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Douglas Porch

A Review Essay

Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars*
Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997

On May 10, 1940, Germany's panzers launched their westward assault on France. Attacking through the thick forests of the Ardennes, German forces rapidly breached French defenses near Sedan, then swept west to envelop the main French and British armies that had advanced to meet what French Commander in Chief Maurice Gamelin had expected to be the main German attack in Belgium. Adolf Hitler's legions marched into Paris on June 12, 1940. A shattered French government, overwhelmed by the magnitude of its defeat, sued for peace and signed an armistice at Compiègne on June 22, 1940. The British Expeditionary Force fled across the English Channel, abandoning its equipment on the beaches of Dunkirk. Few defeats in military history have been as rapid, decisive, and unexpected.

Sixty years later, the sudden collapse of France in May–June 1940, and the French foreign and military policy of the 1930s that contributed to that *débâcle,* remain a focus of security studies. The era appears to present a cautionary tale of a nation, and an army, that made just about every unfortunate choice possible. The ink was barely dry on the armistice of June 1940 when contemporaries advanced competing versions of the argument that France's fate had been a sort of divine judgment invited by the inconsistencies and contradictions of its political culture. The most powerful indictment that the Third Republic exhibited all the symptoms of terminal decadence prior to its *débâcle* was made by Marc Bloch, whose posthumously published *Strange Defeat* offered a vision of a fearful, selfish, and unpatriotic nation psychologically primed for calamity.[1] The view that France's collapse was the product of an

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1. Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940* (New York: Norton, 1968), pp. 131–132.

attitude, a state of mind, a culture gone decadent, and a people surrendered to defeatism before the first shot was fired still finds its advocates. Most scholarship since the 1970s, however, has focused on the dilemmas of France's geopolitical position, the inadequacy of its military plans, and the inability of the French army to execute its doctrine.

Elizabeth Kier's *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* is an important recent contribution to the enduring debate over the fall of France.[2] Kier argues that France and Britain failed to develop military doctrines that might have countered the German threat because the military in each country suffered from a failure of imagination. This failure was a reflection of the culture of each military organization. Kier contends that the organizational culture of the French and British armies was the most important influence on their choice of military doctrines. More generally, she claims that a cultural approach often offers more powerful explanations than the standard realist and rationalist accounts of military policy.

In this essay, I assess the arguments presented in *Imagining War.* First, I briefly summarize the historiography of the fall of France. Second, I summarize the main themes and arguments of *Imagining War.* Subsequent sections offer criticisms of the book. In particular, I argue that *Imagining War* rests on the flawed premise that offensive doctrines offered a better, more modern option for France and Britain in 1940; that Kier overstates the role of organizational culture in explaining military doctrine; and that the book ultimately rests on stereotypical views of military officers and discredited historical claims that France was a victim of a divine judgment. The essay ends with a brief concluding section.

Historiography: The Evolution of Explanations for France's Fall

From the moment France and Germany signed the June 1940 armistice, the unanimous verdict was that the defeat represented a judgment on the moral state of the French nation. Marshal Philippe Pétain, Gen. Charles de Gaulle, and the Resistance movement offered competing versions of the view that the French defeat was rooted in the decadence of French culture. After spending

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2. Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997). Subsequent references to this book appear parenthetically in the text.

125 pages of his book castigating the French military, Marc Bloch suggested: "In no nation is any professional group ever entirely responsible for its own actions. The solidarity of society as a whole is too strong to permit the existence of the sort of moral autonomy, existing in isolation, which any such total responsibility would seem to imply. The staffs worked with tools that were put into their hands by the nation at large. The psychological conditions in which they lived were not altogether of their own making, and they themselves, through their members, were as their origins had molded them. They could be only what the totality of the social *fact,* as it existed in France, permitted them to be."[3]

Historians subsequently offered assessments broadly similar to Bloch's. Philip Bankwitz sees the fall of France as a collaboration between the government and the military. Aware of the "exhaustion of the national spirit," political leaders were willing to tolerate, even encourage, a primal antimilitarism in French political culture. For its part, the high command was paralyzed by a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis its German rival and by the fear that mobile warfare would invite attacks by the parliamentary Left.[4] Even the historian Eugenia Kiesling, who argues strongly that France's choice of doctrine was based on functional considerations, still makes a place for culture. France's defeat, she writes, "had natural—perhaps even ineradicable—roots in French political and military culture."[5]

The view that France's collapse was foreordained by deep-seated cultural factors, that 1930s' France was, in the words of British historian Martin Alexander, "a tired, lackluster, and ineffectual coalition leader,"[6] still finds advocates.[7] But since the 1970s, "Anglo-Saxon" historians especially have

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3. Bloch, *Strange Defeat,* p. 126 (emphasis in original).
4. Philip Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 165–166. See also Robert A. Doughty, *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Press, 1990), pp. 325–332; and Martin S. Alexander, *The Republic in Danger: General Maurice Gamelin and the Politics of French Defence, 1933–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 399.
5. Eugenia G. Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler: France and the Limits of Military Planning* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), p. 4.
6. Martin Alexander, "The Fall of France, 1940," *Journal of Strategic Studies,* Vol. 13, No. 1 (March 1990), p. 14.
7. Stephen Schuker, "France and the Remilitarization of the Rhineland," *French Historical Studies,* Vol. 14, No. 3 (1986), pp. 299–338; Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France, 1871–1969: La décadence, 1932–1939* [The foreign policy of France, 1871–1969: the decadence of 1932–1939] (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1939); and Duroselle, *L'Abîme, 1939–1945* [The abyss, 1939–1945] (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1983).

challenged the argument that the high patriotism of the generation of 1914 deteriorated into the defeatism of *ceux de '40*.[8] Scholars have attempted to discover, in the words of Kiesling, not why France failed, "but the nature of French efforts to avoid [defeat]."[9] French policymaking,[10] rearmament,[11] and military planning[12] have been scrutinized as causes for the defeat.

The idea that France was too disorganized and defeatist to defend itself has been swept away. "The outcome, by and large, has been a more widely-accepted appreciation of how greatly the French authorities in the late 1930s stretched their minds, their muscles, and their money to confront Hitler and the dark, dimly-understood horrors that he represented," writes Alexander. "Furthermore, it has become increasingly appreciated that the exertions of the French did not occur in some eleventh-hour awakening in 1939–1940 but were made from at least as far back as 1936."[13] Historians now tend to view the disasters of 1940 as a consequence of contingent events in the context of a longer-term attempt by France and Britain to adjust to the relative decline of their power after the unification of Germany in 1871. Most agree that France was correct to focus its diplomatic energies on recreating the alliance with Great Britain and, ultimately, with the United States. France spent plenty on armaments. France did not fail in 1940 for lack of tanks, although its air force was still rebuilding when the conflict broke out. Increasingly, scholars have defended the Maginot Line as a logical way to shield vital French industrial areas and to channel the German attack through Belgium.[14] France's strategic calculation that the war would be a long one cannot be faulted. Even Gamelin's

8. Douglas Porch, "Arms and Alliances: French Grand Strategy and Policy in 1914 and 1940," in Paul Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 125–126. Indeed, even Bloch argues that the French peasant of 1914 was no more eager to die for Belgrade than was the French peasant of 1939 for Danzig. Bloch, *Strange Defeat*, pp. 136–137. Jean-Jacques Becker, *1914: Comment les français sont entrés dans la guerre* [1914: how the French entered the war] (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977), argues that French soldiers went to battle in 1914 in a spirit of resignation rather than in a state of patriotic euphoria.
9. Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler*, p. 5.
10. Robert J. Young, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); and Alexander, *The Republic in Danger.*
11. Robert Frankenstein, *Le prix du réarmament français* [The price of French rearmament] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992).
12. Jeffrey Gunsberg, *Divided and Conquered: The French High Command and the Defeat of the West, 1940* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985); and Henri Dutailly, *Les problèmes de l'armée de terre française (1935–1939)* [The problems of the French army (1935–1939)] (Vincennes: Services historiques de l'armée de terre, 1980).
13. Alexander, "The Fall of France, 1940," p. 16.
14. Judith Hughes, *To the Maginot Line* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

decision to deploy into Belgium had a political and strategic rationale. So what went wrong?

If scholars cannot attribute France's defeat in 1940 to divine judgment, then they should explore the role of the instruments meant to defend it—the armies of France and Great Britain. Why were these forces so ill prepared to meet their German adversary? In the 1980s, military historians and political scientists sought to answer that question by focusing on "military effectiveness,"[15] in particular, how military organizations acquire and advance tactical and operational doctrine.[16] Important works by historians Robert Doughty[17] and Eugenia Kiesling[18] joined those of social scientists Jack Snyder[19] and Barry Posen[20] to trace the forces that influence the selection and development of military doctrine. Elizabeth Kier's book is one of the most recent additions to this literature.

Imagining War: *A Summary*

Imagining War has been hailed as an important new work that advances the debate over the sources of French and British military doctrines before World War II.[21] It received the 1998 Edgar S. Furniss Book Award, which the Mershon Center at Ohio State University gives annually to the first book by an author that makes an exceptional contribution to the study of national and international security, and many scholars cite it as a leading example of the new "culturalist" approach to security studies.

Imagining War rests on two premises. First, Kier claims that Britain and France adopted military doctrines that contributed to the defeat of their armies in 1940. "When war broke out in May 1940," Kier writes, "the French army (and its British ally) had a defensive doctrine that was incapable of breaking the German assault" (p. 39). France's defensive doctrine was "ill suited to

15. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, *Military Effectiveness,* 3 vols. (Boston: Allan and Unwin, 1988).

16. Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

17. Robert Allan Doughty, *Seeds of Disaster: The Development of French Army Doctrine, 1919–1939* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Press, 1985); and Doughty, *The Breaking Point.*

18. Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler.*

19. Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

20. Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

21. "The greatest significance of (Kier's) book is that its central ideas should replace simplistic notions about doctrine that currently exert great influence," writes Robert A. Doughty in the *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 92, No. 3 (September 1998), p. 750.

defeating France's continental adversary [Germany]" (p. 56). Further, "British officers were ill prepared for the demands of offensive operations dominated by mechanized vehicles and massed firepower" (p. 109). The French and British armies failed both to imagine how the war might be fought and to prepare for it accordingly. The year 1940 offers thumping proof that "static" military cultures that can "imagine" war only within established frameworks open themselves to defeat (pp. 144–145).

Second, Kier makes a more general claim that "choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines affect both the likelihood that wars will break out and the outcome of wars that have already begun" (p. 3). The role played by doctrines in 1940 is thus one example of a more general phenomenon. *Imagining War* does not present a detailed argument for either of these premises, but they pervade the book and are used to justify the importance of explaining military doctrines. If doctrinal choices affect the likelihood that wars will break out and their outcomes, then to understand exactly how military organizations develop doctrine becomes, literally, a matter of life and death.

The central argument of *Imagining War* is that culture shaped French and British military doctrines before 1940. The organizational cultures of the French and British armies explain why those forces proved unable to evolve a more modern, "offensive" doctrine. Many historians use culture as a rather vague and indeterminate concept, what Michael Desch would call a "supplement" to more concrete concerns that influenced "the organizational culture of particular militaries" (p. 30).[22] Culture provides "a particular [and limited] way of organizing action" (p. 144). A military culture emerges when soldiers react to constraints imposed on their force in the domestic political arena by their political leaders (p. 5). While this military culture may become more or less dogmatic or inflexible depending on that military's perception of civilian attitudes toward it (p. 145), an army's freedom to choose its doctrine is limited only by its own "set of basic assumptions, values, norms, beliefs, and formal knowledge that shape [its] collective understandings" (p. 28). The monopolistic and noncompetitive nature of the security environment, Kier asserts, reinforces this inward-looking characteristic of military organizations.

Kier argues that hostility to conscripts, whom French officers viewed as a mechanism of left-wing control of the military, convinced them that the nation-in-arms was incompatible with a modern, mechanized, fast-moving battlefield.

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22. Michael C. Desch, "Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies," *International Security,* Vol. 23, No. 1 (Summer 1998), p. 144.

When the French parliament voted in 1928 to reduce conscripts' terms to one year, the military's culture induced it to opt for a defensive doctrine, because "the French army could not imagine short-term conscripts executing an offensive doctrine" (p. 73). The professional prejudices of French officers led them to believe that one-year conscripts would lack the cohesion and ability to manipulate the new technology of maneuver warfare.

Domestic political factors in France circumscribed the army's choices and shaped the choice of a defensive doctrine. The French Left had traditionally opposed a long-service, professional army, fearing that it would be used domestically to break strikes and to support the Right. The Left thus advocated short terms for conscripts, so that the army would comprise citizen-soldiers and would never become a separate military caste. The French Right, on the other hand, preferred a professional army that could maintain order at home. These political beliefs, which neither Britain nor other countries shared, and the ensuing struggle between the Left and the Right created the domestic political context that interacted with the military's organizational culture to produce the French army's defensive doctrine.

Doctrinal choice in the British army also was socially conditioned, according to Kier. The class-conscious nature of British military society, the *haut bourgeois* recruitment of its stylish regiments from which the army selected its senior officers indelibly marked the command culture of the British army. "The British army's organizational culture continued to prize the gentleman-officer over the professional soldier," Kier writes. "This anachronistic culture prevented the army from grasping the potential of massed armor" (p. 109). The British army was dominated by "gentleman-officers" who "could only integrate the new technology within a defensive doctrine"(p. 144). According to Kier, British military leaders bent over backward to thwart advocates of offensive warfare, frustrating the success of armored exercises (p. 102) and underestimating German military strength (p. 103). "Gentleman-officers" could only imagine using "new techniques to fight in a traditional and defensive manner. Adopting an offensive doctrine on the modern battlefield required an organizational culture that they did not have" (pp. 109–110). Kier presents Basil Liddell Hart, J.F.C. Fuller, and Giffard Martel as prophetic visionaries whose ideas were consistently sabotaged by the guardians of Britain's gentleman-officer culture (p. 101).

The social origins of the British officer corps also constricted organizational options: "The British army's command structure resembled the hierarchical arrangement of the English gentry," she writes. "The idea of a subordinate

exercising initiative was practically unthinkable. . . . [The Duke of] Wellington, for example, did not allow his generals to design their own operations" (p. 149).

Kier argues that a "cultural, constructivist, and sociological" analysis of the evolution of doctrine in the French and British armies in the interwar years has greater explanatory power than the "more conventional structural, functional, and rationalist approaches" (p. 5) followed heretofore by both historians and social scientists. *Imagining War* thus differs in emphasis and conclusions from both the historical approaches cited above as well as those of Jack Snyder and Barry Posen, who argue that the military selects doctrines that promote the interests and self-image of the officer corps, strengthen a country's position in an alliance, and best utilize the skills of their troops. Kier contends that the French and British militaries adopted doctrines that did not respond to international imperatives or advance functional interests of their own organizations. Neither political nor technological constraints inhibited French and British soldiers from choosing more "offensive doctrines" had they wished. The "defensive doctrine" with which Britain and France went to war in 1939 was not inspired by organizational or strategic concerns. Rather the organizational culture of the respective officer corps made them incapable of imagining "a mechanized and offensive battlefield." Political prejudice and a British military culture that devalued professionalism blinded Allied officers to the fact that their defensive-minded doctrinal concepts had been made obsolete by what Kier calls "offensive doctrines."

Imagining War is a tightly argued work. The author has certainly read broadly in the literature and history of the French and British forces in the 1930s. Kier's emphasis on military culture reminds one that military organizations—indeed all organizations—acquire an ethos and develop an environment in which they work, one that shapes their assumptions and outlook. Nevertheless, the author takes her cultural argument too far when she attempts to preempt other factors that explain the lackluster Allied military performance of 1940.

The Flawed Premises of Imagining War

A fundamental shortcoming of *Imagining War* is that the two premises that frame the book's analysis are flawed. First, Kier's claim that the French and British armies were defeated in 1940 because they failed to adopt offensive doctrines is undermined by the fact that the "methodical battle" approach

ultimately won World War II.[23] Kier implies that offensive doctrines based on the use of independent tank forces would have succeeded on the battlefield, but were rejected by the French and British militaries for "cultural" reasons. In fact, the German approaches to armored combat succeeded only in specific circumstances and ultimately fell victim to what Kier regards as less imaginative attritional fighting styles that ultimately triumphed in World War II.

Second, Kier's assertion that doctrine can affect "the outcome of wars" (p. 3) is undermined by the fact that *strategy*, not doctrine, played a far more decisive role than doctrine in shaping the military postures of France, Britain, and Germany in 1940. Because Kier confuses strategy and doctrine, she mistakenly exaggerates the impact of military doctrine on the fall of France in 1940.

OFFENSIVE DOCTRINES, METHODICAL BATTLE, AND WORLD WAR II
Imagining War rests on the false premise that the Germans triumphed in 1940 because the French and British militaries were not "imaginative" enough to devise an offensive doctrine for their armored forces. Alas, Kier awards the title of most "imaginative" organizational culture to the wrong side. *Imagining War* does not inquire into the fate of offensive doctrines after 1940. The evidence from the latter years of the war reveals that controlled battle won World War II. (One can say that controlled battle lost it as well, because after 1942 the Allies forced the *Wehrmacht* to abandon the "offensive doctrines" that had given it such stunning early success and to concentrate on managing retreat. The bottom line is that doctrines that stressed independent tank armies enjoyed a brief shelf life—about two years—after which they succumbed to methodical battle.) In short, the Allies had a vision of how to win the war. In the short term, however, they were unable to execute their doctrine very well. The Germans had a different problem: a portion of their army could successfully execute its doctrine, but they still had no plan, no vision, and no strategy to win the war.

Kier suggests that the British army failed to grasp "the potential of massed armor" (p. 109) and ignored the views of proponents of "independent, fast-moving tank formations" (p. 91). Had British advocates of mechanized warfare been allowed to test their theories, rather than being consistently passed over, retired, or transferred to out-of-the-way places like India or Egypt (p. 101), Kier

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23. Methodical or controlled battle doctrines were developed by the British and French armies during World War I and called for the close coordination of infantry, artillery, and tanks, and eventually close air support in an advancing wave of firepower.

argues, the outcome might have been different in 1940. But what happened when British advocates of offensive doctrines got their chance to utilize independent tank formations? One such advocate was Claude Auchinleck, a general celebrated for his scant respect for military orthodoxy (and who incidentally was an Indian army officer). Named to command in the Middle East in June 1941, Auchinleck is credited with stopping Erwin Rommel at the first battle at el-Alamein in July 1942, and of playing midwife to Bernard Montgomery's successful defense of Alam Halfa in September. Nevertheless, Montgomery discovered on assuming command from Auchinleck that his first task was to repair Auchinleck's operational methods, which consisted of employing tanks in mobile formations independent of infantry support. This had allowed Rommel to impale them on screens of German antitank weapons and then savagely counterattack. As a result of these offensive doctrines, Auchinleck in 1942 was driven out of Cyrenaica, forfeited Tobruk, and made preparations to retreat to Jerusalem. At the insistence of Chief of the Imperial General Staff Alan Brooke, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill reluctantly replaced Auchinleck with Montgomery, whose opposition to independent tank corps was well known. Monty believed that German armor was "a myth," that if an army was well trained and mobile, "why then, even the most spectacular Panzer was in itself powerless."[24] Barely two weeks after taking command of the 8th Army in Egypt in August 1942, Montgomery proved it, first at Alam Halfa and then two months later at el-Alamein. And that proof came against Germany's greatest protagonist of "offensive doctrines"—Erwin Rommel. In the words of British historian Nigel Hamilton, Alam Halfa "demonstrated the fallibility of armor as an independent weapon and proved decisively that future battles and indeed the war itself would have to be won by co-operation between all arms, and between all three services."[25]

Montgomery's victory at el-Alamein later employed infantry assault behind a curtain of massed artillery fire in an eight-day battle reminiscent of the western front in World War I.[26] The character of World War II, like that of World War I, was one of attrition and methodical battle, which no amount of imagination could reverse in Tunisia, Sicily, Italy, Normandy, or on the eastern

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24. Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: The Making of a General, 1887–1942* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), pp. 214, 281, 353–354, 436–437, 493, 532.
25. Ibid., pp. 637–711, at p. 695. At Alam Halfa, Rommel's plan for victory consisted of drawing the British tanks from their defensive positions and then destroying them with his antitank guns as he had in the past. Montgomery's plan kept his tanks in their defensive positions to support his infantry, hence condemning Rommel's attack to defeat.
26. Ibid., pp. 775–848.

front.[27] Therefore, when one looks beyond 1940, one is forced to conclude that German doctrine in the first two years of the war relied for its success on speed and surprise. It succeeded against armies that could be overwhelmed because they were small like those of Poland. The Germans massed their best troops against poorly prepared French B divisions in the Ardennes in 1940. French political and military leadership was too politically riven to devise a coherent response to the German breakthrough. In the Western Desert under Auchin-leck, the British 8th Army tried unsuccessfully to replicate the German mobility to defeat the Germans. Montgomery realized that without speed and surprise, even the best German commanders were at a disadvantage against well-led infantry backed by concentrated artillery fire. In the view of American historian Williamson Murray, Montgomery's greatest contribution to victory was his emphasis on matériel and methodical battle over mobility.[28] In short, his army did not try to look like that of the Germans.

In the end, one is left to wonder which organizational culture was static, and which imaginative—the one that foresaw a long war of attrition and sought to devise a doctrine that best utilized the strengths of its conscript soldiers, or the one that tried to operationalize strategy and enlist it in the service of a policy that was beyond Germany's capacity to achieve?

In 1940 neither the British nor the French army had a strategic interest in adopting the risky "one throw of the dice" approach of the German army. Why meet the Germans on their terms? An encounter battle for any purpose other than to stop the initial German onslaught before settling in for the inevitable long war was out of the question. It was not compatible with Allied strategy, and it did not play to Allied strengths. The problem was not that the Allies chose the "wrong" doctrine. Apart from other factors, the most prominent being a faulty strategy, the Allies failed to execute their doctrine.

EXAGGERATING THE CAUSAL ROLE OF DOCTRINE BY CONFUSING STRATEGY AND DOCTRINE

One of the fundamental assertions of *Imagining War*, that "choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines affect both the likelihood that wars

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27. Even Gen. George Patton's two celebrated armor-led dashes to Palermo or in Normandy succeeded because, in each instance, the hard work of infantry and artillery tied down the main German forces and removed the threat from his flanks. One criticism of Patton was that his armored thrusts were spectacular precisely because he went where the German forces were weak or virtually nonexistent, for example, northwestern Sicily in 1943.
28. Williamson Murray, "British Military Effectiveness in World War II," in Millett and Murray, *Military Effectiveness*, Vol. 3, *The Second World War*, p. 119.

will break out and the outcome of wars that have already begun" (p. 3), is undermined by Kier's tendency to confuse "doctrine" with "strategy." Strategy and policy determine a military organization's offensive or defensive posture, not its doctrine. Doctrine is the way an army organizes to fight, that is, the procedures and methods it applies in combat. Doctrines are important especially for armies whose numerous articulated components must be coordinated to operate in unison. Strategy, on the other hand, is how a nation organizes its strength toward achieving a political goal in war.

One of the consistent weaknesses of Kier's approach is that, while she assumes that German choices were superior because the organizational culture of the German army allowed German officers to make correct doctrinal choices free from the prejudices that limited their French and British contemporaries, she never examines Germany's methods or the rationale behind its choices. This causes her to overemphasize the role of organizational culture in the development of doctrine in the German army before 1940, as well as to misconstrue what doctrine actually is. Kier repeatedly contrasts the "offensive" German doctrine against the "defensive" Allied procedures; however, doctrine per se is neither offensive nor defensive. Looking at the origins of *blitzkrieg* and of methodical battle reveals that what Kier calls "offensive" and "defensive" doctrines had switched places before 1940. Germany developed its mobile warfare doctrine in the early 1920s in the context of the small professional force imposed on Berlin by Versailles *and* of a defensive strategy. German soldiers concluded that the only way they could achieve any success against an invasion by Poland or France, or a combination of both, was to use railways and especially motor vehicles to combine mobility with surprise. Even after the German buildup began in 1935, Gen. Ludwig Beck, head of the Army General Staff, made plain that the "increasing offensive power of the army" was done in the interest of "strategic defense."[29] It was Hitler who converted mobile warfare into an offensive doctrine by taking on offensive strategic aims.

Although what eventually came to be called *blitzkrieg* evolved in a defensive strategic framework, methodical battle was developed for *offensive* warfare in

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29. The Germans began to experiment with armored vehicles near Kazan in the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s. In 1929 Heinz Guderian fathered the idea of armored divisions, and field exercises began from 1932. What was the attraction of enhanced mobility for the Germans? Gen. Werner von Fritsch, commander of the army between 1934 and 1938, called it a doctrine of "offensive defense." Wilhelm Deist, Manfred Messerschmidt, Hans-Erich Volkmann, and Wolfram Wette, *Germany and the Second World War,* Vol. 1, *The Build-up of German Aggression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 432, 434, 440.

World War I. Allied commanders relied on methodical battle, not because they were prejudiced against conscripts or, in the British case until 1916, citizen volunteers. Rather, a tightly coordinated plan of attack offered the best chance of success for half-trained soldiers and their officers whose professional knowledge was extremely tentative. Increases in firepower intensified the power of methodical battle in the interwar years. Nor was methodical battle made obsolete by mechanization. On the contrary, the integration of the tank into this concept was essential to Montgomery's successes in 1942–43.

Doctrines are merely techniques, methods of organization. They are operational and tactical in nature. Strategies supply the political dimension of conflict because they concern themselves with the political objectives of a war. Armies apply their doctrines well or badly depending on the level of training and professionalism, the nature of the strategic goals, the terrain, and the actions of the enemy. France in 1939–40 opted for a strategy of forward deployment into Belgium to fight a defensive war to stabilize the front and thwart a German victory. Hitler placed "mobile warfare" in the service of an offensive strategy, rather than use it in the defensive mode for which it had originally been conceived.

French Doctrine: The Limits of Cultural Explanations

Imagining War exaggerates the influence of organizational culture in shaping French military doctrine before 1940. Like all myths, there is an element of truth in the argument that French officers were prejudiced against conscripts. In all armies, professional soldiers consider themselves more technically proficient than conscripts and reservists. After all, soldiering is their *métier*. One also can agree with Kier that prejudice against conscripts was particularly exaggerated in the French army, where a sort of culture war between the professional army and the nation-in-arms had been fought at least since the Dreyfus affair at the turn of the century.[30] The culture of the French army was deeply scarred by the Great War. French conscripts in the interwar years were drawn from a society ambivalent about war, one that probably harbored to a greater or lesser degree a latent hostility to military service. Nevertheless, Kier

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30. The conviction of Capt. Alfred Dreyfus on charges of espionage in 1894, on the basis of fraudulent evidence, touched off a bitter fight for a revision of the verdict that eventually expanded to encompass anti-Semitism and the place of the army in the state.

does not place sufficient emphasis on three factors that also influenced France's choice of a defensive military doctrine.

First, Kier does not acknowledge that conscripts often *are* lower-quality soldiers; beliefs that conscript armies are less capable and less ready to fight are not merely prejudices caused by organizational culture. Kier argues that French officers were free to press conscripts into the service of offensive doctrines had they chosen to do so. But by dint of repetition that conscripts were bad soldiers because conscripts represented, in their minds, the power of the Left, French officers did come to believe their own prejudices (p. 156). However, even if one admits that prejudice against conscripts and reservists is endemic to all armies, and that it was more exaggerated in the French army than in the German army, this does not mean that short service did not cause French soldiers immense organizational and structural headaches, whatever their prejudices. Although France emerged victorious in 1918, the armistice of that year, Kiesling argues, produced a "perverse kind of reconciliation," a tacit truce in the war between politicians and soldiers in which each blamed the other for the mistakes and huge costs of the Great War.[31] The compromise was that politicians legislated for a large army of conscripts and reserves, but denied professional soldiers the means to indoctrinate them in military values and train them to a standard that would tempt the generals to repeat the bloody sacrifices of 1914–18. Money was not voted to train the reserves between 1919 and 1927, and only episodically after that. Reserve cadres were selected from one-year conscripts and were lacking in the knowledge and hence authority required to lead. Experiments with the call-up of complete reserve divisions, or selected cadres, or a broader base of reservists to integrate into regular units were attempted in the 1930s, all with disappointing results. Yet for French soldiers to criticize reservists was both politically incorrect and professionally damaging. Any professional soldier who criticized the citizen-soldier in public was branded anti-republican and accused of calling into question the ability of the army to defend France.[32]

Kier argues that the integration of conscripts into mobile warfare doctrines in Germany proves beyond a doubt that culture determined military doctrine in France. If the Germans managed to carry out an "offensive doctrine" with conscripts, why could not the French? This is an excellent question, but the

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31. Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler* p. 25.
32. Kiesling goes into some detail about the army's problems in training both conscripts and reservists in the 1930s. Ibid., chaps. 3, 4.

answer does not necessarily help her case. On the surface, at least, the problems of the French army in the 1930s paled in comparison to those of the *Reichswehr,* whose professional cadre was swamped with millions of conscripts after 1935. The absence of an organizational prejudice did not inhibit German soldiers from complaining bitterly that the influx of conscripts lowered readiness. German leaders calculated that their 100,000-man *Reichswehr* was so highly trained that it could absorb a threefold increase without a decline in quality. Once the *Wehrmacht* expanded beyond twenty-four divisions, however, the Germans experienced the same problems of quality decline as the French.[33] Melding this influx of men into a small professional force organized around a mobile warfare doctrine caused German generals many sleepless nights. The problem was especially acute because Hitler insisted on an accelerated timetable for rearmament and announced that Germany would go on the offensive as soon as possible to redress the indignities of Versailles. The German army's solution was to concentrate its best soldiers in elite divisions employed as a spearhead for its encounter battle doctrine, which was now placed in the service of an offensive, rather than a defensive, strategy.[34] In short, because Kier never deals with the German army, she ignores the fact that the German army utilized conscripts in basically the same way as did the French—that is, placing the best-trained soldiers in units most likely to see combat and consigning the rest to (one hoped) quiet sectors.[35]

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33. Like their French counterparts, German officers insisted that one-year conscription was insufficient to both train and maintain battle-ready divisions. Their solution was to raise conscription to two years in 1936, and draw officers from where ever they could find them, including the police and, in 1938, the Austrian army. German generals were never satisfied that their conscripts were sufficiently trained, and continued to insist that they would not be ready for war before 1943. Deist, *Germany and the Second World War,* Vol. 1, pp. 449, 453.

34. Although the influx of conscripts from 1935 caused the Germans immense problems, it also gave them enormous advantages. First, the German army was virtually permanently mobilized from that moment. Conscripts called up in 1935 were only released in the autumn of 1937, to be recalled in the spring of the following year. The rapid pace of German rearmament, the incorporation of the Austrian army into the *Wehrmacht,* and the takeover of the Skoda arms works in the autumn of 1938 meant that training in mobile warfare could be carried out in the German army. In September 1939 the German army was offered a dry run in Poland to test its theories; it sustained substantial casualties. Ibid., pp. 448–453. Diest notes that the rapid expansion of the German army did impede the training of motorized troops in the winter of 1938–39 because of a lack of vehicles. Ibid., p. 453.

35. The Germans organized their army in four waves. The first wave comprised 78 percent active-duty personnel. Most of the conscripts and reservists were consigned to second-echelon units. Ibid., p. 455. The French, too, divided their army into more highly trained A and reserve-heavy B divisions. Unfortunately for the Allies, however, because the Germans held the strategic offensive, they were able to identify the Allied deployment through radio intercepts and concentrate their forty-four best-trained and highly mechanized units against the worst-trained French

Second, French policymakers adopted an attitude to mobile warfare that was at best ambivalent, and at worst hostile. The emergence of this attitude undermines Kier's contention that the French military could have chosen an offensive doctrine had it wished (p. 72). In the opinion of Edouard Daladier, France's defense minister from 1938 to the outbreak of war, "The first and last word in military art is to construct a trench and hold it well. All the rest . . . it's a joke!" Paul Reynaud, who presided over France's surrender in 1940, believed that de Gaulle's ideas on mobile warfare got no hearing because of "our political concepts which conceive of only a war thrust upon us, therefore only of a defensive one" Kier quotes Léon Blum, leader of the Socialist Party and prime minister in the Popular Front government of 1936, as testifying at the Riom trials of February 1942 that the French army had been perfectly at liberty to develop an offensive, mobile warfare doctrine. In fact, Blum equated mechanization and mobile warfare with the wasteful offensives of 1914–18, for which he blamed the professional military caste. He had denounced de Gaulle's call for mechanization on concrete evidence that a "reactionary" and "dangerous" high command had never accepted the idea of a citizen army.[36] Gamelin was furious with de Gaulle, not because he opposed mechanization, but because de Gaulle linked mechanization to professionalization. "The French were trapped," Kier concludes. "The Left would not accept a professional army and the army could not envision an offensive doctrine without one" (p. 83). Perhaps de Gaulle could not separate professionalization from mechanization. But that does not mean that the army was incapable of imagining a mechanized force in the context of a conscript army. The army simply needed to keep the conscripts longer so that they could train the best of them as noncommissioned officers and reserve officers. Gamelin opposed de Gaulle, not because de Gaulle advocated mechanization, but because de Gaulle's 1934 book was interpreted as an attack on the citizen army and gave ammunition to those who argued that to become too innovative in doctrinal matters was to invite attack by antimilitarist politicians.[37]

Kier is correct to point out that the politicians did not tell the army what doctrine to adopt. Yet the constraints imposed by the Third Republic in the form of an army of short-service conscripts, budgetary constraints that pre-

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units, placed in the Ardennes precisely because that was where Gamelin thought an attack least likely.
36. Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France,* pp. 86–87, 154, 160.
37. Alexander, *The Republic in Danger,* pp. 37–39.

vented rigorous training, and a political leadership alert to any hint that the professional soldiers might resurrect offensive doctrines offered French soldiers little incentive except to innovate cautiously within the context of proven military doctrines. Mechanization had to be carried out by stealth in the French army, lest it suggest that the army might repeat the bloody and futile offensive operations of 1914–18.

Finally, Kier's emphasis on cultural explanations ignores the possibility that France's doctrine may have been a rational response to France's external circumstances. The case for an offensive doctrine was not so obvious that a cultural explanation must be invoked to account for why France chose a different approach. Kier assumes that the case for offensive doctrines was obvious before 1940. In France, however, the debate over mechanization was a lively one, made complex by overlapping issues of arms procurement, the absence of proof that hard-hitting mechanized units could achieve strategic results, and a weak high command unable to resolve doctrinal debates within the forces. In France armored vehicles began to come on line in sufficient numbers only in the autumn of 1939, which retarded the creation of independent armored divisions. This is not so much because of an a priori hostility to mobile warfare in the French army, although the case for it remained unproven before Poland. Even after the fall of Warsaw, advocates of controlled battle could plausibly argue that what worked against Poland would not work against the Allied armies, especially as the Germans had taken 44,000 casualties in a campaign against a small country that was simultaneously attacked by the Soviet Union. A lengthy and complicated process of arms procurement, bureaucratic infighting over systems and budgets, and production bottlenecks complicated the disputes over doctrine in the French army. Similar disputes in Germany were resolved more easily because of Germany's strategic position, a centralized high command able to resolve bureaucratic disputes, and the intervention of Hitler in favor of those who advocated aggressive use of mechanized formations. In France Gamelin could coordinate, but not command, a deliberate imposition of the civilian government to prevent the emergence of a strong military spokesman. Likewise, the minister of defense had little authority over the other military ministries and so was virtually powerless to resolve the many disputes over arms procurement and doctrine. Because the case for offensive doctrines was not obvious, and no one could resolve these debates, the process of resolution was a slow one.

British Doctrine: The Limits of Cultural Explanations

Kier's cultural explanation of British army doctrine also does not withstand scrutiny. If Kier were correct, we would expect to find that critics of offensive doctrines in the 1930s were amateur gentleman-officers guided by cultural prejudices, not military professionalism. Instead, however, the critics of offensive visions of armored warfare were professional generals who went on to make their reputations as some of best commanders in World War II. Alan Brooke, the only corps commander in the British Expeditionary Force who performed competently in 1940 and who as a result was promoted to chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Bernard Montgomery sat firmly in the controlled battle camp. Generals Miles Dempsey, Oliver Leese, and Brian Horrocks, who acquitted themselves well enough in 1940 to assume corps commands in the 8th Army, all applied methodical battle techniques. Indeed, Kier's "prophets" of armored warfare were either "no shows" after 1940, or, like Claude Auchinleck (whom she does not mention), utter failures. Infantry and artillery won battles. The tank was fundamentally an infantry support weapon, only exceptionally employed independently. Those who argued otherwise were the amateurs, men carried away by "a modern version of the age-old romance of cavalry," none more so than Churchill. Montgomery denounced General Sir Giffard LeQ. Martel's call for a "tank army" that could fight independent of infantry as a "hare-brained" example of "backward thinking." To be successful against opponents as tough as the Germans, forces had to combine infantry, artillery, and tanks.[38] Indeed, Kier's cultural explanation for the origins of doctrine could much more plausibly be applied to the Nazis, who combined a pessimistic view of German civil society with an infatuation with warfare as a heroic and romantic enterprise.[39]

   Kier's assertion that the British disinclination to decentralize was a function of a gentry culture assumes that decentralization of command is good, whereas

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38. Hamilton, *Monty,* pp. 213–214, for disagreements with Liddell Hart; p. 320 for Dempsey, Leese, and Horrocks; p. 329 on Brooke; p. 436 on armor as a revival of the "romance of cavalry"; and pp. 353 and 493 on Martel.
39. Far from being prejudiced against the "nation-in-arms," one can argue that the adoption of a long-war strategy demonstrates that the soldiers of the Western alliance actually placed greater faith in the willingness of their populations to sustain a long war than did German soldiers and Hitler, who sought to win the war quickly lest they again be "stabbed in the back" by a fickle population as in 1918. In fact, it was the German doctrine that was rooted in a deep cultural pessimism, while that of the Allies was calculated to entice the most efficient performance from citizen-soldiers.

centralized command is bad. Decentralization of command, considered a benefit by Kier, does not invariably succeed, however. Montgomery decentralized his command after el-Alamein only to discover that his mobile *corps de chasse* failed to *chasse* the retreating Rommel. The attempts of his corps commanders to surround and entrap Rommel invariably failed, all of which suggests that decentralized command worked best when the enemy was disorganized or demoralized, as the Germans discovered when the loss of control over their battles contributed to defeat on the Marne in September 1914, and to the failure of the Michael offensives of 1918.[40] Otherwise, decentralization might lead to confusion and loss of control.

Old Wine in New Bottles: Reviving Divine Judgment and Stereotypes

Ultimately, Kier's work is a revival of discredited approaches instead of an innovative new analysis. *Imagining War* falls into the divine judgment category of 1940 scholarship because it sees the Allied defeat as foreordained, the military concomitant of an appeasement policy that ignored the competitive nature of the international system and instead pandered to the defeatism of the Allied populations. Instead of working to perfect offensive doctrines, Allied soldiers wallowed in the cultural prejudices that consigned them to defeat at the hands of an enemy spiritually free to innovate. Rather than fall back on this "rot from within" explanation of 1940, most historians prefer to view 1940 as a consequence of contingent events in the context of a longer-term attempt

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40. In taking Wellington as an example of how British military culture precluded decentralization (p. 149), Kier offers further evidence of her failure to accord sufficient weight to factors other than cultural bias. Wellington faced problems that only strict centralization could cure: his army was undisciplined, plundered the population at will, and was literally caught napping during French attacks. A minor Irish baronet and "sepoy general" like Sir Arthur Wellesley might have found it difficult to have his orders followed by commanders who, though inferior in rank, considered themselves socially superior and better connected at court. These intriguers, whom Wellesley called "croakers," were led by his second-in-command, Sir Brent Spencer, a favorite of George III, who spread discontent with Wellington's leadership in the army and at home. Wellesley could not afford to have his subordinates make common cause with his numerous enemies in the British press and in the government. Although Wellesley certainly fit the definition of a snob, class preference had nothing to do with his reluctance to decentralize command. Given the inferior size of Wellington's army and the fact that survival in the musket era depended on the maintenance of an unbroken front, allowing subordinate commanders to "plan their own operations" would be courting extinction. But Kier's accusation that Wellington was a martinet driven by a gentry desire to control everything is belied by the fact that, as the leader of a coalition force, he often had to plead with and cajole his Spanish and Portuguese allies to carry out their preassigned role in his operations. Christopher Hibbert, *Wellington: A Personal History* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1997), pp. 85–86, 88, 93, 98–99.

by France and Britain to adjust to the relative decline of their power after the unification of Germany in 1871. Allied armies did not reject mobile and mechanized warfare because of internally generated prejudice and because their "static" organizational cultures prevented them from reaching greater heights of doctrinal imagination. By 1940 they had gone some way toward contemplating a more mobile battlefield. That they did not throw themselves with Teutonic abandon into "offensive doctrines" can be explained by the fact that an offensive posture and the encouragement of "encounter battle" were compatible neither with Allied strategy nor with Allied force structure. Victory or defeat in 1940 did not hinge on the choice of offensive or defensive doctrines. The verdict was awarded to the adversary who could best execute his doctrine and who made the fewest strategic mistakes.

Imagining War also revives largely discredited explanations that rely on stereotypes of military officers. Kier's focus on organizational culture as an explanation for the fall of France and as a way to understand how a state chooses to adopt either an offensive or a defensive doctrine has been hailed by the strategic studies community as groundbreaking, but "strategic culturalists" have been around at least since the interwar years.[41]

Although the "cultural" argument has been more-or-less present in military studies at least since Machiavelli, perhaps even since Thucydides, Kier's study appears, at first glance, to offer a modern approach to the study of military doctrine. The study of the way nations and organizations, and now apparently wars, are imagined has become a fashionable, postmodern approach to scholarship. Taking their cue from the work of Benedict Anderson[42] and the collection of essays edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger,[43] historians have studied how institutions and peoples perceive or invent their own reality, one that is sometimes at odds with the facts. Indeed, the more at odds with the facts that reality is, the more the outside world is hostile to an organization's perception of reality, the more an organization is likely to intensify its allegiance to its self-generated illusions. Military organizations tend to be particularly resistant to the imposition of civilian values. Thus Kier argues that, while the Germans proved that conscripts were perfectly able to adapt to the skilled

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41. Desch, "Culture Clash," pp. 144, 149, 150.
42. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Books, 1991).
43. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

demands of modern warfare, French soldiers were unable to imagine a war in which conscripts could perform anything other than a small range of defensive military tasks (p. 56).

Although Kier's approach appears to be thoroughly postmodern, on closer inspection her focus on organizational culture merely resurrects antimilitarist clichés and popular stereotypes about the origins of military incompetence that have been around at least since the turn of the century and clothes them in social-scientific language. A reversion to these antiquated explanations of military behavior appears a step backward, not forward, in trying to understand how military organizations adapt to tactical, operational, and strategic challenges. French antimilitarists had argued at least since the Dreyfus affair that the French officer corps generated its own, often socially derived, attitudes and perspectives, ones often seriously at odds with the interests of society.[44] Colonel Blimp was created in the interwar years as a personification of the "lions led by donkeys" verdict on British generalship in World War I. In Britain Churchillian rhetoric and the popular capacity to interpret Dunkirk as a victory undermined any proclivity to interpret the defeat in Flanders in moral terms. Nevertheless, Colonel Blimp, a stereotypical representative of the genteel British officer, became a common whipping boy for military failure in the public mind. "Badgering Colonel Blimp" was elevated to a major-league sport in the more popular London dailies, especially because William Edward Ironside and John Gort, the leaders of the British army, seemed "blood brothers of Blimp."[45] Churchill was livid when the film *Colonel Blimp* was produced early in the war, because it projected stereotypes of a British officer corps dominated by representatives of the upper classes out of touch with modern warfare.[46]

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44. French socialist leader Jean Jaurès' *L'organisation socialiste de la France,* originally published in 1910, argued that if France and other European countries adopted a Swiss militia system, war would cease because these conscript armies would be capable of carrying out offensive operations. Jaurès, *L'organisation socialiste de la France: L'armèe nouvelle* [The socialist organization of France: the new army] (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1977). See chapter 7 on the benefits of the Swiss militia system and chapter 5 on the virtues of a defensive strategic posture.

45. Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain, 1935–1945* (London: Granada, 1971), p. 285.

46. According to Sir David Hunt, who left Magdalen College, Oxford, to serve both Auchinleck and Montgomery as an intelligence officer in the Western Desert, the accusations of Blimpish attitudes had senior British officers bending over backward to show that they were "imaginative," which led to "a good deal of proliferation of special forces, private armies, separate intelligence-gathering organizations. . . . Senior regular officers of the Indian Army were among the keenest in this way. General Auchinleck, for instance, was determined to show himself as unconventional as possible." The Welsh Labour leader Aneurin Bevan attributed Rommel's success in 1942 to his (incorrectly) alleged working-class origins, and insisted that he would never rise above the rank

Without competent civilian oversight, soldiers may fight wars in wasteful, inefficient, and potentially disastrous ways. War, of course, is *always* too important to be left to the generals. But Kier breathes new life into the view put forward by left-wing deputies in the Third Republic and advanced academically by Joseph Monteilhet[47] and Richard Challener[48] that debates over military organization in France were ultimately about the distribution of domestic political power. Her caricatures of the British officer corps could have been lifted from the popular Labour press of the war years, and do more to obscure the complexity of the issues debated within the British army than to explain its early failures.

Conclusion: Imagination or Fantasy?

In the final analysis, one wonders if the world needs yet another book that interprets 1940 as a moral judgment on the Allied armies and an object lesson in the consequences of a defective organizational culture. The fall of France was not a divine judgment, but a consequence of France's decline as a great power after 1871. Kier's account of the Allied defeat in 1940 ignores or dismisses logical reasons other than political prejudice or an amateurish outlook that explain why the Allies failed to adopt offensive doctrines. Just because opposing armies have equal access to technology, matériel, and manpower does not mean that they can access them at the same time. Despite Kier's assertions that the French army was at liberty to choose "offensive doctrines" had it possessed the imagination to do so, the political and organizational impediments to doing so were huge. Nor is it necessarily in the strategic or organizational interest of one army to use technology and manpower in ways identical to those of the enemy. On the contrary, an asymmetrical response is often the better option, assuming, of course, that it can be efficiently applied.

Kier's explanation for the Allied defeat is a particularly regressive one that relies on clichés and stereotypes to explain organizational behavior and hence

of sergeant had he been born in Hull instead of Heidenheim. Hunt, *A Don at War* (London: William Kimber, 1966), pp. 15, 74. This eagerness of the British army to shed its Blimpish image by promoting working-class officers is brilliantly satirized by Evelyn Waugh in *Officers and Gentlemen* (London: Penguin, 1970), pp. 216–217.

47. Joseph Monteilhet, *Les institutions militaires de la France* [The military institutions of France] (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1932).

48. Richard D. Challener, *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, 1888–1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955).

doctrinal choice.[49] The Allies got off to a slow start against the Germans in World War II. But Hitler was forced to intervene in 1941 to halt the slaughter of Italian forces by British "gentleman-officers" in North Africa. Within weeks of having assumed direction of the war in the summer of 1942, Brooke and Montgomery—the atheists of "offensive doctrines"—forced Rommel into a retreat that would carry him back to the Fatherland.

In *Imagining War,* Kier confuses doctrine and strategy, ignores the historical antecedents of each force's doctrine, and makes sweeping assumptions about the ability of doctrine to influence the outbreak of a war or the outcome once a war begins. There was nothing wrong with the doctrines of the Allied armies in 1940 that better training, execution, and superior strategy would not have cured. The Germans employed conscripts in basically the same way as did the French, putting the best-trained troops in units that were expected to absorb the brunt of the fighting.

The Allied armies' failure did not lay in their doctrine, which was well adapted to their strategy and actually showed that the Allies' strategy placed more faith in the stamina of their populations to support a long war than did the Germans in theirs.[50] The outcome of the conflict in May–June 1940 can be explained by mistakes made by the Allies from the beginning, and by the German ability to capitalize on those mistakes. The French and German armies resembled each other at the outset of the conflict more than they differed. Each had a doctrine that was a work in progress. That of the Germans was not so much a set of hard principles as one that relied on initiative and inventiveness in tactical situations.[51] The Allied armies lagged behind the Germans in training and operational technique. Their communications were bad and their leadership lacked determination and ruthlessness. But the fear that they would

49. If these men were so ensnared by their dysfunctional organizational cultures, how did they manage to have any success at all? Colonial expeditions, at which the British excelled, were extremely complex to organize both logistically and politically. The British army in 1914 was considered one of the most professional that Britain ever fielded. The professional British army was sacrificed in the first two years of the war and had to reorganize virtually from scratch, utilizing methodical battle as the best operational device to employ a mass of untrained volunteers in an offensive capacity.

50. "The doctrine the French created during the 1930s made sense for the army that France had and the war that France was planning to fight," Kiesling argues. "The result, both in the form of the long-war strategy and of the doctrine of the methodical battle, was designed to deter war if possible and, if deterrence failed, to maximize the likelihood of victory while minimizing its cost." Kiesling, *Arming against Hitler,* p. 5.

51. Karl-Heinz Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende: Der Westfeldzug, 1940* [The legendary blitzkrieg: the western campaign, 1940] (Munich: Oldenbourg, Militargeschichtliches Forschungsamt, 1996).

overtake the Germans caused Hitler to press his generals for an early offensive. When that offensive came, Gamelin failed to ensure against strategic surprise and instead committed his strategic reserve to his left flank. Once the Germans made their breakthrough in the Ardennes, with his best troops isolated in Belgium, Gamelin was unable to seal the breach with poorly trained officers and soldiers. "The reasons France made the fateful strategic decision it did actually had little to do with the domestic political crisis of the Third Republic or even with its defensive military doctrine," concludes Michael Desch, who argues that realist theory still offers the best explanation for changes in French military doctrine between the wars and for the outcome of the battle for France.[52]

If "imagination" was the key to victory in 1940, then what sort of imagination was required? In fact, in the context of the 1930s, the imagination to discover offensive doctrines proved precisely the most dangerous sort of imagination to possess. In the French army, those who possessed the imagination to argue in public for the creation of tank armies, like Charles de Gaulle, drew the vilification of the Left down on the heads of the army. In the British case, the proponents of offensive doctrines were the amateurs and romantics. Their adversaries were the realists and professionals who understood that a decentralized command style and an offensive posture built around independent tank units would lead to disaster against a highly professional German army. What sort of imagination allowed German soldiers to believe that they could conquer Europe with an "offensive doctrine"? What sort of organizational culture stripped German officers of the ability to imagine that, sooner rather than later, they would encounter nations and armies against which their tactics would not work? German strategy was a desperate gamble rooted in cultural pessimism and strategic desperation, not in imagination.

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52. Desch, "Culture Clash," pp. 162–163.