, 5N 579-1, 'Étude pour le Président du Conseil', 13 Sept. 1938.

Added emphasis on the economic arm as a decisive weapon in the coming war brought increased demand for intelligence on political and economic conditions in Germany. During the last few months of peace the SGDN, functioning as Gamelin's staff, produced virtually hundreds of reports on the economic and political situation in Germany. Studies were done on everything from the volume of German copper imports to prospects for the autumn harvests. The mountain of information compiled provided essential ammunition to reinforce the conviction that Germany could be brought to its knees by economic warfare.

The intelligence on the economic situation in Germany which had arrived in the intervening eight months boded well for the prospective success of Allied economic warfare. Didelet, for example, was unequivocal that Germany could not support a long war. The previous December he had reported that the German leadership remained 'haunted by fear of the effects of a blockade'.⁸⁰ In April he judged that Germany had neither the means to withstand a blockade nor the ability to break its grip.⁸¹ One week before the outbreak of war he was even more forceful, warning that '[i]f the democracies wish to stop Germany they must, simultaneously with all other necessary measures, immediately impose a blockade'.⁸² The *Deuxième Bureau* study of early April judged that an economic blockade was 'the most effective weapon which the Franco-British bloc possesses for war with Germany'.⁸³ Several weeks later the Berlin embassy produced a lengthy study of the relationship between the German war effort and the economies of Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Denmark, the Baltic states, and Finland.⁸⁴ The study began with a survey of the role each state had played in providing Germany with raw materials during the Great War. It then compared the situation of Germany in 1914–18 with that of 'Greater Germany' in 1939. It concluded that there were three 'vital centres', without access to which Germany could not mount a prolonged war effort. These were, in order of importance, Swedish iron ore (for the entire armaments industry), Romanian oil (vital for the conduct of mechanized warfare and aerial operations), and Yugoslavian bauxite (essential for the aircraft industry).

⁸⁰ SHAT, 7N 2602-1, 'Tour d'horizon', 12 Dec. 1938.

⁸¹ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Rapport sur la situation générale', 11 Apr. 1939.

⁸² SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Situation générale au 21 août'.

⁸³ SHAT, 7N 2524-1, 'Note sur les moyens . . .', 14 Apr. 1939.

⁸⁴ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Étude sur l'économie des pays de l'Europe du Sud-est et du Nord considérée dans ses rapports avec le potentiel militaire allemand', 28 Apr. 1939.

The SGDN undertook a series of studies on waging economic war on Germany in the immediate aftermath of the seizure of Prague. In early April it estimated that German stocks of iron ore, phosphates, and oil were all insufficient for more than six months' consumption at current levels. It pronounced the prospects for crippling Germany's war effort by depriving it of Scandinavian iron ore and Romanian petrol as 'excellent'. France and Britain, with their wealth of currency reserves, could expand purchases in these markets and force the Germans to spend what little gold reserves they had left. Both Sweden and Romania, moreover, could be expected to resist any effort to seize control of their natural resources by force. The SGDN thus concluded that '[i]t is a priori impossible to separate economic warfare from military warfare; the first is essential to ensure the success of the second'.⁸⁵ This conviction underpinned the emphasis placed on economic collaboration in the Franco-British military conversations from March 1939 onward. A Franco-British Committee was established in late May to coordinate planning for economic warfare.⁸⁶ In June preparations were finalized for the establishment of a separate ministry, the *Ministère du Blocus*, which would organize France's contribution to an economic war against Germany. Weeks later two separate French missions were established in London to coordinate purchases from neutral states of raw materials vital to the German war effort. These were forerunners of the *Mission Française en Angleterre de Guerre Économique*.⁸⁷ In July a *Section D'Action Économique* was established in Paris and attached to the *Quai d'Orsay* which constituted the embryo of the blockade ministry.⁸⁸

Growing faith in the power of economic warfare as a great equalizer in the military balance between France and Germany extended to the upper echelons of the defence establishment. Gamelin considered it the most effective means of reducing Germany's capacity to wage war. 'The blockade', he informed his British counterparts, would eventually

⁸⁵ SHAT, 2N 51-1, 'Note sur la guerre économique', 8 Apr. 1939.

⁸⁶ For the Franco-British staff conversations pertaining to economic warfare, see, in particular, the *procès-verbaux* of the Franco-British conversations on economic warfare in *DDF*, 2ème série, xvi [First two meetings], no. 19, 27 June 1939; [Third meeting], no. 34, 28 June 1939, and [fourth meeting], no. 46, 29 June 1939. See also M. A. Reussner, *Les Conversations franco-britanniques d'État-Major, 1935-1939* (Vincennes, 1969), 213-41.

⁸⁷ MAÉ, *Papiers Reynaud*, vol. 1, 'La Guerre économique', undated. On Franco-British preparations for economic warfare, see W. N. Medlicott, *The Economic Blockade* (London, 1952), 36-7, 133-6 and Duroselle, *L'Abîme*, 78-9.

⁸⁸ SHAT, 2N 51-1, 'A.s. de la guerre économique', DAPC memorandum of 16 June 1939.

‘drain the German economy of its vitality and emasculate its war industry’,⁸⁹ Daladier was another convert. He informed the Chamber foreign affairs commission that ‘[t]he German economy is strained to its limits’ and characterized economic warfare as ‘the most powerful weapon in the war arsenal of the Allies’.⁹⁰

The alacrity with which economic warfare was embraced by French decision makers on the eve of war was a product of the terrible experience of 1914–18: a *guerre économique* would permit France to defeat Germany without recourse to another such bloodbath. The views of the head of the blockade ministry, Georges Pernot, are illuminating in this respect. Explaining to the foreign affairs commission of the Chamber the role of economic warfare in French strategy, Pernot concluded by stating that ‘I believe that, by waging economic war, we are protecting the youth of France, among whom I must count my own sons, from the butchery of the last war’.⁹¹ In sum, economic warfare functioned as a panacea which rendered Germany’s overwhelming industrial and demographic superiority less formidable and the prospect of another conflict less terrifying. These were the necessary preconditions for any decision for war. Having decided to resist further German aggression French decision makers seized upon waging economic war as a means of defeating Germany whilst avoiding a repeat of the First World War. The hope was that the German economy would be unable to sustain a long war of attrition and that economic pressure by the West would play a decisive role in the issue of a general war. On one level, such an assumption was well-founded. In spring of 1939 the *Wehrwirtschaftsstab* considered that Germany could count only 33 per cent of its vital imports as reliable. The remainder were judged ‘defaulting or doubtful imports’.⁹² The difficulty would be to prevent the Reich from securing access to the sinews of war from neutral states either by trade or through conquest.

The need to deny Germany control of the resource-rich areas of northern and south-eastern Europe was fundamental to planning for

⁸⁹ *DDF*, 2ème série, xvi, no. 413, 13 June 1939 (Gamelin visit to London).

⁹⁰ SHAT, Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224, Carton 8, dr. 4, ‘Note sur les accords d’États-Majors franco-anglais’, 7 Mar. 1939. For Daladier’s views, see the AAN, Commission des Affaires Étrangères, 16ème Législature, Carton 8, Daladier audition, 4 Oct. 1939. For the role of the blockade in French phoney war strategy, see F. Bédarida, *La Stratégie secret de la drôle de guerre* (Paris, 1979).

⁹¹ AAN, Commission des Affaires Étrangères, 16ème Législature, Carton 8, Pernot audition, 15 Nov. 1939.

⁹² Volkmann, ‘The National Socialist Economy’, 352.

the construction of an eastern front. By constantly underlining the importance of eastern Europe to German war potential, military intelligence played a central role in convincing decision makers of the importance of a *barrière de l'est*. In the spring of 1939 the general staff received a series of warnings of the geo-strategic importance of eastern Europe from the intelligence bureau. A prolific source of these was Colonel Didelet. Didelet quoted Colonel Walther Warlimont, Chief of the German army operations bureau, that, in order to have any hope of winning a war with the West, Germany must 'impose absolute economic suzerainty over the states of eastern and south-eastern Europe'.⁹³ Didelet warned that if Germany was permitted to dominate eastern Europe and thus combine her highly developed war industry to the raw materials of the Balkans 'she will become more powerful than she has ever been'.⁹⁴ This view was shared by Gauché, who assumed the uncharacteristic role of policy adviser, urging the high command that '[t]he only factor which could dissuade the Nazis from their present enterprise of force is the constitution of an eastern barrage'.⁹⁵ In July the SGDN concluded that Germany controlled over 45 per cent of Romanian trade and over 50 per cent of Yugoslavian commerce. The success of economic warfare, it warned, depended 'in a very fundamental sense' on preventing German domination of the Balkan region.⁹⁶

The importance of economic pressure and a second front to French strategy is evident in French policy towards Romania during the crisis of March–April 1939. In the weeks following the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, rumours of a possible German move against Romania dominated European politics. As the world's fourth largest producer of oil, Romania occupied a key position in French calculations of the European strategic balance. Germany was critically short of oil reserves. French intelligence calculated German oil consumption at over 7 million tonnes per year in peacetime including the newly-acquired Austrian and Czech territories. It estimated that during wartime this figure would increase to between 15 and 20 million tonnes depending on the extent of military operations.⁹⁷ According to French

⁹³ SHAT, 7N 2602–2, 'Propos tenus par une personnalité importante de la Wehrmacht', 1 Mar. 1938. This remark was reported in the weekly intelligence bulletin for 6–19 Mar. in 7N 2515.

⁹⁴ MAÉ, Papiers 1940; Lacoste, vol. 4, Didelet to Weygand, 31 Mar. 1939 (Copy to DAPC).

⁹⁵ SHAT, 7N 2516, 'Bulletin de Renseignements #12', 9 June 1939.

⁹⁶ SHAT, 2N 151–7, 'La Domination économique de l'Allemagne sur les pays de l'Europe sud-orientale', 2 July 1939.

⁹⁷ SHAT, 2N 235, 'Note sur la production pétrolière des champs roumaines', 18 Apr. 1939.

estimates, the Reich was producing a maximum of 600,000 tonnes of regular fuel and 2 million tonnes of synthetic fuel per year. Hence total production of fuels of all kinds was less than half of peacetime consumption and only a fraction of the amount which would be required during wartime.⁹⁸ Nor were there immense stockpiles of oil capable of sustaining Germany during a prolonged war. The Deuxième Bureau estimated that the Reich had stored a maximum of six months' worth of oil reserves.⁹⁹ Nazi Germany could not hope to secure oil from its Axis partner as the Italian oil industry was virtually negligible. In fact, the total production of the Axis powers was estimated to be less than one-eighth of their projected wartime requirements.¹⁰⁰

Romanian oil production, significantly, could be raised to 11.75 million tonnes per year, making it a crucial source of fuel for Germany in wartime.¹⁰¹ Hence mounting evidence of a possible threat to Romania produced a stream of memoranda in Paris stressing Romania's importance to the strategic situation. The prevailing sense of urgency was heightened in early April by the presence of a German trade mission in Bucharest, which raised fears of German domination of the Romanian economy. The response of the French government is illuminating. Daladier, working closely with Alexis Léger (rather than Bonnet), became convinced of the necessity of a guarantee for Romania similar to the one issued to Poland at the end of March. He insisted on the importance of such a policy before his cabinet and applied intense personal pressure on both Chamberlain and Halifax in London to guarantee Romanian independence. Despite British reluctance, a Franco-British commitment to make war in the event of aggression directed against Romania or Greece was announced to the world on the afternoon of 13 April. In Paris this guarantee was considered an important step in the process of building an eastern front and denying Germany control of the natural resources it lacked to wage a long war.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'L'Allemagne et les carburants en cas de guerre', 28 Apr. 1939; 7N 3053, 'Besoins et ressources en pétrole des Puissances totalitaires', 6 June 1939.

⁹⁹ SHAT, 7N 2524-1, 'Note sur les moyens . . .', 14 Apr. 1939 and 7N 2602-2, 'L'Allemagne et les carburants en cas de guerre', 28 Apr. 1939.

¹⁰⁰ SHAT 7N 3053, 'Besoins et ressources en pétrole des puissances totalitaires', 6 June 1939. See also the Naval intelligence *BdR* for 18 Mar. to 15 Apr. 1938 in SHM, 1BB2 92.

¹⁰¹ SHAT, 7N 3057-5, 'Roumanie—Pétrole', 11 Dec. 1935; and 2N 235, 'Note sur la production pétrolière des champs romains', 18 Apr. 1939.

¹⁰² For a fuller discussion, see my 'France and the Guarantee to Romania, April 1939', *INS* 10 (1995), 242-72.

VI

From late April through to the end of the summer the growing threat to Poland dominated intelligence estimates of German intentions. The Anglo-French guarantees did not act as a deterrent to further German aggression. Hitler was enraged by the guarantee and on 3 April ordered preparations for an attack on Poland to come not later than 1 September. German foreign policy then focused on securing a tripartite military alliance with Italy and Japan in an attempt to isolate Poland and dissuade Britain and France from intervening on its behalf.¹⁰³ The Deuxième Bureau operated on the assumption that the occupation of Prague and the annexation of Memel were preparatory steps for a larger threat to European stability. On 16 March the SAE advised both Gamelin and Daladier that the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia marked 'the opening of a new period of tension'.¹⁰⁴ For the first time, moreover, a German offensive in the west was considered a real possibility by the French general staff. Gamelin observed during a 13 March meeting of the CSG that '[u]ntil now I have been sceptical [of the possibility of an *attaque brusquée*] but now I believe that it could pose a danger'.¹⁰⁵ Shortly thereafter intelligence from another *très bonne source* (which, again, cannot be identified) communicated 'information from the German high command' that plans were underway for a combined German and Italian offensive through Switzerland.¹⁰⁶

This report was received with cautious scepticism by Gauché and his subordinates. Analysts considered eastern Europe a more likely objective for German expansion as Germany was still considered lacking in the necessary resources to wage war against the west. Bohemia and Moravia would likely constitute 'the necessary point of departure' for 'ultra-rapid military operations' aimed at seizing control of the petrol and wheat Germany lacked and which were 'indispensable for the conduct of a conflict of substantial duration'.¹⁰⁷ As noted above, Romania was erroneously considered the most likely target of imminent

¹⁰³ Messerschmidt, 'Foreign Policy and Preparations for War', 688–96; Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, 558–61; Watt, *How War Came*, 188–98.

¹⁰⁴ SHAT, 7N 2524–1, 'Note sur la situation créée par la disparition de la tchécoslovaquie', 16 Mar. 1939. Signed by Gamelin and marked 'Communiqué au Ministre'.

¹⁰⁵ SHAT, 1N 38–3, 'Procès-verbal de la séance d'études du 13 mars 1939'.

¹⁰⁶ SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Note sur une attaque germano-italienne exécutée par surprise contre la Suisse', 31 Mar. 1939.

¹⁰⁷ SHAT, 7N 2524–1, 'Note sur la situation créée par la disparition de la Tchécoslovaquie', 16 Mar. 1939.

German aggression in the immediate aftermath of the Prague coup.¹⁰⁸ In the weeks which followed, however, the Deuxième Bureau monitored the situation closely but could turn up no reliable evidence of impending German aggression against Romania. Sources which had provided precise intelligence on the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia produced no evidence that Germany intended to strike at Romania. Such a move would necessitate close military cooperation with Hungary. The Section Orient, however, had received no evidence which suggested that the two states had planned a combined military effort against Romania.¹⁰⁹ On 22 March Gauché informed the high command that, although Romania felt justifiably menaced by the events of 15 March, the Deuxième Bureau could uncover no evidence of an imminent military threat. On 17 March German armoured units which had advanced within several kilometres of the Ruthenian frontier in southern Moravia—120 kilometres from the Romano-Hungarian border—had withdrawn into Bohemia.¹¹⁰ By the first week in April, the Deuxième Bureau had identified Poland as the most threatened state in Europe. Hans-Thilo Schmidt informed the SR that operational plans were already underway for an invasion of Poland. This information appeared to be confirmed by the concentration of eleven of thirteen armoured and mechanized divisions around Berlin—where they could quickly be deployed against the Poles.¹¹¹

The Italian seizure of Albania prompted another flurry of rumours. On 9 April Paris was plunged into a state of deadly anticipation with the receipt of unfounded intelligence from von Vivremont that Italy and Germany were coordinating plans for a German attack on Poland and an Italian move against Tunisia. Hostilities were to commence on 20 April with simultaneous bombing attacks on London and Paris. 'War', Gauché advised the military attaché in London, 'is now all but inevitable'.¹¹² Between 9 and 12 April the atmosphere at Quai d'Orsay was dominated by anticipation. Bonnet was convinced that 'there

¹⁰⁸ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Perspectives', 23 Mar. 1939.

¹⁰⁹ SHAT, 7N 3055, 23 Mar. 1939.

¹¹⁰ SHAT, 1N 44, 22 Mar. 1939. See also 7N 3055, 'Accord germano-roumain', 23 Mar. 1939.

¹¹¹ For Schmidt's information and subsequent assessments, see Gauché's briefings of the army high command on 11 and 19 Apr. 1939 in SHAT, 1N 44.

¹¹² SHAT, 7N 3439-1, Gauché to Lelong, 9 Apr. 1939. Marked 'Pour le ministre' by Colson. See also the *procès-verbal* of the meeting of the combined chiefs of staff on 11 Apr. 1939 in SHAT, 2N 225-2.

might be war at any moment' and that 'the only question is where the blow will fall'.¹¹³

The Daladier government assumed a much different attitude to the prospect of war than it had done the previous September. Measures of *alerte* (reinforcement of the frontier detachments) were taken along the Franco-German and Franco-Italian frontiers and the first classification of reservists (the *disponibles*) were recalled to bring the French standing army to 900,000 effectives including colonial forces. Gamelin advised Daladier that this measure was the 'absolute minimum' and that the army must be maintained in this state 'without diminution of any sort' for the duration of the period of international tension—which the General predicted would last at least until the following October—in order to ensure the inviolability of France's frontiers.¹¹⁴ The CPDN met and resolved that France would strike hard at Italy from the outset of a war with the Axis. The decision was also taken to enter into military conversations with the Soviets aimed at forging an Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance.¹¹⁵

The false alarm blew over as rapidly as it had arrived. On 19 April Gauché informed the high command that surveillance of the German order of battle, always considered the most reliable indicator of an imminent *coup de force*, revealed no inordinate military activity. No new developments were reported along the Franco-German frontier and no further reservists had been called to the colours.¹¹⁶ By the end of the month the Deuxième Bureau was advising that '[t]here is no evidence of an immediate menace'. It added, however, that '[o]ne must not accord too much importance to this apparent calm. In a matter of days the situation could be completely transformed'.¹¹⁷

The Quai d'Orsay responded to the war scare of mid-April by revising its attitude towards secret intelligence. On 28 April Léger wrote to Daladier requesting 12 million francs from the *fonds spéciaux* to establish a secret intelligence gathering organ dependent on the foreign ministry which would work in liaison with the SR. Léger noted that 'the atmosphere of uncertainty which has prevailed recently is unacceptable' and that 'the foreign ministry and the ministry of defence must coordinate their efforts to avoid confusion'.¹¹⁸ Rivet approved wholeheartedly of

¹¹³ Quoted in Adamthwaite, *France*, 309.

¹¹⁴ SHAT, 1N 43-3, Gamelin to Daladier, 28 Apr. 1939.

¹¹⁵ SHAT, 2N 25, *Procès-verbal* of CPDN meeting of 9 Apr. 1939.

¹¹⁶ SHAT, 1N 44-7, 'Compte-rendu de la réunion des Chefs d'État-Major le 19 avril 1939'.

¹¹⁷ SHAT, 7N 2516-1, 'Bulletin de Renseignements 9', 4 May 1939.

¹¹⁸ SHAT, 7N 2524, Léger to Daladier, 24 Apr. and Note by De Camp of 28 Apr. 1939.

this change in tune and pledged the full cooperation of the SR.¹¹⁹ The project was approved but Germany invaded Poland before preliminary preparations were completed. After mobilization military intelligence was restructured and the SR became the Cinquième Bureau. In the ensuing confusion the process of creating a diplomatic SR ground to a halt and was not taken up again before the disaster of 1940. There are interesting parallels between the response of the Quai d'Orsay and that of the British foreign office to the false alarms of March and April. The foreign office amended its policy towards joint exploitation of intelligence with the service intelligence directorates. A 'Situation Report Centre' was created within the foreign office for this purpose which eventually became part of a restructured Joint Intelligence Committee under the chairmanship of a foreign office official.¹²⁰

Danzig retained the attention of military observers in Paris from the end of April to the outbreak of war. The Poles, meanwhile, appeared determined to resist any German encroachment on their sovereignty. 'War appears more likely in the coming months than at any time since July of 1914,' concluded an intelligence bulletin of 4 May. Danzig, it was predicted, would serve as the 'fuse for the next world war'.¹²¹ The Deuxième Bureau was able to identify the threat to Poland with increasing precision in the months that followed. The high command was provided with plenty of advance warning both of the timing of the operation and the deployment of the German field army on the eve of the invasion. The archival record for the period leading up to the *Fall Weiss* is very similar to that of the previous summer. After a period of uncharacteristic optimism regarding the international situation, intelligence concerning a German move against Poland began to arrive in Paris in the aftermath of the signature of the 'Pact of Steel' between Germany and Italy on 22 May. The intelligence bulletin of 9 June related that '[n]one, absolutely none, of the numerous intelligence reports received on the possible evolution of the situation sounds a promising note. All suggest a new period of tension for the month of August and perhaps even for the month of July.'¹²²

According to Paul Paillolle, Hans-Thilo Schmidt wrote to Rivet on 9 June with news of the plan to invade Poland at the end of August. While the corresponding SR report cannot be traced in the archives,

¹¹⁹ SHAT, 7N 2524, SR Note: 9 May 1939.

¹²⁰ Hinsley *et al.*, *British Intelligence*, i. 42–3.

¹²¹ SHAT, 7N 2516–1, 'Bulletin de Renseignements #9', 4 May 1939.

¹²² 7N 2516, 'Bulletin de Renseignements #12', 9 June 1939.

on 14 June the SAE related that 'intelligence from an excellent source' indicated that Germany was resolved to 'settle the Polish question' during the final week of August.¹²³ Professor D. C. Watt's argument that the French were deceived into a panic at the end of June over a possible threat to Danzig is therefore unfounded.¹²⁴ The weekly intelligence summaries for the final week of June and the first two weeks in July all predicted that Hitler would steadily build up tension over Danzig in preparation for a coup sometime near the end of August.¹²⁵ From mid-June onward Didelet reported on preliminary measures of mobilization in Germany. His sources indicated that the assault on Poland would be unleashed in mid- to late August.¹²⁶ In late July and early August the Deuxième Bureau was inundated with reports on the impending operation. The same situation prevailed during the final weeks of peace as had during the previous September. In early August information from both Schmidt and von Vivremont narrowed the starting date to between the 26th and 29th of that month.¹²⁷ During the final two weeks of peace Gamelin, Georges, and Colson met with Gauché and the deputy chiefs of staff daily to receive accurate and up-to-date reports of the deployment of the German field army. Gamelin, in turn, kept Daladier amply informed.¹²⁸ The German invasion of Poland, like the remilitarization of the Rhineland, the *Anschluss*, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, surprised no one in Paris.

France's reaction to the crisis of March and the war scares in April was to intensify preparations for war and to give definition to its policy of resistance. France, with Britain, extended guarantees to Poland, Greece, and Romania. Preliminary steps were taken to resolve outstanding differences with Turkey over the Sanjak of Alexandretta. General Weygand was recalled from retirement and sent on a mission to Ankara and to Bucharest to convince the Turkish and Romanian governments that France was indeed serious about an eastern front.

¹²³ SHAT, 7N 2516, 'Bulletin de Renseignements #13', 14 June 1939. See also Paillole, *Notre espion*, 147-9 and Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau au travail*, 99-101.

¹²⁴ Watt, *How War Came*, 324-5. Professor Watt has cited British sources as evidence of French panic.

¹²⁵ SHAT, 7N 2516-1, 'Bulletin de Renseignements', 25 June, 1 and 8 July 1939.

¹²⁶ SHAT, 7N 2602-2, 'Réservists sous les drapeaux', 19 June 1939; 'Echéances?', 22 June 1939 and 'Indices d'activité militaire anormale', 29 June 1939.

¹²⁷ Cited in Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany', 286-7. See also Krop, *Espionnage français*, 402-4.

¹²⁸ See e.g. SHAT, 7N 2516, 'Bulletin de Renseignement #19', 22 Aug. 1939 and the 'Comptes-rendus' of the meetings of the army general staff for 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 Aug. and 1, 2, and 3 Sept. 1939 in 1N 44-7.

Most importantly, the first resolute steps were taken in an effort to draw the Soviet Union into an alliance with France and Britain. This venture would end in failure and humiliation five months later in Moscow.

VII

Denying Germany control of the resources it required to win a world war involved much more than drafting planning documents and issuing guarantees. Neither Romania nor Yugoslavia were capable of defending themselves effectively from German attack. On 12 April, the day before the Franco-British guarantee was extended, the Deuxième Bureau estimated that German armoured columns attacking through Hungary would reach Romania's Ploesti oil fields in five days—the major difficulty being the poor condition of Romanian roads through the Transylvanian Alps and the Bihar Mountains rather than determined opposition by the Romanian army.¹²⁹ The situation was aptly summed up by Weygand upon return from his voyage to Turkey and Romania. Weygand advised Daladier that, for the Franco-British guarantee to carry any weight, 'it will be vital not to limit aid to words but instead to supply real military and material support'.¹³⁰ But such support was simply not available. Gamelin's staff considered that while French and British war production would eventually provide the armed forces of the Balkan states with the *matériel* they required to take part in a general war, in the short term, neither state could offer significant assistance.¹³¹ On 16 June the Chiefs of Staff met to discuss the question of arming France's allies in eastern Europe. It was resolved at this meeting that Poland and Romania would receive priority in French shipments of arms to eastern Europe. It was clear, however, that it would be at least six months before France was in a position to provide the eastern states with significant aid.¹³²

The inability of both France and Britain to put teeth in the eastern alliance was a key element in the growing importance of the Soviet Union to French strategic planning. The previous December Gauché

¹²⁹ SHAT, 2N 235, 21 Mar. 1939 and 1N 43-4, 'Note au sujet d'actions militaires éventuelles en Europe centrale', 3 June 1939.

¹³⁰ SHAT, 7N 3070, 'Mission Weygand à Bucharest', May 1939.

¹³¹ SHAT, 7N 3439-1, 'Étude du problème stratégique à la date du 10 avril 1939'.

¹³² SHAT, 2N 225-2, 'Procès-verbal de la réunion des chefs d'état-major généraux du Vendredi 16 Juin 1939'.

had concluded unequivocally that the construction of an effective eastern front would ultimately depend on the participation of the Soviet Union: 'one fact remains certain: Poland and Romania could hope to resist a German military threat only if they decide to accept, and are assured of receiving, the only source of immediate and effective assistance available in the region: Soviet aid—even if it is limited to aerial and material support.'¹³³ This conviction, combined with increasingly precise intelligence on Hitler's intention to attack Poland at the end of August, underpinned the urgency with which French military and diplomatic officials sought to obtain Soviet military support for Poland and Romania in the spring and summer of 1939.¹³⁴

In French diplomacy an alliance with the USSR was to function as a deterrent to Hitler. This was the motivation for the increasing ardour with which Bonnet pursued negotiations with the Soviets from 5 April onward. In French military planning, however, a more active role was envisioned for the USSR. The Soviet Union was to function as the arsenal of a projected *barrière de l'est*. It was to supply the war material which the Romanians required and which France was unable to provide. Gamelin advised the head of the French military delegation on the eve of his departure for Moscow that '[t]he primary role of the Soviet alliance will be to assure Polish and Romanian forces the war *matériel* they will require in the event of a conflict with Germany'.¹³⁵ The French general staff held to this vision of the Soviet Union as the armoury of the projected eastern coalition through to the beginning of military talks with the Soviets in mid-July. In conversations with Polish military chiefs in May, French soldiers and diplomats did not insist that the Poles enter into a military alliance with the USSR.¹³⁶

Hopes of using a Soviet alliance to deter Germany and to obtain

¹³³ SHAT, 7N 3056–2, 'Considérations sur la constitution d'un bloc oriental', 28 Dec. 1938. The best analysis of the role of the USSR in French strategy is in Inlay, 'How to Win a War', 89–111.

¹³⁴ The tortured course of negotiations between France, Britain, and the USSR in the summer of 1939 are beyond the parameters of this study. See Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 403–39; du Réau, *Daladier*, 347–54; and Inlay, 'How to Win a War', ch. 3. For an opposing view, see M. Carley, 1939: *The Alliance that Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999), *passim*, and G. Roberts, 'The Alliance that Failed: Moscow and the Triple Alliance Negotiations, 1939', *European History Quarterly*, 26: 3 (1996), 383–414.

¹³⁵ SHAT, 7N 3434–3 'Note relative au programme de la mission du Général Doumenc', 13 July 1939. See also iN 43–4, 'Note au sujet d'actions militaires éventuelles en Europe centrale', 3 June 1939.

¹³⁶ On these conversations, see Young, *In Command of France*, 234–5; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 459–61; and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 306–10.

material aid for Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia were dashed in dramatic fashion, however, with the signature of the pact of non-aggression between Ribbentrop and Soviet foreign minister, Viacheslav Molotov, on 23 August. French officials did not learn that the Germans and the Soviets were on the verge of a political accord until the international press broke the news on the evening of 22 August. Allied intelligence has been roundly criticized for not providing advance warning of the Nazi–Soviet Pact. Yet the nature of the discussions leading to the pact presented unique and formidable difficulties which proved impossible for French intelligence to overcome.¹³⁷ One difficulty was logistical. Hitler had apparently been seriously contemplating such a move since the end of April. But talks moved in fits and starts.¹³⁸ Although soundings were made by both German and Soviet officials in May and June, negotiations for a political agreement between the two states began in earnest only on 27 July. Until this time Hitler remained undecided. Only the failure of attempts to draw the Japanese into a military alliance and the need to isolate the Poles before the swiftly approaching deadline of 26 August spurred German policy into energetic pursuit of a deal with the USSR. Ribbentrop proposed to come to Moscow only on 14 August and the offer was accepted only after Hitler's intervention in the form of a personal letter to Stalin, only on 21 August. Knowledge of the talks, moreover, was limited to a small circle around Ribbentrop in Berlin and the German ambassador in Moscow, Count von Schulenburg on the German side and even fewer officials on the Soviet side.¹³⁹ The SR, whose best sources were within the military, did not possess informants in these circles. The German high command was not informed of the negotiations until the pact had been signed. Indeed the only apparent leakage came from the German embassy in Moscow from secretary Hans Heinrich [Johnnie] Herwath von Bittenfeld. Herwath provided an official from the American embassy with a series

¹³⁷ See the excellent study by D. C. Watt, 'An Intelligence Surprise: The Failure of the Foreign Office to Anticipate the Nazi–Soviet Pact', *LNS* 4 (1989), 513–34.

¹³⁸ On this question, see A. Nekrich, *Pariahs, Partners, Predators: German–Soviet Relations, 1922–1941* (New York, 1997), 45–61; A. Read and D. Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace: Hitler, Stalin and the Nazi–Soviet Pact* (London, 1988), 121–37; Watt, *How War Came*, 254–8, 372–80, 396–402; *id.*, 'The Initiation of Negotiations Leading to the Nazi–Soviet Pact: An Historical Problem', in C. Abramsky and P. J. Williams (eds.), *Essays in Honour of E. H. Carr* (London, 1974); A. Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London, 1991), 677–86; E. Robertson, 'German Mobilisation Preparations and the Treaties between Germany and the USSR of August–September 1939', *Paths to War*, 330–66 and G. Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1995), 62–91.

¹³⁹ A. Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (London, 1970), 161.

of detailed reports which were duly reported to the Secretary of State in Washington. Yet, for reasons which remain obscure, this information was shared with neither France nor Britain.¹⁴⁰

Another problem was that there was a great deal of background 'noise' from which accurate information had to be distinguished. In the spring of 1939 Europe was rife with rumours of Nazi–Soviet rapprochement. Many of these rumours had been produced by ongoing commercial negotiations of the kind that the Germans and the Soviets had been conducting intermittently throughout the Nazi period. Others were instigated by the Germans themselves as disinformation intended to intimidate. This seems to be the case with the only substantial piece of information which reached Paris through the military intelligence network. The source was once again General Bodenschatz. In another conversation with Stehlin on the evening of 7 May Bodenschatz warned that Hitler was resolved to take back Danzig and warned that, if France and Britain insisted on opposing Germany in this, an agreement would be struck with Russia. He implied that preliminary discussions were already advanced and the result would be a fourth partition of Poland. 'I cannot say more than this but you will one day learn that there is something brewing in the east [*dass etwas im Osten im Gange ist*]'.¹⁴¹ This was a mixture of truth and disinformation. At this juncture the Molotov–Ribbentrop agreement was a long way off. The motive for Bodenschatz's warnings was likely to sow discord among Germany's potential opponents, thereby providing leverage to obtain French compliance for demands on Poland.

Ambassador Coulondre's analysis of this information provides insight into the thinking of the military and diplomatic establishment regarding a Soviet alliance. Coulondre judged that Hitler was probably considering 'playing the Soviet card' as a means of isolating Poland and dissuading the democracies from intervening. He underlined the ideological gulf between Nazism and Communism, however, and considered that the hypothesis of Nazi–Soviet collusion 'ignores the fact that not only internal policy, but even external Nazi policy is built on the ideology of anti-Bolshevism'. A more likely explanation, Coulondre concluded, was that any dalliance with the Soviets was a diplomatic

¹⁴⁰ H. H. H. von Bittenfeld, *Against Two Evils* (London, 1981) and Andrew, *Secret Service*, 598–9.

¹⁴¹ Stehlin, *Témoignage pour l'histoire*, 59–65, 81–2, 147–53. Stehlin's report of this warning appears as an annex to *DDF*, 2ème série, xvi, no. 100, Coulondre to Berlin, 7 May 1939. See also Watt, *How War Came*, 237.

manoeuvre intended to drive a wedge between east and west. He judged that Stalin was too far-sighted to make a deal with his sworn enemy in order to gain a share of Poland. Such a manoeuvre would be a *pis-aller* should Britain and France retreat from an active policy in the east.¹⁴² This analysis, which credited Stalin with too much foresight and did not give due consideration to the Soviet leader's paranoia, appears to have been the general view in Paris. An attitude of complacency seems to have prevailed after the Soviets had accepted an agreement in principle and preparations were underway for military conversations with the Russians in the summer of 1939. Gauché, for example, informed the high command that although Germany was 'probably making overtures to the USSR' the Russians were 'not considering a pact with Germany' and these overtures were 'almost certainly without effect'.¹⁴³

In late July and early August, when the preliminaries to the Nazi-Soviet pact were hammered out, both French and British intelligence appear to have drawn blanks.¹⁴⁴ On 2 August an intelligence bulletin referred to 'the favourable progress of the Anglo-Franco-Russian negotiations which reinforce the threat of a two-front war' and remarked on the puzzling contradiction between the 'apparent calm' in German diplomatic activity and 'constantly intensifying' military preparations. The intelligence report for the following week made no mention whatsoever of a possible deal between the Germans and the Soviets.¹⁴⁵ It is, however, fair to ask how knowledge of Nazi-Soviet contacts could have changed French policy at this late date. The leader of the French delegation, General Joseph Doumenc, was unable to provide his opposite number, Marshal Klimenti Voroshilov, with permission for the Red Army to move across Poland to fight Germany. The Poles remained obdurate on this question despite intense pressure from Paris. Ultimately the desperate French delegation resorted to lying to Voroshilov on this score, but the Russians were not taken in.¹⁴⁶ Without permission of passage for the Red Army, which the Soviets required in order to overcome their mistrust of the West, military conversations with the Soviets were doomed to failure. Intelligence could not provide this.

¹⁴² *DDF*, 2ème série, xvi, no. 100, Coulondre to Berlin, 7 May 1939.

¹⁴³ SHAT, 1N 44-7, 'Compte-rendu de la réunion des Chefs d'État-Major du 24 mai'.

¹⁴⁴ On the British side, see Watt, 'An Intelligence Surprise', 524-5.

¹⁴⁵ SHAT, 7N 2516-1, 'Bulletins de Renseignements', 2 and 8 Aug. Frustratingly, the intelligence bulletin for the following week (15 Aug.) is missing from the archives.

¹⁴⁶ See Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 431-5.

VIII

It is interesting to note the parallels between French and British assessments of the German threat in the spring and summer of 1939. British appreciations of German power had also undergone something of a renaissance during the winter of 1938–9. Like French assessments, the estimates of the British intelligence community during this period were based on ‘a highly selective reading of intelligence facts’, and outlined a much less pessimistic picture of the balance of power for the Chamberlain government. Emphasis was placed on the staying power of the democratic states and the vulnerability of the German economy to various forms of economic warfare.¹⁴⁷ A strategic overview prepared in January by the British Joint Planning Committee was strikingly similar to the war plan produced by Gamelin’s staff in March. The British were also seduced by the prospect of increased popular unrest in Germany—particularly in the final months of peace. On 28 August, SIS chief Hugh (Quex) Sinclair reported ‘trouble with reservists in Germany’ and the Permanent Under-secretary at the Foreign Office judged that ‘the Germans are in an awful fix’.¹⁴⁸

Not coincidentally, early 1939 marked the beginning of truly extensive and fruitful cooperation between the French and British intelligence communities. Up to this point, intelligence sharing between the two states had been decidedly unequal. The French had been giving up much more information than they had been receiving in return. British intelligence sharing had been sporadic and confined to periods of crisis. This had changed by mid-January 1939 when, amid rumours of a German move against the lowlands, the British became very interested indeed in the information French intelligence had to offer. On 17 January SIS deputy-chief Stuart Menzies came to Paris for a two-day round of consultations with Rivet. In return, Major Guy Schlessler, chief of French counter-intelligence, travelled to London for a three-day conference at the end of January. The surviving records are sketchy, but they do reveal that the British were much more forthcoming with

¹⁴⁷ Quote from Wark, *Ultimate Enemy*, 216. See also Andrew, *Secret Service*, 599–601; Overy, ‘Strategic Intelligence’; and Hinsley *et al.*, *British Intelligence*, i, 31–3 and 60–73.

¹⁴⁸ The overview is in PRO, CAB, 53/44, COS 831 [JP], 26 Jan. 1939. See Wark’s analysis of this document in *Ultimate Enemy*, 212–14. On British planning for economic warfare, see Medicott, *Economic Blockade* and T. Munch-Petersen, *The Strategy of Phoney War: Britain, Sweden and the Iron Ore question* (Stockholm, 1981). Sinclair to Cadogan is from Andrew, *Secret Service*, 604–5.

foreign intelligence than they had been at any time since the end of the First World War.¹⁴⁹ With the onset of the crises of March and April a steady stream of intelligence flowed from the Military Intelligence Directorate at the War Office in London to the Deuxième Bureau in Paris. This flow of information was institutionalized when in-depth staff conversations began at the end of March. There was also collaboration in aerial reconnaissance. In 1939 the SIS and French air intelligence combined in an operation to purchase several Lockheed aircraft to be used, under cover of the business activities of Australian pilot Sidney Cotton, to photograph the length and breadth of Germany as well as Italian activity in the Mediterranean.¹⁵⁰ By far the most important cooperation, however, was in the realm of signals intelligence and it involved both the British and the Poles.

On 15 December 1938 the Wehrmacht and the German secret police (SD) began using two additional code-wheels in its Enigma transmissions.¹⁵¹ This presented Polish cryptanalysts with a challenge which they lacked the resources to overcome. Colonel Bertrand was contacted and a preliminary meeting of French, Polish, and British code-breakers was convened in Paris in January. Little headway was made at this meeting, however, since the Poles remained unwilling to reveal the extent of their progress. The fall of Prague and Germany's renunciation of the Nazi–Polish non-aggression pact of 1934 made the Poles much more cooperative. Another conference was arranged for 24 July at the instigation of Major Langer, this time in Poland. Present were Bertrand and an adjutant, Alastair Denniston and Dillwyn Knox of the GC and CS. The Poles revealed all at this meeting and agreed to share their technology and methods with the French and the British. On 16 August two reconstructed Enigma machines along with two 'cryptographic bombes' arrived in Paris. Biffy Dunderdale was presented with the equipment destined for Britain which he personally accompanied across the Channel. Cooperation did not end here. French and British code-breakers worked closely together, drawing on combined resources far greater than those available to the Poles, to

¹⁴⁹ See esp. SHAT, ARR, 503, dr. 251, 'Prévisions britanniques', 19 Feb. 1939; dr. 250, 'Compte-rendu de mission à Londres', 2 Feb. 1939 and *Carnets Rivet*, ii, 17 and 18 Jan. 1939.

¹⁵⁰ Hinsley *et al.*, *British Intelligence*, i. 496–9.

¹⁵¹ The following is once again taken from Hinsley, 'The Polish, French and British Contribution to the Breaking of the Enigma: A Revised Account', 949–59 and Kahn, *Seizing the Enigma*, 77–81.

solve the problem of the two extra rotors and a new plug-board system the Germans had introduced. After war broke out, Section D moved fifteen miles east of Paris to PC Bruno near Vincennes. Here, with the subsequent aid of Rejewski and a number of other Polish cryptologists who arrived after the fall of Poland, the first Luftwaffe Enigma key was broken on 17 January 1940. It was not until the very eve of the assault on France, however, that the Allies were able to read Luftwaffe traffic with any regularity. Success came too late to be of operational use to the French army in the campaign of May and June.

Without the resurgence in national spirit discussed in the last chapter, without the progress which had been made in rearmament and without a British military commitment, France would doubtless have pursued a very different policy in 1939. Once a strategy of deterrence had been adopted, however, intelligence functioned as the truss supporting both the policy of firmness and preparations for war. A more critical assessment of German military effectiveness and of German air power reinforced the conviction that Germany could not break through the continuous front. More detailed analyses of German economic and financial vulnerability, as well as the lack of support for war in Germany, gave rise to the hopes that a war could be won primarily through economic warfare thus avoiding the bloodletting of the last conflict. These were essential considerations in the French decision to make war in 1939. What is most interesting about assessments of the German threat at this point is that they were based on essentially the same body of evidence that was used to argue for retreat during the Munich crisis eleven months earlier. Germany had retained, and many respects even increased, its military superiority, both on the ground and in the air. The decisive difference was the perspective from which intelligence was interpreted.

Even German intentions were interpreted differently in the changed internal context of spring 1939. The notion that Hitler might be deterred was in contradiction to the long-standing interpretation of Nazi foreign policy and flew in the face of increasing evidence of German preparations for war with Poland. But hopes for deterrence bolstered the government's commitment to policies of rearmament and defiance. Since the entire defence and diplomatic establishment was committed to this course, there was a significant temptation for intelligence officials to produce assessments which appeared to support

government policy.¹⁵² Although the hope that war could be averted if only France could muster the courage to face down Hitler was mistaken, it was the necessary psychological corollary to a *politique de fermeté*.

¹⁵² On this phenomenon, see Janis, *Groupthink*, 245–76; Handel, ‘Politics of Intelligence’, 198–219; and Jervis, ‘Perceiving and Coping with Threat’, 24–33.

Decision for War

A NUMBER of persistent misperceptions have clouded our understanding of France's decision to go to war over Poland. Searching for evidence of defeatism, several historians have portrayed the Daladier government as stumbling into war, clutching blindly at the coat-tails of Great Britain and hoping against hope to avoid fulfilling its obligations to Poland.¹ The evidence simply does not support this interpretation. France went to war in 1939 with a clear strategy and a growing confidence that Germany could be defeated in a long war. The alternative, to let Germany have its way with Poland, would have been to surrender to the Reich control of the natural resources it lacked to wage a *guerre d'usure*. This was deemed unacceptable by France's military and civilian leadership in September of 1939.

The decision was taken on 23 August 1939. News had broken of Ribbentrop's voyage to Moscow that morning. With tension over Danzig and the corridor reaching a crescendo, the entire French defence establishment assembled in Daladier's chambers on the rue St Dominique in the late afternoon.² The meeting was called at the behest of Bonnet, who hoped to convince his colleagues that France must withdraw its commitment to Poland. Daladier opened the meeting by posing three questions. Could France stand by while Poland and Romania were wiped off the map of Europe? How could France oppose Germany? What measures should be taken for the moment? Bonnet mounted an outright attack on the guarantee. He warned that

¹ Adamthwaite, *France*, 343–52; *id.*, *Grandeur and Misery*, 220–3; Watt, *How War Came*, 544–50, 582–5. J.-B. Duroselle was less categorical at this stage but nonetheless concluded his magisterial study with the observation: 'For this pacific people, war itself was the first defeat' (*La Décadence*, 493).

² *DDF*, 2ème série, xviii, no. 324. For divers analyses of this meeting, see Adamthwaite, *France*, 340–1; Young, *In Command of France*, 241–2; Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 474–6; and du Réau, *Daladier*, 358–9.

no support could be expected from the USSR, Romania, or Turkey. But the foreign minister was virtually alone in his advocacy of further retreat. Gamelin responded that 'France has no choice' but to honour its commitment to Poland. He considered frankly that there was no hope of preventing the defeat of Poland. He judged, however, that the Poles would mount an 'honourable resistance'. This, significantly, would prevent Germany from turning with the bulk of her forces against France before the following spring. 'By this time,' he observed, 'England will be at our side.'

Responding to Daladier's second question, Gamelin and Darlan replied that the army and navy were ready.³ La Chambre, rather than Vuillemin (who was nonetheless present), articulated the position of the air force. His response was unequivocal. He stressed the 'great progress realized since September 1938' had transformed the situation in the air. 'In terms of fighters,' the air minister stated, 'we now have modern machines under mass production.' He judged that '[d]espite what we know of German air strength, [which totals] 4,000 first-line aircraft and 5,000 reserves, in terms of quality the situation is very much improved'. La Chambre concluded by advising the gathered ministers and service chiefs that '[t]he situation of our aviation must not weigh on the government's decision as it did in 1938'.⁴ The meeting ended with the resolution to continue preliminary measures in anticipation of a general mobilization. Bonnet had failed in his attempt to achieve a reconsideration of France's commitment to Poland.

The importance of this meeting to the decision for war has been ignored or played down by historians searching for evidence of defeatism in political and military circles. Daladier, in particular, is depicted as torn with doubt, flirting with the idea of another international conference mediated by Italy while Poland reeled under the fury of the German invasion.⁵ But the evidence contradicts this view. Daladier remained determined to resist Hitler through to the French declaration of war on 3 September 1939. The journal kept by Bonnet's personal secretary along with accounts of several diarists present at meetings of the cabinet on the eve of war together illustrate

³ For Gamelin's subsequent claim that this statement was misrepresented, that he had said merely that mobilization orders were ready, see *Servir*, i. 23–43.

⁴ For La Chambre's version of this meeting, which differs only slightly from the version in the *DDF*, see SHAA, Fonds La Chambre, Z 12967, 'Réunion de 23 September 1939'.

⁵ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin pbk edn. (London, 1963), 320–2; Adamthwaite, *France*, 335–52; *id.*, *Grandeur and Misery*, 221–2; and Watt, *How War Came*, 590.

that, despite Bonnet's efforts, Daladier consistently refused to consider such a conference without complete German withdrawal from Poland.⁶ Nor does the notorious delay in the French declaration of war constitute evidence of wavering. The deferral of the declaration of war was a product rather of French obsession with frontier security. Both Gamelin and Darlan had insisted that any declaration be deferred until national mobilization procedures were well under way and the *couverture* force was already in place. The chief fear was that German bombing would disrupt the process of mobilization before it had been completed. Significantly, once France had declared general mobilization, Gamelin vigorously opposed Bonnet's suggestions that France halt the process in mid-stride.⁷ Although Bonnet and his entourage worked until the bitter end to avoid war, the die had been cast with the invasion of Poland.

General Vuillemin did not share the optimism of his minister. Significantly, although Gamelin and Darlan had spoken for the army and the navy respectively, Vuillemin had remained silent during La Chambre's exposition on the state of French air power in Daladier's chambers on 23 August. This was because he did not agree with his minister's views. On 26 August Vuillemin prepared a lengthy overview of the situation in the air which contradicted the views of La Chambre. According to one of his deputy chiefs of staff, Vuillemin intended that, in the event of a catastrophe, this note was to absolve him of all responsibility for advising the government that the air force was ready to face war with Germany.⁸ Reviewing developments in the air since Munich, Vuillemin admitted that 'great progress' had been made by Britain and France in closing the gap with Germany. He also judged that the Armée de l'Air was capable of protecting French airspace from massive bombing raids and that, in terms of numbers of fighters, France would draw even with Germany in six months' time. He warned, however, that '[t]he air power of the principal Allied states is still dominated by that of the totalitarian states'. France could put no more than 1,357 planes into the air against the 4,772 strong first-line

⁶ The 'Journal de Georges Bonnet' can be consulted in the *Papiers* 1940: Bonnet, vol. 4, MAÉ.

⁷ This delay would have no effect on the fate of the Poles as no significant operations were planned in any event. On Gamelin's determination to go to war over Poland, see Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 310, 314–15 and Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 481. For Darlan's views on the importance of preliminary measures, see *Lettres et notes*, 'Réflexions sur la situation actuelle', 3 May 1939, 98–9.

⁸ Teyssier, 'Général Vuillemin', 112–13.

fleet of the Luftwaffe.⁹ Vuillemin's note was a scarcely disguised request that war be delayed.

In contrast to the situation the previous September, Vuillemin's warnings did not exercise an important influence on the government. In resolving to stand firm, France's civilian and military leadership adopted a completely different attitude towards strategic considerations. German numerical superiority in terms of divisions and aircraft was no longer deemed of overriding importance. Instead, economic and financial strength was viewed as decisive. Existing studies of French policy have neglected this dimension to perceptions of the strategic balance in Paris. At the High Court at Riom, both Gamelin and La Chambre were charged with misrepresenting the strategic situation on 23 August. This indictment has been endorsed by a number of historians who have characterized Gamelin's position as a 'bluff'.¹⁰ Gamelin was not bluffing. Along with the rest of the French government, he placed his hopes—for hopes they were, few states can be certain of victory when they take the decision for war—in a lengthy conflict in which the superior resources of the British and French empires would prove decisive. Germany's vulnerability in this type of war had been outlined in rich detail by hundreds of intelligence reports throughout the 1930s.

Added to these considerations was an enduring hope that deterrence would work, which was based on the perception that German morale was wavering. When the German attack on Poland was postponed on 25 August, this was erroneously interpreted as evidence of Hitler hesitating before the prospect of a world war. In Berlin, Coulondre reckoned that Hitler could be faced down and made his famous appeal 'tenir, tenir, tenir' which Daladier read before the cabinet on 30 August.¹¹ With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that Hitler's resolve for war with Poland had not wavered. But we also know that there was misperception on both sides of this war of nerves. Hitler had

⁹ SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12964, dr. 2, Vuillemin to La Chambre, 26 Aug. 1939. In his memoirs Gauché claims to have warned General Colson on the very eve of war that '[n]ever in its history has France gone to war under such unfavourable conditions'. Gauché, *Le Deuxième Bureau*, 104. But there is no documentary record of the chief of army intelligence expressing such a view to his superiors. There is instead the steady stream of intelligence *comptes-rendus* relaying news of unrest in Germany—many of them signed by Gauché personally—discussed in the last chapter.

¹⁰ Cited from Watt, *Too Serious a Business*, 121–2; Taylor, *Origins*; and R. Paxton, *Parades and Politics at Vichy: The French High Command under Pétain* (Princeton, 1966), 66.

¹¹ For a dramatic account of the stormy Cabinet meeting of 30 August, see de Monzie, *Ci-devant*, 147–9. The original copy of Coulondre's celebrated letter to Daladier is in AN, 496 AP 14, dr. 5, sdr. a, 25 Aug. 1939.

convinced himself that Britain and France would not march and had delayed 'Case White' (the attack on Poland) in order to increase the pressure on the Western governments and to bolster the resolve of his suddenly vacillating Italian ally. The hopes of both sides were to be bitterly disappointed.¹²

Crucially, the French government went to war with an exaggerated interpretation of the strains on the German economy. The reality was that, while the Nazi government had made great efforts to subordinate all aspects of economic life to preparations for war, the German economy remained a disorganized morass of competing interests. The situation would not change fundamentally until Albert Speer took control of armaments production in 1942.¹³ To French observers, however, the German economy appeared to exhibit all of the attributes of an economic system mobilized for war. Extensive state control over every key sector of the economy was analogous to wartime conditions. The requisitioning of vital resources and transport facilities, efforts to control the production of non-essential items, the promotion of substitutes and synthetics, controls over the domestic consumption of all types of materials, and the control of foreign trade had all been measures adopted by the German government during the last war. Once again, an inability to see past entrenched stereotypes about German efficiency and to penetrate Nazi propaganda created misperceptions about economic conditions in Germany. This time, however, errors in judgement led to an unduly optimistic reading of the situation in Germany.

Intelligence analyses of the state of the German economy were distilled in an assessment prepared by the Deuxième Bureau as France moved from peace to war.¹⁴ This appreciation provided a powerful endorsement of the long-war principles of French strategy. 'Germany', it began, 'has gone to war under completely different circumstances than the Allies.' Because it had been largely mobilized before the outbreak of hostilities, the German economy would be operating at full steam from the beginning. The study predicted that, after a brief *décalage*, the British and French economies would soon be outperforming the

¹² Watt, *How War Came*, 479–97. For an excellent discussion of the methodological difficulties in measuring the impact of misperception on decisions for war, see R. Jervis, 'War and Misperception', in I. Rothberg and T. Rabb (eds.), *The Origins and Prevention of Major Wars* (New York, 1989), 101–26.

¹³ A. S. Milward, *The German Economy at War* (London, 1965) and Overy, *Goering*, *passim*.

¹⁴ SHAT, 27N 9–4, 'Faiblesses économiques de l'Allemagne', no date but prepared at the outbreak of war. Richard Overy's somewhat intuitive view of French economic assessments on the eve of war are borne out by the archival record.

German. For Germany, the situation would only get worse with the effects of an Allied blockade. Stocks of petrol were estimated to last from twelve to eighteen months 'depending on the intensity of operations', while iron ore reserves were considered sufficient for a maximum of six to eight months under wartime conditions. Significantly, the importance of the Nazi–Soviet agreement was implicitly played down in this study. It was asserted that the Reich implicitly expected to receive large quantities of vital raw materials from the Soviets. Both the ministry of defence and the foreign ministry judged that Soviet petrol production was barely adequate for internal consumption while iron ore production was devoted entirely to the industrialization projects of the third Five Year Plan. This was certainly unduly optimistic and would prove utterly unfounded over the ensuing months. Finally, the estimate stressed that Germany did not possess the financial means to purchase raw materials abroad. Lacking an '*armature financière*', it would be unable to compete with France and especially Britain for raw materials on the international market. The study concluded by underscoring the 'capital importance of the blockade and economic warfare' and that 'time is working on the side of the Allies'. It warned, however, against hasty optimism: 'It is essential to avoid the temptation to conclude that Germany is already in dire straits. . . . The system will collapse in time, perhaps in the medium term, but only when accumulated reserves have been used up and when Germany is unable to replenish them.' Economic warfare would take time to have the desired effect.¹⁵

The vital question therefore became whether or not the French army could turn back the initial German deluge and force a *guerre de longue durée*. Consequently, the assurances given by Gamelin up to and including the meeting of 23 August were indeed decisive.¹⁶ Historians interpreting the events of 1939–40 through the prism of hindsight

¹⁵ SHAT, 27N 9–4, 'Faiblesses économiques de l'Allemagne'. See also 27N 9–4, 'Collaboration économique germano-soviétique', 12 Sept. 1939; 7N 3137–2, 'Les Possibilités de ravitaillement de l'Allemagne par l'URSS', no date but certainly Autumn 1939; and MAÉ, Papiers Massigli, vol. 22, 'Industrie pétrolière russe', 25 Jan. 1940.

¹⁶ From Gamelin's perspective the German invasion of Poland would provide France with the opportunity to complete its mobilization procedures and to ensure the inviolability of its frontier under the best possible circumstances. It would also provide time for substantial British forces to arrive. Polish resistance would also give French industry time to further close the gap with Germany while the economic blockade began to wear down the German war effort. On this question, see J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, 'La France devant l'Allemagne et la guerre au début de septembre 1939', in Hildebrand and Werner (eds.), *Deutschland und Frankreich*, 577–616 and Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 310–13.

have too often ignored the fact that France's civilian and military leadership was confident that, provided the army was permitted time to mobilize, the continuous front would hold. Even Charles de Gaulle, a notorious critic of French military policy, was struck by Gamelin's confidence at the outset of war: '[Gamelin], whose intelligence, keenness of perception, and self-control were of the very highest order, certainly had no doubt that in the coming battle he was bound in the end to win.'¹⁷

Underpinning Gamelin's confidence were the conclusions of every major intelligence assessment of German doctrine, which concluded that the German army would founder on the continuous front. Daladier was equally confident in the French system and articulated this confidence in adjourning the meeting of 23 August with the observation that, thanks to the 'massive effort' which had been devoted to the construction of fortifications and to the production of fighters, France could 'take comfort' in the security provided by its frontiers fortifications.¹⁸

Anticipation of a long war similarly framed La Chambre's perspective on the strategic situation. On 23 August the air minister made no pretension that the French air force was the equal of the Luftwaffe. What he did state was the situation was much improved and would continue to improve. The essential consideration in evaluations of the air situation was that the steady progress in fighter production had provided the Armée de l'Air with the means to prevent German bombers from attacking France's urban and industrial centres with impunity. Air policy complemented the defensive-offensive configuration of French grand strategy. There would be no suicidal attempts to bomb Berlin during the opening stages of the conflict. The air force would instead bide its time, allowing French and British aircraft production to further close the gap with the Axis states. In the meantime the overriding priority would be to secure French airspace. This had been the orientation of French air strategy since the advent of La Chambre to the ministry in the spring of 1938. During his first appearance before the aeronautical commission of the Chamber La Chambre had laid out his strategic conception clearly: 'In the initial phase of a war our first

¹⁷ C. de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre I: L'Appel* (Paris, 1954), 41. Martin Alexander and Eugenia Kiesling has provided overwhelming evidence of this confidence in the continuous front in *The Republic in Danger*, 312–14 and *Arming against Hitler*, 136–88.

¹⁸ DDF, 2ème série, xviii, no. 324, 'Procès-verbal de la réunion tenue au ministre de la Guerre le 23 août 1939'.

priority must be to put our airspace under lock and key, as we have done for our frontiers.¹⁹ The urgency attached to securing the aerial frontier was the primary reason fighters had been given priority over bombers during the first stage of Plan V. Vuillemin's judgement that the Armée de l'Air could defend France's mobilization procedures and could provide protection for large urban centres was of crucial importance to the position taken by La Chambre on the eve of war.

Of the three services, the Marine entered the war under the most satisfactory conditions. The *belle* Marine of 1939 totalled 600,000 tonnes and included the two *Dunkerque* class battle-cruisers, three smaller *Provence* class modernized battleships, seven heavy cruisers, twelve medium cruisers, thirty-two of the superb *Terrible* class fast destroyers, and sixty-four 'blue-water' submarines. And an additional 163 ships totalling 360,000 tonnes were under construction. Among these were four large battleships of 35,000 tonnes or more, all mounting either 380mm or 408mm guns. Two of these, the *Richelieu* and the *Jean Bart*, were scheduled to enter into service in early 1941.²⁰ The French fleet remained superior to both the Kriegsmarine and the Italian navy in virtually all categories. There were weaknesses anti-aircraft protection throughout the fleet was insufficient, the Marine was far behind the Royal Navy in the development of sonar and its naval air arm was inferior to those of the other Great Power fleets. But most of these were flaws common to every navy in 1939. Even Darlan was forced to admit that '[t]he government has responded to the menace constituted by the rearmament of certain foreign powers by giving the navy the necessary means for accomplishing its missions'.²¹ Most important of all was the military alliance with Great Britain. Although the perennial struggle for credits made the naval staff loathe to acknowledge the importance of the entente, in the summer of 1939 France could finally count on the full support of the world's greatest maritime power. All of these factors underpinned Darlan's 23 August assurance that the Marine was ready. The French navy had experienced an impressive renaissance during the inter-war period and stood ready to play an important role in the coming war.

¹⁹ AAN, Commission de l'aéronautique, 16ème Législature, no. 4, La Chambre Audition, 16 Feb. 1938.

²⁰ SHM, 1BB2 172-3, 'Situation des bâtiments autorisés et non admis au service actif', 1 June 1939 and P. Masson, 'La Belle Marine de 1939', in *Histoire Militaire de la France*, iii, under the direction of G. Pedroncini (Paris, 1991), 147-62.

²¹ Cited in Huan and Coutau-Bégarie, *Darlan*, 136-7.

By the summer of 1939 there was no mistaking the threat which Hitler's foreign policy posed to France's survival as a European power. Statesmen elected to act before the Reich's bid for supremacy became too strong to resist. Outlining France's strategic policy to his first war cabinet Daladier stated that France faced a choice between 'fighting or submitting to Nazi domination'. He submitted that France 'cannot hesitate' but must 'make war and win with as few losses as possible as quickly as possible'. To do so, he advised, the most important thing was to 'impose an economic blockade as complete as possible and as quickly as possible'.²² There were other political considerations which were at least as important as the balance of forces in the decision to make war. The government was in no position to abandon Poland the way it had done Czechoslovakia. Another such collapse would be indefensible given the government's efforts to restore French national spirit and in light of the sacrifices which had been demanded in the name of national defence. Since the previous April France had lived in a state of permanent semi-mobilization. Another surrender would certainly have brought down the government.²³ Nor, after nearly twenty years of patient effort, was the French government inclined to relinquish the British alliance just when it had been secured. To negotiate a separate peace with Germany would have sounded the death knell of France's status as an important power. As Gamelin explained at Riom: 'In the end, after the Russo-German entente, if we had given way we were condemned more than ever to recognise the hegemony of Germany over Europe . . . to have given way, to have trusted Germany, would have been to become in our turn the "brilliant second"'.²⁴ The path of resistance had been chosen in the aftermath of Munich.

²² MAÉ, *Papiers Maurice Dejean* (PA-AP-288), vol. 2, 'Note pour le Conseil des Ministres', 9 Sept.

²³ Crémieux-Brilhac, *La Guerre: Oui ou non?*, 55–67 and du Réau, *Daladier*, 365–6.

²⁴ Cited in Alexander, *Republic in Danger*, 313.

Conclusion

IN THE aftermath of the fall of France Nazi Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels reviewed the events of the 1930s and wondered at French passivity in face of such an obviously serious threat:

In 1933 a French minister should have said (and had I been a French minister-president I would surely have said): the man who wrote the book *Mein Kampf*, in which this and that is written, has become Chancellor. We cannot tolerate that man in our neighbourhood. Either he goes, or we march. That would have been totally logical.¹

France did not march in 1933. Nor did it march in 1936 over the remilitarization of the Rhineland; nor in 1938 over Czechoslovakia. Implicit in Goebbels's observation is that either the French did not recognize the threat to their security (in which case they were blind), or that they saw the threat but chose to ignore its implications (in which case they were both blind and stupid). Dr Goebbels's interpretation of French foreign policy has gained wide acceptance in the historiography of the origins of the Second World War.

French intelligence has borne its share of the blame in historical analyses for failing to provide decision makers with a clear conception of the dimensions of the Nazi threat. This is not surprising. Academic study of the role of intelligence in diplomacy, strategic planning, and military operations has tended to focus on explaining intelligence failures.² And nearly all of the problematic trends and tendencies that scholars have identified in the intelligence process have emerged in this study. Assessments of Nazi intentions and capabilities were conditioned by entrenched assumptions about the German national character. Stereotypes concerning Teutonic efficiency underpinned the ill-founded assumption that the German economy was a highly organized industrial juggernaut. This led to egregious miscalculations of the productive capacities of Germany's defence industry which, in

¹ Cited in H. Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil?* (New York, 1993), 311–12.

² For a discussion, see M. Lowenthal, 'The Burdensome Concept of Failure', in Alfred C. Maurer, M. Tunstall, and J. Keagle (eds.), *Intelligence: Policy and Process* (Boulder, Colo., 1985), 43–56 and Betts, 'Analysis, War and Decision', 61–89.

turn, underpinned serious overestimations of the pace of German rearmament. Similarly the image of the average German as militaristic, uncritical, and inherently aggressive was at the heart of assessments not only of Nazi foreign policy but also of the political situation in Germany and especially the war-making capacity of the Hitler state. Appreciations of German air doctrine were consistently flawed by 'mirror-imaging'. Air intelligence officers erroneously assumed that the Luftwaffe would secure the long-range bombing role in German doctrine that the French air force was unable to obtain in French war plans. In the summer of 1939 preconceptions about the ideological fervour of Hitler and Stalin combined with a symphony of background 'noise' to prevent French analysts from predicting the Nazi-Soviet pact.

The near monopoly that the three military services possessed over intelligence gathering and analysis was a serious flaw in the policy making process. The adoption of the 'worst case' approach to estimating German military power was a virtual reflex tendency among military officials charged with the heavy task of assuring French security. This is understandable. But control of the intelligence process by the military meant that assessments could be dismissed (or simply ignored) by civilian decision makers convinced that estimates reflected the vested interests of the military services rather than any external reality. This was often the attitude of political elites who were already committed to a policy of disarmament and, later, appeasement, between 1933 and 1938. And, to a certain extent, this skepticism was well-founded. At key stages during the 1930s estimates of German capabilities were distorted to serve the political purposes of senior military leaders. This trend stretched back to the 1920s when the high command produced inflated estimates of German military potential to avoid a complete dismemberment of the army. In 1934 Weygand and his staff consistently distorted German military power in the fight against disarmament and budget cuts. Similarly, Gamelin and the high command manipulated intelligence figures during and after the Rhineland crisis in order to secure funds for large-scale rearmament. At the air ministry Denain used the same tactics to obtain funding for the ill-fated air rearmament programme of 1934 and Cot later distorted intelligence to protect his position within the Popular Front government. Darlan and the naval staff were also guilty of presenting unduly pessimistic estimates of the pace of the German naval build-up. The common denominator in all of these cases was the desire to preserve and expand the defence budget.

It could be argued that military leaders were justified in misrepresenting the strategic situation to their political masters. The reality was that Germany had gained a decisive head start in the race to rearm. The problem was that the constant tendency to exaggerate German strength undermined the credibility of intelligence assessments, providing civilian officials with an excuse to ignore the warnings of the *Deuxième Bureaux*.

Ethnic typecasting, 'worst case' thinking, and bureaucratic politics all contributed to the chronic tendency to exaggerate German capabilities through to 1938. But the more positive estimates of the military balance that characterized the period after Munich were also politicized. It is worth repeating that intelligence appreciations are not formulated in a vacuum. In the months immediately preceding the war, assessments were clearly influenced by the government's resolve to stand up to further German aggression. This is the only explanation for the fact that a much more confident appreciation of the balance of power emerged from a very similar corpus of intelligence 'facts'. France's military and civilian leaders required estimates that would support the policy of firmness that they had adopted and the intelligence services provided these estimates. In this instance the effects of the 'producer/consumer' dynamic led to an unduly optimistic portrait of the strategic situation.

It is important, however, to place the failures of French intelligence in perspective. The French *Deuxième Bureaux* were not alone in misreading the pace of German rearmament. Nor were French statesmen the only ones labouring under false assumptions about the balance of power and the state of the international system. Men like Hitler and Ribbentrop in Berlin, or Chamberlain and Halifax in London, were also captives of their own delusions. Moreover, the difficulties inherent in assessing the Nazi economy were unprecedented. Never had economic power been considered so important to a nation's capacity to wage war. At the same time, however, never had a modern state so openly flaunted the principles of classical economics. The mistakes which were made in rating German economic vulnerability should be considered within this context. Over fifty years later, with the benefits of hindsight and a wealth of official documents, historians still cannot agree on the true state of the German economy on the eve of war.

A balanced view of the role of intelligence must acknowledge that French decision makers were provided with a reliable interpretation of the long-term objectives of Nazi foreign policy. The fact that this

interpretation rested on crude generalizations about the German national character does not change the fact that it was accurate in its essentials. It is also clear that the *Deuxième Bureaux* had a reasonably sound understanding of the dynamics of the Nazi state. Their analysis of the relationship between rearmament, the Four Year Plan, and foreign policy, for example, was much more penetrating than that of British intelligence. Furthermore, the army and air force *Deuxième Bureaux* were very effective in reconstructing the German order of battle and produced detailed and accurate breakdowns of the composition and deployment of both the *Reichswehr* and the *Luftwaffe*.

The most important flaws in the intelligence process were: an inability to convince civilian policy makers of the danger presented to France by Hitler's foreign policy; a penchant for exaggerating the productive capacity of the Reich's armaments and aircraft industries; and, following from this, a tendency to overestimate German military preparedness. These shortcomings were not the product of an endemic defeatism or moral decay either among intelligence officials or civilian and military elites. Ethnocentrism, 'worst case' thinking, and politicization are in no way unique to French intelligence between the wars.

At the same time, however, structural flaws unique to the French system did inhibit the effective use of intelligence. The most important of these was military control of intelligence gathering. This created a formidable series of information filters separating analysts from policy makers. This problem was mitigated after Daladier combined the roles of Premier and defence minister's after April of 1938. From this point forward a more accurate view of Hitler's aims prevailed at the summit of power in Paris. The system also left the foreign ministry without alternative sources of secret information about Hitler's intentions. This flaw was compounded by the unfortunate attitude towards *Deuxième Bureau* analyses exhibited by foreign ministry officials. Events ultimately compelled the foreign ministry to admit its error and seek assistance from the *Deuxième Bureau* in establishing a diplomatic secret intelligence network similar to the SIS in Britain. By this time, however, precious time had been lost.

Nor should the intelligence community be held wholly accountable for its failure to influence policy. There were many factors impinging on French national policy during the pre-war decade. Foremost among these was the Great Depression. When the world economic crisis hit France it did not create millions of unemployed in a short period of time. It instead lingered with paralysing effect over French society for

the rest of the decade. While after 1935 most of the industrialized world began to experience some recovery, the French economy lagged well behind through to the end of the 1930s. Moreover, the vagaries of the Depression exacerbated the divisions in French society and reinforced prevailing perceptions of decline. Intelligence reports added another dimension to this sense of national impotence by providing the ominous image of German power that haunted French policy makers. Deuxième Bureau reports highlighted the sharp contrasts between the spectacular recovery of industrial production in Germany and the crisis in production in France; between the unity and discipline of the Hitler State and the inner turmoil which plagued France; between the frantic pace of unrestricted rearmament in Germany and the enfeebled efforts of French rearmament in its early stages; between the incredible growth of the Luftwaffe and the pathetic state of the Armée de l'Air and between the progressive militarization of German society from top to bottom and the pacifism which was so firmly entrenched in the French national psyche. It is surely significant in this respect that the most serious errors during this period were those of estimation where no reliable information was available. In these cases, most notably armaments and aircraft production, 'worst case' assessments were adopted. In a sense what the Deuxième Bureau gave with one hand in the form of an accurate reading of German intentions, it took with the other with its overblown appreciations of German power.

One year later the internal situation had improved greatly. The economy was recovering, the government appeared strong and had put a halt to incessant labour strife, rearmament was taking off, and Britain had made a firm continental military commitment. Decision makers responded to these developments by adopting a much more positive outlook on the situation. Responding to these new circumstances, the intelligence services produced a series of assessments which cast much the same information as had been available one year previously in a much more favourable light. Once again the errors which were made were in estimation and projection. German morale was underestimated, the ability of the Wehrmacht to break through the *front continu* was misjudged, and German economic problems were exaggerated.

Given the reciprocal relationship between intelligence and policy, the charge that good intelligence was consistently ignored by ignorant politicians is misleading. Like the majority of statesmen in the history of relations between states, French decision makers best integrated

intelligence into their decisions when it reinforced their assumptions and complemented their predetermined policies. Thus from 1933 to 1935 intelligence on German intentions and capabilities was generally ignored (with the important exception of the Doumergue interlude) by governments committed to the politics of disarmament and European conciliation. Then, from 1936 through to the autumn of 1938, assessments of intentions were ignored but appreciations that warned of German military superiority played a more important role in the calculations of a civilian leadership determined on a policy of appeasement. Finally, from Munich to the outbreak of war, improvements in French self-perception combined with further evidence of Hitler's aggressive intentions to bring about a change of policy. The hope that a lasting understanding could be reached with Nazi Germany was replaced among key decision makers by the realization that France must take a stand or lose its status as a European power. Thereafter intelligence on German intentions and capabilities played a central role in national policy. France's domestic situation was thus crucial in determining the way intelligence was used by its civilian leadership.³ This is why better intelligence on German capabilities would have made little difference to the evolution of policy at decisive junctures such as March 1936 or September 1938. Decisions at this stage were based more on perceptions of French weakness than calculations of German strength.

Individual predispositions were also central in shaping the 'perceptual lens' through which intelligence was interpreted.⁴ The Doumergue cabinet, comprised mainly of patriotic nationalists of the pre-1914 variety, was far more amenable to the pessimistic estimates of German intentions than its predecessors. Its policies of alliance diplomacy and modest rearmament were emasculated when it was replaced by the Laval government. Similarly, the socialist government of Léon Blum was more willing to adopt a vigorous anti-Nazi line than were Laval and his collaborators. But it is important to remember that even the more robust responses to the German menace were constrained in decisive ways by France's diplomatic, political, and economic vulnerability.

³ Eugenia Kiesling and Elizabeth Kier have both come to a similar conclusion about the formulation of French military doctrine during this period. See Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler*, 116–69 and 171–5 and Kier, *Imagining War*, 140–1 and 158–9.

⁴ The concept of a 'perceptual lens' is taken from S. Smith, *Belief Systems in International Politics* (London, 1987), 11.

This is not to say that the entire intelligence process was subjective and therefore of no importance. On the contrary, it is clear that Deuxième Bureau appreciations played a decisive role at important stages throughout the pre-war decade. It reminds us, however, that intelligence is only one among many considerations in the decision making process of a modern state.⁵ It also reinforces the central point that the interpretation and use of intelligence is conditioned by the perceptions and priorities of those responsible for making decisions. Michael Handel's dictum that 'in intelligence, facts do not speak for themselves' is worth repeating.

Once the intelligence dimension is fitted into the larger picture it is possible to view French foreign and defence policy from a different perspective. Neither theories of *décadence* nor the opposing interpretation, with its somewhat deterministic emphasis on strategic and economic factors, provide a satisfactory explanation for why France retreated up to 1938 but chose to fight in 1939. A more compelling interpretation would emphasize the links between policy making and the evolution of material and psychological preparedness for war. The Munich crisis was a watershed in this process and functioned as the pivot upon which the French response to Hitler turned. In September 1938 the nation had been carried to the very brink of a war for which it was neither psychologically nor materially prepared. The brush with war was a dash of cold water to the face of a nation whose focus had been overwhelmingly inward. The realization that war might be imminent, whether France was prepared or not, was a crucial stage in the nation's move from peace to war. From this point onward the purse strings were opened for rearmament and public support began to coalesce for a *politique de fermeté*. French policy became more robust and assertive as guarantees were extended and negotiations were undertaken with the Soviets. Intelligence played an important role in the development of this more confident outlook by providing more positive appreciations of the balance of power.

There was an unmistakable element of forced optimism in all of this, however. The importance attributed to economic warfare as a sort of 'cure-all' during the final months of peace suggests that civilian and military leaders were casting about for reassurances that the path of resistance was the correct one. The optimism with which the French

⁵ For a discussion of this key point that is full of insights, see Jervis, 'Strategic Intelligence and Effective Policy'.

government went to war, typified in the omni-present billboard slogans such as '*Nous vaincrons parce que nous sommes les plus forts*', was late in developing and proved fragile when put to the test.

Finally, at the heart of the French response to the Nazi menace was a profound abhorrence of war. Goebbels's inability to grasp this fundamental consideration underlines the crucial difference between the policies of Nazi Germany and Republican France. The former was pursuing a policy of war and conquest while the latter was seeking to preserve both peace and the last vestiges of its Great Power status. In order to rearm on the same scale as Germany, the very fabric of French society needed to undergo a profound transformation and this was a slow process. As a result, for most of the pre-war decade, the Nazi dictatorship was formulating domestic policy and conducting statecraft under a completely different set of rules than was democratic France.⁶ Under these conditions the initiative inevitably fell to the Germans and to a leader with a diabolical instinct for exploiting the weaknesses of his adversaries. The unique mixture of visionary and adroit politician in the person of the Führer presented French statesmen with a challenge which had no precedent in the history of Great Power politics. As Didelet observed: 'What is most unsettling is that Hitler is not only a mystic, a sort of living "Unknown Soldier" with a mission to regenerate his people, he is also a politician of the highest order.'⁷ Hitler posed the type of threat to which those in France who had lived through the blood-letting of 1914–18 were understandably slow to respond. On balance, it is the determination of Germany's leaders to plunge their country into another such nightmare that is more difficult to comprehend.

⁶ On this question, see M. Knox, 'Conquest, Foreign and Domestic in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany', *JMH* 56 (1984), 1–57.

⁷ MAÉ, Papiers 1940: Pierre Lacoste, vol. 4, Didelet to Weygand, 31 Mar. 1939.

Appendices

APPENDIX C. *German air strength, 1936–1939*

	Deuxième Bureau estimates	German air strength (serviceability)
March 1936	900	1,300 (1,000)
January 1937	1,600	1,900 (1,600)
June 1938	3,247	3,200 (1,669)
September 1939	4,561	3,825 (2,893)

Sources: SHAA, 2B 58, 1936; SHAT 7N 2599, 'Considérations sur le développement de l'Armée de l'Air allemande', 13 Jan. 1937; SHAT, 7N 2697, 'Ordre de bataille de l'armée de l'air allemande: 1 septembre 1938'; SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12936, Vuillemin to La Chambre, 26 Aug. 1939; and Overy, 'German Air Strength', 468.

APPENDIX D. *Monthly German aircraft production, 1936–1939*

	Deuxième Bureau estimates of production of combat aircraft	German aircraft production (combat aircraft)
March 1936	250	426 (128)
June 1937	360	467 (221)
June 1938	450	436 (279)
September 1938	1,000	425 (285)
June 1939	600–800	691 (394)

Sources: SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1936; SHAA, 2B 57, *BdR*, 2ème trimestre 1937; MAÉ, Eu 18–40, Allemagne, no. 663, 'Accroissement du matériel de l'armée de l'air en Allemagne', 9 Nov. 1938; Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12941, 'Tableau comparatif de la situation des armées de l'air, 1 May 1939', and Overy, 'German Air Strength', 468.

APPENDIX E. *Deuxième Bureau estimates of German army expansion, 1936–1939*

Type of Division	1936	1937	1938	1939
Infantry	24	32	39	39
Motorized/Mechanized	2	3	8	7
Armoured	3	3	4	7
Reservist/Landwehr	—	15–20/21	36/36	70–75
Total after mobilization: (divisions and effectives)	29 and 770,000 ^a	75–80 and 1.2 million	120 and 2 million	125–130 and 2.5 million

^a Including paramilitary formations.

Sources: SHAT, 7N 2506, *BdR*, Jan.–Feb. 1936; SHAT, 7N 2506, *BdR*, 'Les Forces militaires en Allemagne', Mar.–Apr. 1937; AN, Archives-Daladier, 496 AP 35, dr. 5, sdr. a, 'Allemagne: Forces terrestres', 27 Apr. 1938 and SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Conférence sur l'armée allemande', Mar. 1939.

APPENDIX F. *German army expansion, 1936–1939*

Type of Division	1936	1937	1938	1939
Infantry	36	34	38	38
Motorized/ Mechanized	—	5	8	8
Armoured/Panzer	3	3	5	6
Reservist/ Landwehr	—	7	27	5 ¹
Total after Mobilization	39 (effectives unavailable)	49 (effectives unavailable)	78 (effectives unavailable)	103 and 2.76 million

Sources: Mueller-Hillebrand, *Das Heer*, vol. 1, 25, 68; Murray, *Change in the European Balance of Power*, 219; and Deist, 'The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht', *GSWW*, i/3, 454.

APPENDIX G. *The Franco-German military balance in September 1939*

	Germany	France
Land		
Divisions	103	90 (in Europe)
Effectives	2,600,000	2,776,000
Armoured divisions	6	1 (incomplete)
Tanks	2,977	2,946
Artillery pieces	6,916	16,850
Anti-tank guns	11,200	4350
Air		
Fighters	900	560 (416 modern)
Bombers	1,620	346 (none modern)
Reconnaissance	708	275 (47 modern)
Sea		
Capital ships	5 (3 Panzerchiffe)	7 (2 outdated)
Cruisers	8	19
Submarines	58	64

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- 1K 545: Fonds Paillole

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- 615/Gx4: Général Henri Didelet
- 1345/Gx4: Général Louis Rivet
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Index

- Abwehr (German intelligence) 28, 25 n. 44,
310, 327
- Abyssinia (Ethiopia):
 Italian invasion of (1935) 114–15, 152,
 155, 161, 170, 176, 196
- Adamthwaite, Anthony 1, 4, 315
- Ageron, Charles-Robert 332
- aircraft industry, France 195–202, 232–41
 and air ministry 88, 126–7, 221–2, 232,
 234, 238, 241, 325
 nationalization and centralization 193,
 195–202, 221, 233, 269
 problems and inefficiencies 144–5,
 168–9, 198, 220, 221, 233–41
 production figures 233, 330
 and rearmament programmes 126–7,
 144, 168, 169, 220, 232, 249, 268–70,
 324–5
- aircraft industry, German 213–15, 232,
 239–40
 and air ministry 94, 125, 240
 modernization 101, 143, 144–5, 166–7,
 195, 213–15
 and Nazi regime 83, 102
 and rearmament programmes 93, 94,
 97, 101, 105–6, 109–11, 125, 129, 159,
 173, 174, 214–15, 299, 303–4, 305,
 339, 340, 341
- air force, French 128, 140, 143–5, 168–170,
 174–5, 232–41, 268–70
 aircraft imported 240, 269, 325, 330, 342
 aircraft numbers 168–9, 196, 198, 199,
 201–2, 233–4, 269, 307, 325, 381
 and army 128, 193
 combat effectiveness 153, 213, 221–2,
 234, 330–1, 342, 380, 381–2
 and disarmament 78–9
 doctrine 127–8, 385–6
 morale in 167–8, 221–2
 organization 193, 268–9
 Plan I (1934) 143–5, 157, 168, 169, 195,
 198, 233
 Plan II (1936) 198, 206, 221, 232, 234
 Plan IV 234–5, 240
 Plan V 268–9, 306, 324–5, 386
- air force, German 122–30, 165–8, 173–5,
 194–7, 213–15, 238, 303–4, 305–6
 aircraft numbers 124, 143, 166–7, 173–4,
 175, 194–5, 195, 198, 199, 214, 241,
 299, 303–4, 306, 307, 338, 380,
 381–2
 and air ministry 122, 123
 armaments 241
 and army 343
 combat effectiveness of 91, 194, 338–91
 doctrine 127, 128
 industrial problems 173, 213, 305, 340–1
 morale in 340
 organization 125, 129–30
 personnel problems 168, 194, 213, 339
 rearmament programmes 60, 93, 94, 97,
 101, 105–6, 109–10, 125, 129, 159,
 173, 174, 214–15, 299, 303–4, 305,
 339, 340, 341
- Albania:
 Italian invasion of 366
- Alexander, Martin S. 2, 6
- Algiers (SR Post) 208
- Alphand, Hervé 323
- Anglo-German Naval Agreements (1935
 and 1937) 111, 133, 137–9, 148, 203,
 265, 266
- Années Creuses* (Lean Years) 50–1, 122, 210
- Anschluss* (1938) 39, 209, 229, 230, 251–4
- 'April Note' 149, 156
- Andrew, Christopher 3
- Arado (aircraft) 166, 213
- Arbeitsdienst (National Labour Service,
 Germany) 90, 171, 172
- Aris, Jean 286–7
- Aron, Raymond 86
- Armée de l'Air, *see* air force, French
- army, French 140, 180, 186–91, 249
 combat effectiveness 153, 168, 183, 185,
 220–1, 367, 380
 and defence cuts 153, 157–8, 168
 doctrine 118, 188–91, 269, 337, 342,
 345–6, 352, 385

- army, French (*cont.*):
 high command 145, 222-3, 313, 336,
 342, 344, 354
 modernization and mechanization of
 158, 188, 189-91
 morale in 168, 221
- army, German 83, 99, 102, 115-22, 170-2,
 184-7, 223-4, 250-1, 302-3
 combat effectiveness 91, 92, 119, 120,
 121-2, 146, 164, 170-1, 172, 183, 185,
 186, 210-13, 224-5, 299, 303, 307,
 312-13, 346-7
 and Czechoslovakia 262-3
 doctrine 117-18, 184-5, 342-6, 385;
see also Germany, war doctrine
 high command 250-1, 254, 256, 260-1,
 264, 310, 311, 342, 365, 372
 modernization and mechanization 168,
 183, 184, 188, 190-1, 210, 303, 307
 morale in 183, 357
 and Nazi party 86-8
 officer corps, problems 86, 121, 164, 171,
 185-6, 250
 purge of (Feb. 1938) 250-1
 reservists 115-17, 119, 121-2, 146, 186,
 210-11, 259, 312, 313, 347
 and SA 86, 87
- artillery 119-20, 153, 183, 186, 213, 301,
 342, 345
- Asché (Agent), *see* Schmidt, Hans-Thilo
- Assemblée Nationale:
 Commission de l'Air 144, 181, 198,
 199-200, 201-2, 234-6, 267-8
 Commission de l'Armée 104, 146, 181,
 186-8, 241, 248-50, 281, 285, 335
 Commission de la Marine 327-8
 Commission des Affaires Etrangères 66,
 181, 316
 national defence commission 330
- attachés, French army, air, naval:
 in Berlin 56, 89, 94-5, 100, 102, 255,
 303-4
 in Britain 138, 313
 role and responsibilities 15-17, 166, 181
 in Switzerland 259
see also Delmas; Didelet; de Geffrier; Poin-
 caré; Renondeau; Stehlin; Tracou
- attachés, French, commercial and financial
 106, 218, 287
see also Aris, Jean
- Aubert, Louis 322
- Auriol, Vincent 188, 230
- Austria 20, 77, 150, 209, 262
- Anschluss* with Germany (1938)
 and Axis 229, 251
 Germany and 39, 115, 209, 229, 230,
 251-4, 248, 251
- aviation, *see* air force
- Axis (Rome-Berlin) 227, 228-9, 230, 251,
 259, 309, 312, 323, 327, 356, 358, 364,
 365, 383
 and Austria 251
 and Czechoslovakia 251
 sign Pact of Steel 368
 and Spanish Civil War 251
see also Germany; Italy
- BCR (aircraft: bombardement, combat et
 renseignement) 144, 169
- BMW (aircraft motor manufacturers) 129
- Bainville, Jacques 91
- balance of power (European) 50, 51-2, 63,
 67, 79, 91, 97, 104, 109, 137, 144, 157-8,
 161, 175, 182, 184-5, 187, 196, 199-200,
 203-4, 210-12, 214-15, 223, 231,
 236-8, 242-3, 247, 254, 258-9, 264-6,
 275-7, 289-92, 294-6, 301, 316-19,
 341-2, 346, 358, 382-3, 387, 401-2
- Barthou, Louis 142, 148, 150, 151, 153, 160,
 242
 and intelligence 142-53
- Bayonne 208
- Baziéries, Col. Etienne 22
- Beck, Col. Jozef 311
- Beck, Gen. Ludwig 260, 262
- Belfort (SR Post) 18, 19, 20, 164, 208, 209
- Belgium:
 and France 152
 and Germany 326, 327
 neutrality 208
- Benes, Edvard 295 n. 205
- Daimler-Benz DB 600 (aircraft motor) 214
- Béranger, Henri 235
- Bergery, Gaston 54, 334
- Bergeton, Paul 243
- Bergson, Henri 111
- Béthouart, Col. Antoine 227
- Berthelot, Philippe 74
- Bertrand, Col. Gustav 3, 4, 21, 22-3, 31
 and Polish intelligence 376
 and signals intelligence 376
- Bihou-Richet, Madelaine 313
- Bismarck* (battleship) 265
- Biurow Szyfrów, *see* Poland, intelligence
- Blomberg, Gen. Werner von 86-7, 114,
 250

- Blum, Léon 107–8, 178–9, 188, 205
 and Britain 245
 and defence reorganization 249
 and devaluation of the franc (1936)
 180
 and foreign policy 179–80, 207
 and French Navy 232
 and German navy 231
 and Germany 107, 178, 242, 243
 and intelligence 37, 39
 and Italy 245
 and Spanish Civil War 245
- Bodenschatz, Gen. Karl 33, 257–9, 303,
 373
- Bonnet, Georges:
 and Daladier 320–1, 342, 381
 and decision for war 379–81
 and eastern Europe 323–4, 380
 and economic and financial policy 76,
 230, 232
 and foreign policy 316, 320–1, 322–4
 and Gamelin 381
 and Germany 258, 320, 342
 and imminence of war 366–7
 and intelligence 263, 367, 379–80
 and ‘pause’ in rearmament 230
 and Soviet Union 371
 and Sudetenland crisis 263
- Bourret, Gen. Victor 37
- Briand, Aristide 54, 72, 74
- Brinon, Count Fernand de 76, 155
- Britain:
 air force 213, 240, 269, 381
 defence policy of 199
 and eastern Europe 328
 economy of 74, 359, 361, 383–4
 empire 183, 299, 382
 and France 77, 78, 79, 85, 138, 140–1,
 152, 170, 199, 244–6, 319, 321,
 323; Anglo-French defence
 co-operation 325–8, 336, 358, 361,
 364, 336–8, 387; and French air-
 power 169, 238–9; and Rhineland,
 remilitarisation of 177; French
 reliance on 140, 148, 176, 202, 205,
 223, 243, 245–6, 318, 318, 231,
 322–3
 and Germany 77, 155, 261, 302, 311,
 319, 327, 336; Anglo-German
 naval agreements (1935, 1937)
 111, 133, 137–9, 148, 265, 266;
 and German foreign policy
 299–300
- and Greece 369
 foreign office 77, 114, 136, 138, 238–9,
 326, 368
 intelligence service, *see* SIS
 and Italy 140
 and League of Nations 75
 and Low Countries, *see* Belgium
 and Poland 322, 325, 369
 and Romania 264, 369
 and Spanish Civil War 246
 and Sudetenland crisis 256, 260, 261
 and USSR 246, 357
- Brauchitsch, Gen. Walther von 251
- Buffotot, Patrice 6
- Bührer, Gen. Jules 318, 332
- Bulgaria 323, 360
- Bullitt, William, C. 277, 278
- Cabinet Noir 12, 13, 31
- Cacqueray-Valmènier, Jean de 16–17
- Caillaux, Joseph 76, 316
- Caisse Autonome des Investissements de la
 Défense Nationale 249
- Cambon, Roger 260
- Campinchi, César 267, 320, 349
- Canaris, Adm. Wilhelm 310, 313
- Castellan, Georges 47
- CE (contre-espionnage), *see* intelligence,
 French
- Chamberlain, Neville:
 and appeasement 321
 and Daladier 249–50, 262, 292–3, 321
 and eastern Europe 328
 and France 240
 and Germany 292
 and intelligence 256
 and Sudetenland crisis 255, 262,
 328
- Charvériat, Emile 254, 317
- Chautemps, Camille 207, 222, 229, 230,
 240, 249, 253, 320
- Ciano, Galeazzo, Conte di Cortellazzo
 308
- Colson, Gen. Louis 187, 301, 318–19
 and deployment of German army 369
 and eastern Europe 260
 and intelligence 260, 312
 and strategic situation in 1938 260–1
- Colyer, Gr. Capt. Douglas 238, 240
- Comert, Pierre 316
- Commissariat de l’Information 332
- Commission Spéciale on disarmament
 (1934) 149–50

- Comité Permanent de la Défense Nationale (CPDN) 39–40, 41, 180, 189, 190, 196, 198, 199, 205, 223, 236, 241, 244, 248, 267, 325, 367
- Communist Party, *see* Parti Communiste Français (PCF)
- Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale (CSDN) 36–7, 131, 146
- Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre (CSG) 61–2, 67, 146, 181, 186, 190, 223, 314, 339, 344, 346, 365
- Conseil Supérieur de l'Air (CSA) 78–9, 193, 222, 268, 339
- Corbin, Charles 138
- Cot, Pierre 179, 191–4, 232–41, 268
 air ministry 238
 air policy 191, 193, 195–202, 222, 232–7, 238–41
 and air re-armament 107, 206, 240–1
 career 191
 and eastern Europe
 and intelligence 194, 196, 198–200, 202, 232–4, 238–41, 389
 and nationalization 193–4
 political views of 54, 241
 and Soviet intelligence 192
 and USSR 192–3, 198–201, 206, 236–7, 240–1
- Cotton, Sidney 376
- Coulondre, Robert 313, 373–4, 382
- Coutau-Bégarie, Hervé 7
- Craigie, Robert 136
- Curtis 550 (aircraft) 330
- Czechoslovakia:
 army 315
 and France 279, 294–5, 315
 and Germany 114, 115, 209, 248, 308, 313, 328, 346
 and Hungary 114
 intelligence 255; French co-operation with 28, 259, 314
 and Poland 114
 Prague coup 313–15
 and Sudetenland crisis (1938) 145, 247–8, 251, 254–297
 and USSR 237
see also Prague coup
- Daimler Benz 119, 129, 214
- Daedalus, *see* Cot, Pierre and Soviet intelligence
- Daladier Edouard 37, 54, 60–1, 64–5, 66–7, 68, 72, 76, 79, 142, 179, 180–1, 186, 190, 227, 248–9, 263, 300, 301–2, 320–5, 329, 365
 and air power 268, 276–8, 325, 341–2
 and *Anschluss* 253
 and appeasement 314, 321, 324
 and army 76, 186–7, 188
 and army commissions 250, 327, 341
 and Axis 230, 309, 323
 and Balkans 323
 and Belgium
 and Bonnet 320–1, 342, 381
 and Britain 245, 318, 321, 364
 career 65–6
 and Chamberlain 292, 321, 364
 and Czechoslovakia 255, 259, 262, 264, 283–4
 and decision for war 379–81, 385, 387
 decree powers 108, 249, 320, 324, 331
 and defence industry 78, 180, 249
 and devaluation of the franc 188
 and eastern Europe 315, 317–18, 319, 327–8
 and economic warfare 362
 and economy 230
 and empire 332
 and Gamelin 183, 301–2, 311, 313, 317–18, 335, 336, 358, 359, 367, 369, 381
 and German military doctrine 344–5
 and German military potential 306, 324, 366
 and German morale 356–7
 and German violations of Versailles Treaty 78
 and high command 317–18
 and Hitler 356, 357
 and intelligence 181, 186–7, 230, 247, 256, 258, 259, 309, 312, 314
 and Italy 332
 and La Chambre 222, 268
 and Low Countries 326
 and the media 331–2
 and Munich Agreement 264, 318–19, 321, 354
 and national morale 331–4
 and Prague Coup 313
 and public opinion 333, 335
 and rearmament programmes 187–9, 230, 248–9, 325, 349
 and rise of Hitler 60, 64, 65–8, 72, 76, 78
 and Romania 364, 370
 and Spanish Civil War 201, 244, 345
 and USSR 200, 237

- and Weygand 64, 68, 180, 370
 Dame, Gen. Marcel 300
 Danzig 109
 Darlan, Adm. François 307
 career 231
 and naval policy 205, 266, 267, 349
 and strategic planning 318, 380
 Decamp, Gen. Jules 37
 Decoux, Adm. Jean 36, 139, 176
 Dejean, Maurice 18–19, 30, 226
 career 18–19
 Delbos, Yvon 179, 199, 200, 207, 231
 and *Anschluss* 253
 and Britain 240
 and defence policy 242
 and eastern Europe 244
 and French air force 239, 240
 and German rearmament 243
 and Spanish Civil War 201
 Delmas, Col. Jean 315–16
 Denain, Gen. Victor 142
 and air policy 144–5, 169, 270, 389
 and German air menace 143–4
 Denmark 360
 Denniston, Alastair 376
 Dentz, Gen. Henri-Fernand 263
 Département des Affaires Politiques et
 Commerciales (DAPC: foreign
 ministry) 29, 94, 239, 286
 Detryat, Michel 240
Deutschland (Pocket battleship) 132
 Dewoitine 520 (aircraft) 342
 Didelet, Gen. Henri-Antoine:
 career 300
 disagreements with Deuxième Bureau
 (1938–9) 300–3
 and eastern Europe 363, 369
 and German economy 352–3, 360
 and German foreign policy aims 307–8
 and German military doctrine 344
 and German military capacity 301, 310,
 312, 347
 and Hitler 300–2, 312
 Dönitz, Adm. Karl 217
 Dormier Do 17 (German aircraft) 194–5
 Douhet, Gen. Giulio 127–8
 Doumenc, Gen. Joseph 374
 Doumergue, Gaston 142
 complexion of cabinet (1934) 142
 and economic policy 153, 157, 160
 and foreign policy 77, 79, 142
 and German rearmament 142, 149
 and intelligence 142–3, 148, 393
 and parliamentary reform 142, 160
 and French rearmament 110, 147
 Dreyfus Affair:
 impact on intelligence community 12–13
 Dunderdale, Wilfred ('Biffy') 22–3, 376
Dunkerque (battlecruiser) 134, 135, 176, 215,
 305, 386
 Durand-Viel, Adm. Georges:
 and naval policy 36
 Duroselle, Jean-Baptiste 1, 75, 151, 207, 315
 Dutailly, Henry 1
 Duvernoy, Lt. Col. René:
 career 32, 270
 Ecole Supérieur de Guerre 14, 270
 economic warfare (French plans to wage
 against Germany) 36–7, 84–5, 92,
 337, 352, 358–64, 375, 384, 387
 Eden, Anthony 239
 enigma enciphering machine 22–5, 376–7
 see also signals intelligence
 espionage 12, 19, 22–6, 34–5, 60, 93, 117,
 123, 127, 159, 226, 254, 262, 313, 366,
 368–9
 Fabry, Gen. Jean 104, 157
 Féquant, Gen. Phillipe 193, 222, 268
 Finland 360
 First World War 9, 91
 impact on French defence policy 80, 81,
 95, 116, 183
 impact on French intelligence 85
 naval blockade 84, 85
 Flandin, Pierre-Etienne 179, 316
 and economic policy 79, 153, 155, 160
 Floradora (German diplomatic cipher) 22
 Focke-Wulf (German aircraft) 123
 Forcade, Olivier 5
 foreign ministry, French 29–31, 36, 37, 39,
 66, 76, 130, 148, 154, 170, 177–98, 201,
 243, 244, 255, 212, 218, 227, 229, 239,
 242, 251, 251, 253–4, 260, 261, 300,
 303, 313, 314–7, 326, 356, 366, 367,
 368
 attitude towards intelligence 30–2,
 69–72, 79–80, 242–3, 303,
 317
 co-operation with intelligence services
 13, 16, 28–32, 208–9, 253–4,
 367–8
 plans to create diplomatic secret service
 367–8
 Four Power Pact (1933) 61

- France:
 armaments 168, 220–1, 330, 331; exports
 of 330
 and Balkans 227, 243
 and Britain 77, 78, 79, 141–2, 319
 and Bulgaria 323
 civil–military relations 68, 107, 110, 161
 and Czechoslovakia 251, 315; *see also*
 Czechoslovakia, Sudetenland crisis
 and defence industry 158, 229, 324
 and eastern Europe 63, 76, 79, 161, 227,
 244, 370
 economy 73–4, 76, 78, 79, 141, 152–3,
 155, 156, 177, 188, 207, 230, 329, 330,
 333, 334, 359, 361, 383–4, 391–2
 empire 63, 131, 176, 183, 216, 267, 299,
 308, 323, 332, 334, 382
 industry 73, 152, 329
 and Italy 63, 77, 79, 137, 140, 150–2, 155,
 176, 228, 248, 308, 318, 323
 labour movement 331, 334
 and Poland 77, 244, 299, 322, 369,
 370–1, 387
 public opinion towards war 333–4
 and rearmament programmes 186, 324
 and Romania 77, 227–8, 323, 328,
 363–4, 369, 370–1
 and Russia 64
 and Soviet Union 64, 77, 79, 150, 151,
 154, 170, 236–7, 243, 244, 245, 246,
 318, 322, 328, 357, 358, 359, 367,
 370–2
 and Spanish Civil War 244, 246, 324
 and Sudetenland crisis 247–97, 299–303,
 315–19, 321, 323, 328, 333, 341, 354,
 394
 and Turkey 322, 369
 and USA 77–8, 79, 358
 and Yugoslavia 227–8, 322, 323, 370
 Franco-German declaration (December
 1938) 322–3
 François-Poncet 19, 30, 59, 68–72, 142
 career 68–9
 and Czechoslovakia 259
 and German army 251
 and German foreign policy 81, 316
 and German high command 261
 and German rearmament 71, 101–3,
 130, 148–9, 239
 and Hitler 114, 155, 299
 and Hossbach memorandum 226
 and intelligence services 19, 30, 59, 142
 Franco-Prussian War 12
- Frank, Robert 2, 160, 205
 Fraser, Col. William 326
 Fridenson, Patrick 145
 Fritsch, Gen. Werner Freiherr von 114, 250
 Funk, Walther 351
- Gamelin, Gen. Maurice 63–4, 65
 and air power 307
 and *Anschluss* 253
 and army 157, 186–7, 188
 and Axis co-operation 309
 and Balkans 370
 career 110–2
 and Daladier 180, 183, 301–2, 311, 313,
 317–8, 319, 335, 336, 358, 359, 365,
 367, 369, 381
 and decision for war 380, 382, 384–5, 387
 and French military doctrine 118,
 188–9, 344
 and German foreign policy 183, 248,
 307–8, 317–18, 335
 and German high command 261
 and German internal situation 356
 and German military capacity 336
 and German rearmament 146, 173, 183,
 186, 306
 and Hitler 301–2
 and intelligence 169, 172, 174, 247, 253,
 258, 260, 312, 326, 389
 and Laval 158–9
 and Prague coup 313, 314
 and Rhineland, remilitarization of 171
 and Romania 228
 and Soviet Union 371
 and strategic planning 186–7, 188, 223,
 306, 318, 319–20, 328, 336, 344,
 358–9, 361–2, 365, 367, 371, 384–5
 and Sudetenland crisis 258, 260
 and Yugoslavia 228
- Gasnier-Duparc, Alphonse 179, 205, 231
 Gauché, Col. Maurice 3, 4, 15
 and Axis 229
 career 162
 and eastern Europe 319, 363, 366
 and French high command 367
 and French strategic situation 319, 366
 and German armed forces 346, 369
 and German foreign policy 181–2,
 209–10, 223, 224, 227, 248, 307, 311,
 326
 and German internal situation 112–13,
 209, 356–7
 and German rearmament 164, 301

- and Hitler 301, 357
 and Sudetenland crisis 262
 and the USSR 244, 370-1, 374
- Gaulle, Gen. Charles de:
 and French military policy 189-90
 and Gamelin 385
- Geffrier, Col. Hubert-Marie-Joseph
 165-6, 251, 255, 258, 303
- Georges, Gen. Alphonse 260, 312, 369
- Germany:
 and Anglo-German Naval Agreements 203
 armed forces, *see* army, German; air force, German; navy, German
 and Austria 77, 115, 209
 and Balkans 244, 302, 308, 309, 360
 and Belgium 326, 327
 Communist Party (KPD) 56, 59
 and Czechoslovakia 114, 115, 209, 224, 225, 303, 308, 313, 328, 346
 defence industry 83, 92, 93, 94, 97, 101, 103, 104-6, 132-3, 135-6, 182-3, 185, 186, 210, 356
 and Denmark 360
 and eastern Europe 243, 249-5, 302, 307, 308, 309, 311, 314, 315, 318, 325, 328, 360
 economy 50, 55, 62, 69, 71, 82, 92-3, 94-5, 97-103, 104-6, 112, 183, 217-20, 309, 340, 350-4, 359-64, 383-4, 390
 French assumptions about national character 50, 63, 64, 80, 85-6, 91, 103-4, 110, 159, 171, 219, 383, 388-9, 391
 and Holland 326, 327
 and Hungary 97, 365
 industrial superiority over France 50-1, 59-60, 62, 82, 92, 93, 94, 97-9, 101, 103, 182-3, 212-13, 219, 220
 internal situation 82-108, 112-13, 209-12; popularity of Nazi regime, 49-50, 55-60, 66, 70-2, 83-4; strains on populace and perceived decline in national morale (1938-1939) 217-20, 354-9, 382-3
 and Italy 77, 115, 140, 228-9, 299, 308, 309, 365
 and Japan 372
 and League of Nations 80, 149-50
 and Low Countries 360
 and natural resources 96-7, 98-9, 105-6, 183, 212-13, 218-20, 226-7, 227, 242, 266, 302, 304, 308, 319, 336, 340, 351, 352-3, 360-4, 384
 and Poland 225, 299, 306, 308, 309, 311, 319, 365, 368-70, 372; non-aggression pact (1934) 111
 and Romania 96-7, 227, 244, 307-8, 312, 319, 360-1, 363-4, 365
 and Soviet Union 311; Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact 372-4
 and Spanish Civil War 228, 324
 strategic policy 184-5, 342-6, 385
 Sudetenland 249, 256; *see also* Czechoslovakia, crisis
 and Sweden 360-1
 and Switzerland 326
 and Ukraine 309, 319
 and USA 96-7
 and Venezuela 96-7
 and Yugoslavia 97, 227, 244, 360-1, 363-4
- Gestapo 20
- Girardet, Raoul 7
- Giraudoux, Jean 332
- Girault, René 315
- Gneisenau* (battle-cruiser) 135, 203, 215, 264-6, 304, 305
- Goebbels, Joseph 114, 251, 388
- Goerdeler, Karl 260-2, 309
- Göring, Field Marshal Hermann 33, 114, 155, 261-2, 271, 299, 340
 and German economy 104, 105, 165, 352
 and Luftwaffe build-up 123, 124-5, 128, 130, 167, 303, 305, 339
- Grange, Baron Amaury de la 197, 235, 239, 269
- Great Depression 55, 73-4, 152, 391-2
- Greece 364, 369
- Grosser, Pierre 2
- Guderian, Gen. Heinz 184, 342
- Halder, Gen. Franz 260, 262
- Halifax, Lord 327, 364, 390
- Handel, Michael 8, 394
- Haute Comité Militaire (HCM) 49, 122, 155, 158, 171, 172, 173, 174, 180
- Heinkel He 111 (aircraft) 123, 166
- Heinkel He 51 (aircraft) 126, 166, 213
- Herriot, Edouard 149
- Herwath von Bittenfeld, Hans Heinrich (Johnny) 372-3

- Hesse, Maj. Dr. Kurt 100
 Himmeler 114, 226, 251
 Hinsley, Sir Francis Harry 3, 28
 Hitler, Adolf:
 and Austria 251
 and Czechoslovakia 254, 256, 257, 261, 262, 263, 299, 313, 314, 315
 and France 46-7, 56-7, 58-9, 70-1, 111, 158, 356, 373, 378, 394-5
 French assessments of 300-2, 312, 317, 382
 general views 46-7, 301; see also *Mein Kampf*
 and German army 83, 102, 121, 184, 187, 210-1, 312; purge of (Feb 1938) 250
 and German army high command 251, 257, 260-1, 310, 357
 and German economy 83, 350-1
 and German foreign policy 46-7, 181-2, 307
 and German navy 217, 299
 and Great Britain 132, 134, 365, 373
 internal opposition to 309-10, 354
 and Munich Accords 298-9, 300
 and Mussolini 229
 and Poland 311, 365, 369, 371, 373, 382-3
 and rearmament 83, 218
 and Rhineland, remilitarization of 170
 rumours of declining health 357
 and strategic planning 161, 301
 and Stalin 372
 and USSR 372
 Holland:
 and France 76, 95
 and Germany 326, 327, 360
 Hoppenot, Roger 317
 Hossbach Conference (1937) 226
 Hungary:
 and Germany 97, 360, 365
 strategic situation 114
 I. G. Farben 98
 Imlay, Talbot 350 n. 45
 intelligence, French:
 air intelligence (Deuxième Bureau):
 organization 32-35
 army intelligence (Deuxième Bureau):
 co-operation with foreign ministry 28-32, 16, 29-30, 208-9, 253-4, 367-8; co-operation within Deuxième Bureaux 27-9; organization 13-4, 27-8
 co-operation with other intelligence services: British 28-9, 326-7, 368, 375-7; Czechoslovak 28, 259, 314-5; Polish 28, 259, 376-7
 exploitation of open source information 15-17, 26-7, 41-2
 lack of centralisation 39-41
 military character of 12-13, 41-3, 389-90
 naval intelligence (Deuxième Bureau)
 organization 35-36
 relations with civilian authorities 13-14, 37-41, 247, 255-6, 262-3, 295; see also foreign ministry; Blum; Bonnet; Cot; Daladier; Doumergue; Fabry; Laval; Maurin
 Italy 181
 and Albania 366
 armed forces, see air force, Italian; navy, Italian
 and Britain 176
 and France 79, 131, 137, 140, 150-2, 155, 176, 243, 308, 318
 and Germany 77, 115, 131, 140, 229, 299, 309
 intelligence 229
 navy 131, 133-4, 137, 140, 148, 176, 203-4, 266-7, 348, 386
 and Spanish Civil War 152, 204, 228, 229
 see also Abyssinia, Italian invasion of; Axis (Rome-Berlin)
 Jacomet, Robert 330
 Jamet, Gen. Louis 36, 94
 Janis, Irving (Groupthink) 14
 Japan 299, 372
 Jauneaud, Gen. Jean-Henri 193, 222
 Jervis, Robert 160
Jean Bart (battleship) 148, 204, 386
 Johnson Act (USA 1934) 78
 Jouvenel, Bertrand de 54
 Jumo 210 (aircraft motor) 214
 Junkers (aircraft manufacturers) 129
 Junkers Ju 52 (aircraft) 126, 166
 Junkers Ju 87 (aircraft) 338
 Kahn, David 42
 Kayser, Jacques 321
 Keiger, J. F. V. 7
 Keller, Gen. Louis 236-7
 Knox, Dillwyn 376
 Koeltz, Col. Marie-Louis 59
 career 14-15

- Krassnaya Zvezda* 26
 Kriegsmarine, *see* navy, German
 Krupp (armaments manufacturers)
 119–20, 135
 Kühnmunch, Lt. Col. Henri 209
 Kupferman, Fred 154
- “L” (SR agent) 24, 25, 60, 93, 117, 123, 127, 159
- La Chambre, Guy 241, 268, 269, 304, 305,
 307, 320, 325, 341
 career 222, 268–9
 and Czech crisis 276–9
 and Daladier 222, 268
 and decision for war 380, 381, 382,
 385–6, 330
- Labarthe, André 192
- Lacaze, Yvon 290
- Lacoste, Adm. Pierre 7 n. 18
- Langer, Maj. Gwido 23, 376
- Laurent-Eynac, André 197
- Laurent, Col. Edmund 47
- Laval, Pierre 153–9
 and army general staff 158–9
 career 153–4
 and defence industry 110, 138, 157
 and economic policy 79, 157, 160
 and foreign policy 138, 141, 150, 151,
 153–9, 242, 316
 and French internal situation 149, 179
 and German rearmament 138, 154–6
 and Hitler 155
 and intelligence 80–1, 141, 154
 and Italy 150, 155
 pacifism of 153–4
 and rearmament 156–8
 and USSR 151, 154
- League of Nations 49, 66, 72, 75, 76, 80,
 120, 149–50, 151, 154, 155, 239
 Germany leaves (1933) 80, 141
- Léger, Alexis Saint 74
 assessments of Hitler 357
 and Daladier 357, 364, 367
 and defence policy 245, 364
 and eastern Europe 243
 and foreign policy 200, 317
 and German morale 357
 and German rearmament 148
 and intelligence 253, 254, 367–8
 and Italy 229
- Leygues, Georges 231
- Lille (SR Post) 19, 20, 208
- Little Entente 181, 199, 243–4
- Litvinov, Maxim 151
- Locarno Accords 75, 161
- Lukes, Igor 295 n. 206
- MAD, *see* Vivremont, Col.
- MEFO Bills 97–8
 see also Germany, economy
- MacDonald, Ramsey 77, 141
- Maginot Line 75, 156, 157 181, 224
- Manchester Guardian* 26
- Mandel, Georges 320, 332
- Marchandau, Paul 289, 320
- Marseilles (SR Post) 20, 208
- Massigli, René:
 and air ministry 239
 and German foreign policy 242
 and German rearmament 148, 149, 150
 reassigned (1938) 316
- Masson, Philippe 6
- Materialschlacht*, *see* economic warfare
- Maurin Gen. Louis 157, 169, 172, 174
- Mein Kampf* 55–6, 57, 63, 80, 81, 181, 308
- Menzies, Gen. Sir Stewart (SIS deputy-
 chief) 375
- Messerschmidt Bf 109 (aircraft) 123, 338
- Metz (SR Post) 19, 20, 35, 94, 208
- Ministère de Blocus 37, 361
- Molotov, Viacheslav 372
- Monzie, Anatole de 65, 320
- Moravec, Col. František 28
- Morane (aircraft) 198, 234
- Moulin, Jean 193
- Munich Agreement (1938) 247, 264, 276,
 278–9, 295–6, 298, 299, 300, 303, 306,
 315–19, 321, 328, 333, 339, 354, 394
- Mussolini, Benito 61, 140, 150, 152, 229,
 266
- Mysyrowicz, Ladislav 1
- NKGB, *see* Soviet Union, intelligence
- Národní Politika* 26
- Navarre, Henri 3, 5, 37
- navy, British 136, 137, 140, 148, 202, 204,
 205, 217, 349, 386
- navy, French:
 and German navy 130–40, 147–57,
 175–7, 202, 202–5, 215–17, 231–2,
 249, 266, 305, 349–50, 380, 386
 interpretations of naval power 131–2
 and Italian navy 131, 134, 137, 139–40,
 176, 215, 231, 266–7, 348, 386
 and rearmament 134, 153, 203–5, 264,
 266–7, 349–50

- navy, German 130-40, 175-7, 202-4,
215-17, 231, 264-6, 267, 386
and Italian navy 131
rearmament 130-3, 137, 215-17, 299,
304-5, 347-9
strategic planning of 215-17
submarines 131, 135-6, 137, 175-6, 203,
216-17, 348
- navy, Italian 131, 134, 137, 139-40, 176, 215,
231, 266-7, 348, 386
- Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact 372-4,
384, 387
- Nazi Party:
and domestic policy 88-91, 355
and economic policy 350-1
and German high command 85-7,
250-1
and militarization of German society
90-2
and propaganda 89-90, 123, 227, 383
and secrecy 92-4
secret police 93
- Noël, Léon 295 n. 206
- Norway 360
- Oster, Col. Hans 310
- Overy, Richard 350-1
- pacifism, or anti-war movement, French
53-4, 333
- Paillole, Col. Paul 4, 5, 226, 368
- Papen, Franz von 57
- Paul-Boncour, Joseph 65, 66, 72, 79
and Daladier 78, 79
and foreign policy 78, 79
and rise of Hitler 66
- Pernot, Georges 362
- Pétain, 142, 146, 157
- Phipps, Eric 239, 326
- Piétri 138, 140, 142, 147, 176
- Poincaré, Leon 32-3, 88
named air attaché 33
and Luftwaffe build-up 124, 127, 129,
130, 173, 213
- Poland:
and Britain 369
and France 244, 299, 322, 369
and Germany 225, 299, 308, 309, 311,
319, 326, 365, 366, 368-70, 372
intelligence co-operation with 28,
376-7
military strength of 319
non-aggression pact with Germany 111
and Soviet Union 327-8, 371-2, 373-4
and strategic situation 75, 114, 182
- Pomaret, Charles 320
- Porch, Douglas 7 and n. 21
- Potez 63 (aircraft) 233
- Provence* class battleships 386
- Prussia 56
see also Franco-Prussian War
- Pojo, Gen. Bernard 173, 174, 175, 193
- Raeder, Adm. Erich 132
- Réa, Comm. Emile-Marie-André 16, 255
- Réau, Elisabeth du 2, 6
- Régnier, Marcel 157
- Reichswehr, *see* Germany, army
- Renault (automobile and armoured vehicle
manufacturers) 329
- Renondeau, Gen. Gaston 15-17, 57, 59-61,
89-90, 225, 287-8
career 15-16
and German armed forces 116, 119, 120,
121, 224-5, 250, 251, 310, 317
and German foreign policy 224, 226,
302
and German high command 16-17,
59-61, 151-2, 260
and German internal situation 85-6,
87-8, 212
and German rearmament 96, 101-3,
119, 218, 219
and Hitler 113, 251, 300
and intelligence collection 92, 93
and Rhineland, remilitarization of 170
and Sudetenland crisis 255, 256-7, 258,
260, 263
- réseau d'écoute 21, 33
see also signals intelligence
- Reynaud, Paul 309, 320, 325, 329, 331, 334
- Rheinmetall 119-20
- Rhineland 121
remilitarization of 109, 161-77
consequences of remilitarization 178,
181, 182, 209, 227
- Ribbentrop, Joachim von 114, 226, 251,
311, 316, 372, 379, 390
- Richelieu* (battleship) 148, 204, 386
- Rivet, Gen. Louis 3, 4, 31, 37, 38, 247, 368
and *Anschluss* 253
career 163
criticizes political leadership of the Third
Republic 4
and Daladier 247, 255-6, 262-3, 295
diary 29, 253

- and German foreign policy 255–6, 314, 326
 and signals intelligence 31
 and SIS 375
 and Sudetenland crisis 255, 262, 314
 and secret intelligence collection 367–8
- Röhm, Ernst 87
- Romania 77, 95, 263
 and Britain 364, 369
 and France 323, 328, 364, 369, 370–1
 and Germany 96–7, 227, 244, 307–8, 312, 319, 360–1, 363–4, 365
 military strength of 319
 and Soviet Union 237, 327–8, 371–2
- Roosevelt, Franklin Delano 291
- Roux, Lt. Col. Henri 163
 career 18
- SA (Sturmabteilung) 115, 116, 120
 tensions with regular German army 87
 purge of (June 1934) 87
- Sarraut, Albert 174
- Schacht, Dr Hjalmer 97, 179, 219, 242, 261, 351
- Schairer, Dr Reinhold 261, 309
- Scharnhorst* (battleship) 135, 203, 215, 265–6, 304, 305
- Schlesser, Maj. Guy 375
- Schmidt, Hans-Thilo (Asché) 19, 22–23, 24–5 and n. 44, 60, 226, 254, 262, 313, 366, 368, 369
 and enigma keys 22–5
- Schulenburg, Count von 372
- Shuschnigg, Kurt von 251
- Schutzpolizei 171, 172
- Secrétariat Général du Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale (SGDN) 38, 43, 42, 84, 99, 100, 101, 164, 218, 219, 251, 254, 350, 351, 352, 353–4, 356, 360–1, 363
- Section d'Etudes (renamed Section d'Etudes Générales in 1937) 36
- Senate:
 Commission de l'armée 181, 327–8
 Commission de l'air 193–4, 197, 201–2, 232–3, 235–6, 239–41, 267–8, 327–8
 Commission des finances 76, 181, 327–8
 Commission des affaires étrangères 181
 Commission de la défense nationale 66–78, 181, 32–4, 327–8, 336
- Service de renseignements (SR or secret intelligence service) 163, 252, 253, 254–7, 259–60, 312, 313, 314, 262, 300, 116, 120, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 366, 367–9, 372
 agent networks, *see* espionage
 becomes Cinquième Bureau (September 1939) 368
 co-operation with foreign ministry 13, 30–1, 29–30, 208–9, 253–4, 367–8
 historical background 11–13
 naval SR 23–4
 relationship with army Deuxième Bureau 17–27
 role and organization 17–21
- shipbuilding industry:
 British 231
 French 215, 231–2, 266, 267, 349, 386
 German 215–17, 231, 264–6, 304–5, 348–9
 Italian 231, 266–7
- Siegfried Line (westwall) 259, 284–5, 299
- Siemens 98
- Signals intelligence 21–5, 30–2
 and *Anschluss* 251–3
 coordination between SR and foreign ministry 30–1
 and German naval codes 133
 and “R” (British diplomatic cipher) 292
see also enigma
- Sinclair, Sir Hugh (“Quex”, SIS chief) 375
- SIS (Secret Intelligence Service, Britain) 238, 310, 313
 comparisons with French intelligence service 13, 27, 31, 39, 40, 41, 43, 391
 French co-operation with 28–9, 326–7, 368, 375–7
 and Sudetenland crisis 255
- Skoda (armaments and automobile manufacturers) 346
- Soviet Union:
 armed forces 64, 237
 and Britain 357
 and Czechoslovakia 237
 and Eastern Europe 327–8
 and France 64, 77, 79, 150, 151, 154, 199–201, 236–7, 243, 244, 245, 246, 318, 319, 322, 357, 367, 328
 industry 384
 and intelligence 192
 Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact 372–4
 and Poland 371–2, 373–4
 and Romania 371–2
see also Ukraine

- Spanish Civil War (1936–9) 152, 201, 204,
206, 209, 210, 228, 229, 244, 246, 251,
324, 344–5
- Speer, Albert 383
- SS (Schutzstaffel) 116, 171, 172, 210
- Stalin, Joseph 372, 374
- Stehlin, Capt. Paul 4, 5, 33, 124, 165–6,
255, 257–8, 303, 373
- Strasbourg* (battle-cruiser) 134, 137, 148, 176,
215, 305
- Stresa Conference (1935) 155
- Stülpagel, Gen. Joachim von 17
- Sûreté Nationale 20, 21, 35, 58
- Sweden 95, 96, 98, 360–1
- Switzerland 259, 326
- Tardieu, André 48, 142, 149
- Terrible* class destroyers 386
- Thomas, Gen. Georg 100, 351–2
- Thümmel, Maj. Paul 28, 225
- Tirpitz* (battleship) 265
- Toulon (naval SR station) 35
- Tours (Socialist Party congress of 1931) 53
- Tracou, Capt. 133, 355
- Treaty of Rapallo 200
- Treaty of Versailles 77, 80, 130, 134, 167
German violations of 48, 62, 75, 78, 102,
111, 112, 121, 139, 155
- Troisième Bureau 186
- Turkey 319, 322, 369
- USA:
economy 74
and France 77–8, 79, 177
and Germany 96–7
intelligence 192, 372–3
and League of Nations 75
- Ukraine 307, 319
- Vaïsse, Maurice 1, 75
- Venezuela 96–7
- Venona decrypts, *see* USA, intelligence
veterans organizations 53–4, 333
- Viénot, Pierre 66
- Villelume, Capt. Paul de 29
- Vitrolles, Col. Alfred d'Arnaud de:
career 270
and German foreign policy 319
and German rearmament 339–40
- Vivremont, Col. Lahousen Elder von
(MAD) 24, 313, 366, 369
- Voroshilov, Marshall Klimenti 374
- Vuillemin, Gen. Joseph 222, 268, 270,
306–7, 318, 319, 339, 380, 381–2,
386
- Wark, Wesley 3
- Warlimont, Col. Walther 363
- Wassmer, Roger 165–6
- Watt, Donald Cameron 369
- Wehrmacht, *see* air force, German; army,
German; navy, German
- Weidemann, Capt. Fritz 309
- Weygand, Gen. Maxime 64, 68
and army 153, 157
career 110, 369
and civil–military relations 64, 68, 161,
180, 370
and Daladier 370
and defence policy 145–7, 149
and German national character 146
and Hitler 145
and intelligence 110, 145–7, 389
- Wohlstetter, Roberta 8
- Young, Robert 2, 6, 68, 315, 326
- Yugoslavia 95, 319, 322, 323
and France 370
and Germany 227, 244, 360–1, 363–4
and Soviet Union 327–8, 372
- Zay, Jean 320