

Source evaluation of schlieffen plan debate

Business



Another vital aspect of this historical debate is criticisms of the source analysis and interpretation of the historians involved. Mombauer and Foley believe Zuber's disregard for the diplomatic background of Schlieffen and Motlke's contexts weakens his claim's credibility. Since Zuber only focuses on the military aspects, he misses much political evolution that may have led to an idea like the Schlieffen Plan being born. However, both Mombauer and Foley are shown to have ulterior motives in their dismissal of Zuber's thesis. Mombauer's criticism of Zuber stems from her examination of the origins of WWI, and in this work she concentrates excessively on German policy as a cause of WWI, neglecting other countries', notably France's, actions. Foley also asserts that Zuber's argument is a member of the group of Germans who 'twisted facts and the historical record in an attempt to prove that Germany fought an essentially defensive war in 1914'.

In actual fact, Zuber was an American infantry officer with family from Alsace. Foley's statement betrays his objective in this historical debate; to establish German war guilt through the Schlieffen Plan. Therefore, Foley and Mombauer, although correct in their critique of Zuber's source analysis, are not the most reliable with their arguments. Mombauer also accuses Zuber of inventing source material due to lack of footnoting. However, Zuber has recorded all of his sources, and they have been used by Holmes in his own evaluations. Zuber's footnoting is messy, but a historian is always able to tell from the context of a quote what the source is.

This issue of misunderstood translations or varying interpretations of sources is a major issue in the Schlieffen Plan debate, occurring on both sides.

Holmes questions some of Zuber's details and interpretations of sources

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while Zuber has critiqued Holmes translations and interpretations of many German documents. For example, Holmes' asserts that the 1905 Kriegsspiel was an aberration, thus its dissimilarity from the Schlieffen Plan. In support he quotes the exercise critique, stating that Schlieffen said the exercise was 'improbable but not boring'. Zuber notes that this comment is not to be found in the exercise critique, as a direct quote or paraphrase. It is very difficult to judge which opponent is correct in their understanding without reading the original documents, which isn't a possibility for those who can't read German.