

WHEN DIPLOMATS FAIL:
AUSTRIAN AND RUSSIAN REPORTING FROM BELGRADE, 1914

Barbara Jelavich

The mountain of books written on the origins of the First World War have produced no agreement on the basic causes of this European tragedy. Their division of opinion reflects the situation that existed in June and July 1914, when the principal statesmen involved judged the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Habsburg throne, and its consequences from radically different perspectives. Their basic misunderstanding of the interests and viewpoints of the opposing sides contributed strongly to the initiation of hostilities.

The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of diplomatic reporting, particularly in the century before 1914 when ambassadors were men of influence and when their dispatches were read by those who made the final decisions in foreign policy. European diplomats often held strong opinions and were sometimes influenced by passions and prejudices, but nevertheless throughout the century their activities contributed to assuring that this period would, with obvious exceptions, be an era of peace in continental affairs.

In major crises the crucial decisions are always made by a very limited number of people no matter what the political system. Usually a head of state -- whether king, emperor, dictator, or president, together with those whom he chooses to consult, or a strong political leader with his advisers-- decides on the course of action. Obviously, in times of international tension these men need accurate information not only from their military staffs on the state of their and their opponent's armed forces and the strategic position of the country, but also expert reporting from their representatives abroad on the exact issues at stake and the attitudes of the other governments, including their immediate concerns and their historical background. Of course, they also need to read this material and to act on a critical and rational basis. The breakdown of this system in 1914 -- the failure of the European diplomats to communicate the differing viewpoints on the crisis both to their own governments and to those to which they were accredited -- certainly played a significant role in the initiation of the disaster.

This study will concentrate on the immediate events, not on the general origins of the First World War. The majority of the books on the subject dwell on the often vague background events. In fact, however, the international situation in 1914, in comparison with almost any other period in the previous century, was relatively good. Although in any forest a large amount of combustible material is always available, a fire does not start until a match is lit or lightning strikes. The cause of the conflagration is the match, not the available leaves, which constitute the nature of a woodland. In 1914, two actions, first, the Habsburg declaration of war on Serbia and, second, the Russian decision to back Serbia, were the matches; the leaves had always been there.

Although by 1914 Russia and the Habsburg Empire had many differences and were part of competing alliance systems, in the previous two centuries they had acted together more often than separately or in opposition. Sharing certain basic interests, they usually were either in alliance or able to negotiate their differences. Not only did they often have common foreign policy goals, but the nature of their conservative regimes also drew them together. Both opposed radical political movements, changes brought about by force and violence, and what we today refer to as terrorism. Their internal security organizations were concerned, in particular, about small terrorist groups plotting actions against the state either at home or abroad. Political assassination was a living reality to their leaders and certainly to their monarchs. Alexander II in 1881 and Empress Elizabeth in 1898 had died at the hands of political assassins.

Equally important, both governments faced serious problems with their minorities. The national question, particularly the South Slav, was the major internal issue in the Habsburg Monarchy in 1914. Similarly, in Russia the Polish problem had exerted a great influence on foreign affairs and a policy of Russification was in effect in 1914. Preceding Russian governments had also usually opposed national opposition within the Habsburg Empire. In 1849, Nicholas I, for instance, had come to the aid of the monarchy faced by the challenge of the Hungarian revolution. In 1914, most Russian statesmen for different reasons preferred the maintenance of the dual structure in the Habsburg state rather than reforms which would give more power to the Slavic element.

The assassination of Franz Ferdinand in June 1914 involved exactly these elements of political terror and national agitation directed against the integrity of a state. By this time, however, the previous unifying elements had to a large extent been overridden by other more immediate issues, some of which were the product of Balkan events, in particular the change of government in Serbia in 1903, the Habsburg annexation of Bosnia-

Hercegovina in 1908, and the Balkan Wars. As a result of the friction caused by these events, many political leaders in both states came to view their governments as natural opponents. In St. Petersburg some statesmen saw the Habsburg Empire as an aggressive power which, in league with Germany, was attempting to dominate the Balkan peninsula to the total exclusion of Russia. In Vienna, the apparent Russian support for Slavic causes was often considered as a move to break up the empire into its national components. In both countries these views were also aired in an aggressive and violent press, whose activities did much to poison the atmosphere. Unfortunately, both Russian and Habsburg diplomats tended to consider the opinions expressed in the newspapers and journals as truly representing "public opinion."

The negative elements in Russian-Habsburg relations were particularly apparent in their relationship with Serbia. This connection is of importance because it will be argued here that the major direct cause for the outbreak of the war was the breakdown for a crucial period of civilian control in Serbia, an event which allowed the organization of an extremely small-scale conspiracy, which, contrary to all reasonable expectations, succeeded and thus set the stage for the subsequent events. The assassination of the heir to the throne caused the Habsburg leaders to respond not on the basis of a rational consideration of events, but on a misunderstanding and misreading of what they saw as a dangerous Serbian threat to their internal stability, involving in fact the life or death of the state. Their reaction was so strongly directed towards South Slav concerns that they, as one scholar has written, "acted as if Russia did not exist."¹ For its part, the Russian government, without accurate information on Serbian internal conditions and with only a fuzzy conception of the entire South Slav national problem as it involved both the monarchy and Serbia, tended to view the Habsburg actions as directed against a small, weak, innocent victim, which as a Slavic state was entitled to Russian consideration.

The attitude of both countries had, of course, been built up over the previous years. What we need to consider here is the extent to which the diplomatic reporting from both sides did or did not convey the real situation in Belgrade and whether it aided or misled the governments in making correct decisions. First, the reports from Belgrade will be examined to discover the extent to which they gave an accurate description of Serbian political events and of the struggle for influence between the Habsburg and Russian representatives. Second, and in less detail, the reaction of the Russian and Habsburg diplomats in Vienna and St. Petersburg to the assassination will be summarized to judge whether their views reflected those of their colleagues in Belgrade.

Before proceeding to an examination of the activities of the Habsburg and Russian representatives in Belgrade it is necessary, however, to consider briefly Serbian internal conditions in 1914 and the events leading to the assassination. Certainly, if a dangerous point existed in Europe in 1914, it was in Belgrade where Russian and Habsburg interests clashed directly and where the internal situation opened the door for outside adventures. Although Serbian-Habsburg relations had cooled after 1903 when an army coup brought in a new government under King Peter Karadjordjević, it was the subsequent Habsburg annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina in 1908 that produced the major reaction. Serbian patriots had long regarded these provinces as their national heritage despite the fact that the Orthodox population enjoyed a plurality and not a majority in the area. At the time of the annexation crisis the Narodna Odbrana (National Defense) society took upon itself the task of forming armed bands and of conducting national propaganda in Bosnia. After an ultimatum brought an end to such activities, Narodna Odbrana was ostensibly transformed into a cultural organization, but in fact its members continued their conspiratorial functions. In 1911, another organization, Ujedinjenje ili Smrt (Union or Death), called by its enemies the Black Hand, was founded. At its head was Dragutin Dimitrijević (also called Apis, the bull, after the Egyptian god), one of the principal conspirators in 1903. This organization was actively engaged in advancing Serbian national goals abroad, but, most important, it also played a role in internal Serbian politics. In the spring of 1914 it undertook a campaign against the head of the government, Nikola Pašić, of the Serbian Radical Party. The major issue was the control of territory won in the Balkan Wars.

From early May until the middle of June 1914, Serbian internal politics were dominated by the so-called Priority Question, that is, whether the army or the civilian government should control the "New Serbia." If the military, at this time strongly under the influence of officers who belonged to the Black Hand, were allowed to administer what was in fact almost half of Serbian territory, the army would be able to challenge the civilian government for control of the entire state. Pasic, determined to maintain civilian rule in Macedonia, also took some measures against the Black Hand at this time.

The opposition groups, in particular the Young Radicals, took this opportunity to launch a simultaneous attack on the government. Although forced to resign briefly on June 2, Pašić was able to return to power on June 11. The assembly was dissolved on June 24, with new elections scheduled. At the same time King Peter, in bad health, stepped down and his son Alexander became regent.

It was in this crucial period of internal turmoil that three Bosnian students, with Serbian arms and acting with the knowledge

and approval of Dimitrijević, crossed into Bosnia. During the next week these young men traveled around the country recruiting more supporters. On June 4 or 5, when the nation was still in a political crisis, Pašić learned through his contacts about the actions of the students; he was apparently aware of their intentions. He took several steps. He discussed the matter with his ministers and opened an investigation of the border conditions. He did not directly or indirectly get in touch with any Habsburg official. Neither did he inform his strong supporter, the Russian ambassador Hartwig, of the events. The news of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo on June 28 was received with shock by the Russian and Habsburg representatives in Belgrade, both of whom had no prior suspicions of what was happening nor any appreciation of the dangers in the Serbian internal situation for foreign affairs.

The Russian representative, Nicholas Genrikhovich Hartwig, and his Habsburg colleague, Wladimir Giesl von Gieslingen, were both able diplomats with a great deal of experience in Balkan affairs. During the six months preceding the assassination, they had not faced any major crises. Following the turbulent events of the Balkan Wars, this period was one of relative calm and readjustment. The major foreign policy issue which involved the two diplomats was the negotiation over the financing and building of railroads in Serbia. At this time, both diplomats were intensely aware of the changes in the Balkan balance brought about by the previous wars, and they followed Serbian domestic politics closely. Their differing approaches can be seen in a brief analysis of their reports.

Of the two diplomats, Hartwig had previously played the more important role in Balkan affairs.² The grandson of a German doctor who had emigrated to Russia, he was brought up in completely Russian surroundings. Since his family had neither great wealth nor influence, he had to win his way by his talents. After completing his studies at the University of St. Petersburg, he entered the Asiatic Department of the Foreign Ministry, where many others of his social background had previously achieved success. Rising quickly because of his intelligence and ability, he worked closely with Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamzdorf during the latter's term as foreign minister from 1901 to 1906. At that time Hartwig became head of the Asiatic Department. But under the next minister, Alexander Petrovich Izvolskii, his career took a downward turn. Sent as minister to Teheran, a post which he regarded as an exile, he did not make a success of his assignment. His appointment to Belgrade in 1909 did, however, enable him to carry out a policy in line with his own convictions.

While in the Asiatic Department, Hartwig had been among those who attacked official Russian policy in the Near East as too weak and compliant. Once in Belgrade he took an active role

in attempting to reverse the situation and, in addition, to make Serbia the center of Russia's Eastern policy. His crucial part in the organization of the Balkan League in 1912 and his tendency to carry on a personal policy without adequately informing his superiors have been studied previously. Although strongly convinced of the necessity of close Russian involvement in Slavic causes, a stand which inevitably included hostility to Austria-Hungary, Hartwig hoped for close Russian-German relations, and he was on good terms with German diplomats.³

Because of his strong support of Serbian national aims, Hartwig by 1914 enjoyed a major influence not only over Serbia's foreign but also its domestic politics. Most foreign observers considered that he had full control of Serbian foreign affairs and was second in influence only to the Radical Party leader, Nikola Pašić. The Habsburg representatives, in particular, were strongly critical of his role; Giesl's predecessor, Stephan von Ugron, compared him to "a malicious demon."⁴ Considering his period as minister in Belgrade, however, the chief criticism that can be made against Hartwig is that he misled the foreign representatives, the Serbian politicians, and his own government on his exact position. As many previous Russian diplomats, Hartwig played a lonesome game. He did not rigorously carry out the foreign ministry's instructions, nor did he report fully on his own activities. In Belgrade, however, he cultivated the impression that he was indeed the mouthpiece of his government and that his word represented official policy. As such, not only the Serbs, but the Habsburg diplomats were convinced that he was carrying out official instructions. Thus, both Serbs and Austrians received the impression that Russian policy in the Balkans was far more active and aggressive than it actually was.

In Serbian domestic affairs Hartwig also took a decisive stand. A defender of Pašić and the Old Radicals, he criticized strongly any of their opponents. He also does not appear to have been close to Serbian army circles, although his military attaché, Colonel Viktor Alekseevich Artamonov, was. In turn, Pašić relied heavily on Hartwig's support and appears to have consulted him on all major decisions. He too was apparently convinced that Hartwig spoke for Russia.

As a person, Hartwig has drawn both positive and negative judgments. A colleague described him as:

typically Russian, a Russian student, an enthusiast for certain ideas, devoted up to his death to certain political conceptions, despising formality, and conventionality in appearance, sometimes even in his intercourse with others, ignoring the conventions; vehement and despotic in his opinions, but a good fellow all the same, and willing to forgive the wrongs he had done to others.⁵

A similar judgment has been offered by Giesl. By the time the Austrian representative arrived in Belgrade, Hartwig was in bad physical condition, suffering from heart problems and extremely overweight. His home was, nevertheless, a social center of the Serbian capital. It was only here that the Habsburg representatives could meet with Serbian military and political leaders. Giesl, for instance, was not invited even once to a Serbian house.⁶ Although Hartwig kept the official relationship reserved and cool, he did maintain friendly personal relations with the Habsburg representatives. As Giesl commented:

He was a friend of social events, loved good dinners and willingly made apparent his admiration for Vienna, where he acquired all possible things and also all of his wardrobe. He often said to me: "One can live only in Vienna."⁷

The positive and negative qualities of this influential diplomat have been summed up as follows:

He was a true and faithful friend of the Serbians; he was just as sincere and ardent a Russian patriot; he displayed an intelligence above the average, much learning and unremitting work; but his vehement and domineering character, his intolerance of any opinion differing from his own, prevented him from forming an equitable judgment on men and matters, and from seeing the terrible dangers accumulating on the horizon.⁸

Prior to 1914, Hartwig had enjoyed a relatively successful career. Although not the Russian foreign minister or an ambassador at a major court, posts which he had previously desired, in Belgrade he was in a position to make Russian policy and to exert a strong influence on the Serbian government. Where he can be strongly criticized, however, is in his failure to inform his own government adequately on the major points of friction involving Serbia in this period. His dispatches in the first months of 1914 focussed on external events, such as the railroad question, the need for closer relations between Serbia and Montenegro, the status of Albania, and the relations among the Balkan states. A strong supporter of Serbian causes, he consistently painted the Habsburg monarchy in a negative light, as the constant opponent of legitimate Serbian goals. Throughout his reports he gave his approval of greater Serbian objectives with only indirect mention of the fact that they involved the acquisition of territory which was often not Serbian in population. The dependence of Serbia on Russia and the love of its people for the great Slavic brother were also emphasized. Pasic's loyalty received special attention; Hartwig, for instance, wrote that on returning from Russia the Serbian minister declared:

In each word of the tsar...I felt, besides, the benevolence of his imperial highness for Serbia...the tsar's kindness serves also in our eyes as a pledge for the bright future of Serbia, which, of course, without the powerful moral support of Russia cannot succeed in overcoming the difficulties created for it at each step by the allied monarchs, always with a hostile attitude in their relations with Serbia.⁹

Despite his influence on and knowledge about Serbian politics, Hartwig's despatches on the domestic crisis of May and June are surprisingly sparse. His first mention of the events is to be found in his telegram of June 2, in which he wrote that the political opposition had forced Pašić to resign.¹⁰ A despatch of June 16 gave more details.¹¹ Here Hartwig laid the blame for the crisis on "senseless obstruction" and the jealousy of other political leaders of the power of the Old Radicals, who had held office for so long. On the same day he sent his first report on the Priorities Question and the Black Hand.¹² He described the affair as a minor episode during the ministerial crisis which had no serious political significance. It had been used by the opposition to create an "unworthy" agitation in the army. The Bulgarian and Austrian press had also taken the occasion to comment critically on the internal condition of the Serbian military.

Hartwig thus dismissed the entire priorities issue as an unimportant affair which was exploited by the opposition to bring down Pašić. The malcontents, he wrote, had joined a small group of officers, participants in the coup of 1903, "which under the name of the society Black Hand use every opportunity offered in order to sow division and discontent in the military." The army command, under orders from King Peter, was taking measures against the Black Hand, which, Hartwig reported further, had "never had the smallest sympathy in the army, which does not intervene in internal affairs." The minister certainly knew, or should have known, that this explanation was, to say the least, misleading.

It is interesting to note that at this time Colonel Artamanov wrote far more detailed and critical reports on the Black Hand and the Priorities Question, which were sent to the headquarters of the Russian General Staff.¹³ Reviewing the contrasting reports, it is a question whether Hartwig in fact read these analyses, which may also not have reached the Foreign Ministry.

On June 16, in one of his last despatches before the assassination, Hartwig, in a further discussion of Serbian domestic affairs, emphasized that there were no Austrophile parties in Serbia.¹⁴ The Progressives, who had once supported a

pro-Habsburg orientation, had changed their opinion during the annexation crisis and the Balkan Wars: "Immediately at the beginning the roles of Russia and Austria were clear: friendly, powerful support on one side; often enemy attacks on the other." Except for a few individuals, Vienna had no friends in Belgrade.

The reports of Hartwig stand in strong contrast to those of his colleague, Giesl, both in content and emphasis. Originally from the Rhineland, Giesl's family in the eighteenth century had provided notable members to the Austrian army, one of whom received noble rank during the reign of Maria Theresa.¹⁵ Like his father, Giesl entered the army and subsequently served as a military attaché in Constantinople, Athens, and Cetinje; in 1910 he was appointed minister in Montenegro. These posts gave him experience in Eastern affairs, and he was considered an expert on the region.

For the crisis in 1914 two aspects of Giesl's activities in the preceding years are of particular importance: first, his deep involvement in the events connected with the Balkan Wars, and, second, his close association with Franz Ferdinand. The successful campaigns of the Balkan states against the Ottoman Empire in 1912 upset the Habsburg policy of maintaining the status quo in the Balkans. Although it was recognized that territorial changes would have to be accepted, the Habsburg diplomats attempted to limit the damage by supporting the establishment of an Albanian state and blocking both Serbian and Montenegrin attempts to gain Adriatic ports. In implementing this policy, Austria-Hungary was twice prepared to use force against the Slavic states. The first crisis occurred in May 1913, after the Montenegrin army besieged and then occupied Scutari. At this time Habsburg military forces in Bosnia, Hercegovina, and Dalmatia were placed on a war footing. A warning telegram, but not an ultimatum, was sent which resulted in the evacuation of Scutari on May 5. In the second conflict, a Habsburg ultimatum, delivered on October 17, forced the Serbian army to withdraw from territory assigned to Albania. The Habsburg government considered going to war on both occasions, but its military threats succeeded in compelling the Balkan states to yield. It is important to note here, however, that in both instances the Habsburg government was enforcing decisions reached previously by the great powers, including Russia, in negotiations in London.

As minister in Cetinje, Giesl was involved in both actions, in particular with the question of Scutari. In December 1912, he was sent to the London conference of ambassadors to assist the Habsburg ambassador, Albert Mensdorff. At this time he received special instructions from Franz Ferdinand to defend Albanian integrity.¹⁶ When he returned to Montenegro in March 1913, he had to deal with a crisis which was in its acute stage. In Cetinje he was widely blamed for the failure of the powers at the

London conference to grant the Montenegrin demands. His position became so uncomfortable that he could not remain at this post.¹⁷ His appointment as minister in Belgrade in late 1913 meant, of course, that he had to face the strong Serbian resentment over the October ultimatum.

During this same period Giesl was in touch with Franz Ferdinand and his circle.¹⁸ He was also acquainted with General Conrad von Hötendorff and his plans for a preventive war against Serbia and Italy. These personal connections, as well as his direct experiences, assured that the minister fully appreciated the significance of the South Slav problem for the monarchy and of the arguments for and against a military solution to the question. Giesl was aware of his favorable position with Franz Ferdinand. In December 1911, Alois von Aehrenthal, who was at that time Habsburg foreign minister, told him: "You certainly know what a powerful patron you possess in the person of the heir to the throne."¹⁹ In December 1912, the chief of Franz Ferdinand's military chancellery, Dr. Karl Bardolff, assured Giesl that when the heir became emperor, he intended to appoint him as minister of foreign affairs.²⁰

In Belgrade, where Giesl arrived in the first part of December, he was assisted by the military attaché, Captain Otto Gellinek, and the Councillor of Embassy, Wilhelm von Storck. Assuming his post at a difficult time, Giesl directed his attention to exactly those problems which had concerned his predecessors. He thus not only reported on the regular ongoing diplomatic activities, such as railroad projects and inter-Balkan relations, but on an entire line of the questions which had not concerned his Russian colleague at all. Throughout the Habsburg despatches the emphasis was on the Serbian national question and its effect on the territorial integrity of the monarchy. There was also an implicit assumption, as well as explicit statements, of the identity of Serbian, Russian, and Hartwig's views. In fact, Pašić often appears as a tool of Hartwig, who is pictured as implementing an aggressive Russian policy. With their interest in what was assumed to be a direct Serbian menace to Habsburg integrity, the Austrian representatives made an effort to collect as many examples as possible of public condemnations of the monarchy, either in the press or by public officials; they carefully noted meetings of Serbs of Serbia with Serbs and Croats of the monarchy. Their reports also contained strong criticisms of Serbian actions in the Macedonian territories acquired in the recent wars, a subject which the Russian representatives did not touch upon.

Another issue on which the Russian and Habsburg reports differed sharply was their depiction of Serbian internal conditions. The Habsburg diplomats, of course, were not supporters of Pašić or his Radical Party, who were regarded as Russian surrogates. They therefore reported in greater detail and more

critically on the military-civilian conflict.²¹ In May, at the height of the crisis, Giesl doubted the ability of the civilian government to stay in power. He recognized that Pašić was attempting to get rid of the dominant influence of the military, but he did not think that he would succeed. Both Giesl and Gellinek were concerned about the effect of the conflict on Austro-Serbian relations, although they recognized that no matter what the outcome of the crisis, the influence of the army would remain strong, and that "the officer corps also represented the stronghold of the greater Serbian, Austrophobe direction."²² Giesl was extremely pessimistic about the situation. On June 6 he reported that no political party supported the Habsburg Empire, and: "The authoritative factor in Serbia, the army, is filled with South Slavic chauvinism and hatred against Austria-Hungary and will force upon the policy of any regime a national chauvinistic and Austrophobe direction."²³

Until the assassination of Franz Ferdinand on June 28, we can thus see that the diplomatic reports sent to Vienna and St. Petersburg concerning Serbia contrasted dramatically. On the one hand, Hartwig, providing few details on his own activities and little on domestic events in Serbia aside from Pašić's achievements, either did not write about or was not aware of the nature of Serbian nationalism or the very real threat that it offered to Habsburg integrity. In fact, in all of the reports from the diplomatic representatives of this period, there are few attempts to define and discuss national issues, such as, for instance, the exact relationship of the South Slav people (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bulgarians) and exactly what lands each people inhabited. As far as his attitude toward the monarchy, Hartwig, although a strong supporter of Slavic causes, did not express an antipathy toward it in the manner that, for instance, Storck criticized Serbia. He did, however, present a picture of Serbia as a land where a brave but militarily weak people, sincerely devoted to Russia and under a wise leadership, was being menaced by a big bully who in fact controlled lands which should be Serbian. He also did not report adequately upon Serbian activities in Habsburg lands, nor on those of the societies Narodna Odbrana and the Black Hand. It is interesting to note that neither the Habsburg nor the Russian diplomats considered the activities of the Black Hand in other respects than their effect on Pašić's government.

Similarly, the Habsburg despatches with their emphasis on possible future aggressive Serbian actions were also misleading. While recognizing that Serbia in 1914 was in no position to act immediately, these reports were filled with apprehension about the future. For instance, in his long despatch of October 22, Storck recognized that the immediate Serbian goals would be union with Montenegro and control of Albania, but he feared that the next objectives would be Bosnia and other Habsburg lands, such as Croatia-Slavonia, with a South Slav population.²⁴ The attraction

of independent Serbia for the latter was not underestimated; this state had a democratic constitution and a recent history of military victories which would appeal to many under Habsburg rule. The South Slav intellectuals, in particular, were drawn to the idea of Yugoslav unity. This report, as others written by Habsburg diplomats at the time, while not presenting a picture of Serbia as a direct and immediate menace in 1914 either to the integrity or the great power position of the Habsburg Empire, certainly conveyed a feeling of inevitability -- at some time and place Austria-Hungary would be faced by a Serbian challenge, backed by Russia, and perhaps at a time that might not be auspicious for the monarchy.

When the archduke was assassinated, Hartwig was in Belgrade, but Colonel Artamonov was on leave and did not return until after the outbreak of hostilities.²⁵ Giesl was on vacation in Vichy; receiving the news, he hurried first to Vienna, where he took part in discussions over the crisis, and then to Belgrade. On his return there, he received a visit from Hartwig, an event which was to have important consequences. In a friendly conversation Hartwig assured Giesl that his embassy had observed all the proper forms in connection with the death of the heir to the throne. At the end of this discussion, Hartwig suddenly became ill and died of a heart attack.²⁶ His death caused immediate rumors in Belgrade that he had been poisoned by a cigarette or coffee, or, as Giesl overheard, killed by an electric chair brought from Vienna.²⁷ Giesl later expressed his regret about the death because he believed that Hartwig would have advised the Serbian government to accept the conditions of the ultimatum since the country was not ready for war and needed time to prepare for the future.²⁸

Before his death Hartwig had written only a few reports on the assassination. In these he emphasized the correctness of Serbian behavior and the assurances by Pašić that his people would not react to Habsburg provocations. He also reported on the effect in Serbia of the actions taken in Bosnia by Muslim and Croatian crowds against Serbian individuals and their property, an aspect of the crisis that was to have an important place in both Serbian and Russian diplomatic reporting. After Hartwig's death Vasilii Nikolaevich Shtrandtmann, the chargé d'affaires, continued to write in the same spirit: the Serbian government was avoiding provocative acts, it was attempting to calm the press, and it depended on Russia for support and military supplies. Throughout this period the Serbian leaders assured the Russian representatives that the assassination was an event dangerous for the existence of their kingdom, which brought all of their plans into disarray. The danger now existed that the monarchy would use this time when Serbia was militarily unprepared to settle its accounts. The Russian representatives were assured that Serbia would accept all the Habsburg demands which were compatible with its independence. Throughout the

crisis Pašić kept in close touch with the Russian embassy and continually emphasized Serbian dependence on St. Petersburg.

In contrast to the Russian position, the Habsburg representatives reacted with recrimination and suspicion. Of course, it was their heir to the throne who had been killed. The fact that they had been almost completely excluded from any influence in Serbia in the previous years also affected their thinking. With the minister away, the first reports after the assassination were written by Storck, who had certainly not previously shown himself as a moderate on Serbian affairs. Giesl, according to his own account, at first urged caution. During his visit to Vienna before returning to his post, he spoke with, among others, Berchtold and the Hungarian minister president, István Tisza. With Berchtold he emphasized the importance of not presenting demands to Serbia which would subsequently be negotiated down. The foreign minister assured him that: "You can be assured that will not happen."²⁹ Returning to Belgrade, Giesl gradually adopted a stronger attitude. In his memoirs he wrote that in the days from July 10 to 20 he became convinced that the conflict with Serbia could only be settled with arms.³⁰ His opinions were strongly expressed in his long despatch of July 21.³¹ It contained an almost definitive summation of the arguments of those who favored war in 1914:

Before the assassination, as in fact since the annexation crisis, the relations between the monarchy and Serbia have been poisoned on the part of the latter through national chauvinism, enmity and an effective propaganda in our Serbian inhabited lands -- since the last two Balkan wars Serbian success has raised this chauvinism to paroxysms whose outbreaks at times carry the stamp of madness.... I maintain as an accepted axiom that the policy of Serbia is built on the detachment of the South Slav provinces and, as a further result, on the destruction of the monarchy as a great power and that it knows only this one goal.... That so much hated Austria-Hungary appears now to the Serbs to be powerless and scarcely worthy of fighting -- contempt is joined to hatred --...our prestige has fallen deeply. Fear of accountability does not exist any more.

In the weeks after the assassination the major decisions were made in Vienna and St. Petersburg rather than in Belgrade. In meeting the issues which now arose, both the Habsburg and the Russian leaders reflected the general views held by their diplomats in Belgrade, each of whom represented an attitude which had adherents in their own countries and which they did not contradict in their reporting. Immediately after the event there was a widespread expression of outrage in the European capitals,

which was then followed by a period of calm. It was generally expected that the Habsburg government would take some action, but there was not an atmosphere of crisis. Not only were Artamonov and Giesl on vacation, but Nikolas Nikolaevich Shebeko, the Russian ambassador in Vienna, traveled to St. Petersburg on July 21, arriving on July 24, the day after Austria-Hungary delivered an ultimatum to Serbia.³² This document and its strong terms thus came as an unexpected shock to the Russian diplomats.

Although the Habsburg leaders had early determined that they would either go to war with Serbia or force its government to accept humiliating terms, they delayed immediate action because they desired, first, to assure themselves of German support and, second, to collect proof of direct Serbian involvement of such a convincing nature that other governments would accept their actions. After obtaining the full and unconditional backing of Germany, the Habsburg diplomats thereafter acted independently. They did not consult with their German partner, and certainly not with their Italian ally, concerning either the terms of the ultimatum or their subsequent declaration of war. Determined to uphold Habsburg prestige as an independent great power, they hoped for a limited war, involving only Serbia and Austria-Hungary, but they were willing to take wider risks. They did not, however, face squarely the full political and military implications of possible Russian support to Serbia.

The chief discussions involving Russian-Habsburg relations were carried on between the Habsburg foreign minister, Leopold Berchtold, and Shebeko in Vienna, and between the Russian foreign minister Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov and the Habsburg ambassador, Friedrich Szápáry, in St. Petersburg, or between their subordinates. Since the Habsburg government had made a firm decision to settle its accounts with Serbia once and for all, the talks with the Russian representatives amounted chiefly to explanations and attempts to justify a strong reaction. In addition, the Habsburg diplomats, emphasizing that the issue involved primarily internal affairs, tried to keep the matter from becoming a subject of international concern. They thus refused to agree to negotiations on Serbian issues with the Russian government although its representatives repeatedly requested them.

In its attempt to persuade the Russian statesmen that the Habsburg government was justified in acting unilaterally and with force, the Habsburg diplomats emphasized the common interests that had brought the two states together in the past. In particular, they tried to play on the revolutionary theme and underline the dangers of assassinations and conspiracies to monarchies. They also assured St. Petersburg that they did not wish to humiliate the Serbian government, take any of its territory, or change its relative power position: the aim was only to end the threat to Habsburg territorial integrity.

Unfortunately for their position, the Habsburg authorities failed in their attempt to implicate the Serbian government directly in the assassination. Without strong and convincing evidence of Serbian complicity, they could not hope to persuade the Russian leaders that their arguments were justified. Certainly, the Russian government was sensitive on questions of political terrorism. In a meeting with the Habsburg Councillor of Embassy, Otto Czernin, on June 30, Sazonov admitted the danger of revolutionary actions and the common interest of monarchical states "to control this plague."³³ On July 3 he commented that: "The struggle against treacherous weapons will become more and more a common interest of the monarchies."³⁴ Despite this agreement in principle, however, the Russian officials demanded specific proof of Serbian involvement. When on July 18 Szápáry brought up the question of the use of terrorist revolutionary methods, Sazonov replied that "proof of the tolerance of such machinations on the part of the Serbian government" could not be demonstrated.³⁵

The same demand for proof arose when Szápáry delivered the terms of the ultimatum to Sazonov. The Russian minister reacted with extreme agitation: "You are setting fire to Europe."³⁶ At this time he again brought up the question of official Serbian complicity. It seemed to him that the monarchy was using the opportunity offered by the assassination to make war on Serbia. Rejecting the Habsburg justifications, he declared that "the monarchical idea has nothing to do with that."³⁷ At the same time, he asked for the dossier that Habsburg officials had previously promised, but had not delivered. At this time³⁸ and again on July 27,³⁹ Sazonov again brought up the question, but Szápáry was forced to admit that he did not have it. Once more, on July 29, Sazonov asked for this material, arguing that once war started it would be too late to examine the dossier.⁴⁰ In reporting this request, Szápáry commented that it appeared that the Russian minister was hoping to find in it something that would make it possible for Russia to disengage itself.

The failure of the Habsburg Empire to deliver proof of its allegations and its refusal to discuss its relations with Serbia with other powers, together with the reports from Belgrade, certainly influenced Russian leaders to accept the Serbian explanation of the assassination -- that it was a Bosnian affair caused by the bad conditions in the province. In their final conversations with Habsburg diplomats, Sazonov and Shebeko made the Russian interpretation of the events perfectly clear: in the absence of proof to the contrary it appeared that the Habsburg Empire, a great power, with the backing of Germany, was about to launch an attack on a small state, Serbia, and was refusing to inform St. Petersburg of its exact intentions. Russia could not be indifferent to the fate of a nation bound closely to it by historical and other ties.⁴¹ Influenced by a strong pro-Slavic

public opinion at home and worried about the prestige of their own government, the Russian leaders naturally regarded Habsburg explanations with deep suspicion. Certainly, the previous Hartwig reports had not prepared the Russian government to accept easily Habsburg claims concerning Serbian underground and revolutionary activities. With this background, the tsar's decision for full mobilization on July 30 can be understood.

Hartwig's death, of course, removed a major influence from the diplomatic scene, but Giesl continued to play a role in the subsequent decisions. Although he did not take part in the formulation of the demands on Serbia, they certainly reflected a policy of which he could approve. On July 23 he delivered the ultimatum to the Serbian government; when on July 25 the terms were not accepted unconditionally, he followed his instructions and broke diplomatic relations. Returning to Vienna he participated in the discussions in the foreign ministry over the Serbian reply. Here he argued that if the monarchy accepted the Serbian answer, relations would only get worse.⁴² The influence he exerted is shown in Berchtold's account of the meeting:

The Serbian assurances and reservations in relation to our demands were gone through point by point. The explanation of our Belgrade envoy, who took part in the conference, that practically nothing was achieved with this Serbian pronouncement and that all would remain as before, determined our attitude. To be satisfied with a basically worthless sham success would be self-deception.⁴³

The Habsburg acceptance of a military solution rather than continued diplomatic negotiations inaugurated a deadly procession of events: on July 28 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia; on July 30 Russia began full mobilization; in the first days of August Germany was at war with France, Russia and Britain; on August 6 Russia and Austria-Hungary were at war; and, finally, on August 12 France and Britain declared war on the Habsburg Empire. Given the tragic results of the conflict for the three main states involved in this discussion -- tsarist Russia, Serbia, and Austria-Hungary -- the significance of the breakdown of the previous diplomatic methods is all the more significant.

How then did the diplomats fail? Certainly in 1914 both the Russian and Habsburg statesmen were talking over each other's heads; they were each using arguments which their counterparts did not understand. This discussion has concentrated on the reports from Belgrade, which, of course, were a small but essential part of the diplomatic reporting on the crisis. An examination of Hartwig's and Giesl's despatches, as well as those of their subordinates, makes clear that neither embassy provided critical dispassionate analyses on local conditions. Both ministers were personally involved to a degree that

prevented a cool examination of the actual situation in Serbia in 1914. Although they approached the questions at issue from different angles, Hartwig and Giesl presented almost identical, but misleading, versions of some of the major issues in question. Among these two were of great significance in 1914: first, the identity of Serbian and Russian interests, and, second, the Serbian relationship with the general South Slav movement.

On the first question, Hartwig's reports, emphasizing his own influence and the devotion of the Serbian government to the great Slavic brother, while satisfying to the minister's self-esteem, did not reflect the true situation. Like other Balkan leaders in similar situations, Pašić and his supporters were perfectly willing to accept Russian assistance, and they did flatter and beguile Hartwig with servile language. In fact, however, they determined policy with complete independence, and they were neither frank nor open in their dealings with the Russian embassy. Certainly, the illusion in St. Petersburg, shared by most government officials, the literate public, and politicians, of a weak and dependent Serbia, totally devoted to Russia, played an important role in securing Russian support in 1914. In the same manner, Giesl's reports, emphasizing the Russian role in Serbia, strengthened the convictions of those Austrian officials who saw Russia behind all the Serbian actions which they felt endangered their domestic situation. Moreover, a Serbian government, acting on Russian instructions, was indeed a danger to Habsburg survival.

Second, neither representative presented an accurate picture of the South Slav movements of the day with a definite and clearly defined differentiation between the separate Serbian, Croatian, and Yugoslav programs. In both the Russian and Habsburg reporting the emphasis was on Serbian-national or Greater Serbian aims. As such, Russian officials received a picture of Serbia as the popularly accepted leader of the South Slavs -- Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim alike. Giesl's despatches gave a similar impression. If Serbia was in fact the natural leader of the Habsburg South Slavs, and if Russia was behind its actions, then the crisis surrounding the assassination did indeed involve "life or death" matters for the monarchy, and the arguments of those who believed that the monarchy's South Slav problem could not be solved without the reduction of Serbia had at least some justification.

Not only did the Russian and Habsburg representatives fail to convey to their governments an adequate assessment of local conditions, but their superiors can be faulted for their initial choice of these men for the sensitive Belgrade post. This judgment applies in particular to Hartwig whose independent activities and refusal to follow instructions had already caused difficulties for Russian policy during the Balkan Wars. Concerning his failure at that time to control extreme Serbian

claims, Sazonov wrote:

To my mind the Serbian attitude was partly accounted for by the fact that M. Hartwig, our Minister in Belgrade, preferred the agreeable role of countenancing the exaggerated attitude adopted by Government and social circles in Belgrade, to the less grateful one which he should have adopted in the true interests of Serbia: it was his first duty, as Russian representative, to sacrifice his personal popularity and restrain the Government and the people from dangerous impulses. Hartwig interpreted Russian policy in Belgrade according to his own taste, and thereby greatly added to my difficulties.⁴⁴

Baron Rosen, a supporter of a reconciliation between Russia and the Central Powers, considered that Hartwig was "the last man to be entrusted with such a post," and regretted his influence on relations with Vienna:

By his open encouragement of Pan-Serbian ambitions--that is to say, of tendencies aiming at nothing less than the disruption of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy--he has become a most influential personage in Serbian political circles.... It is hardly to be wondered at that Austro-Hungarian statesmen, however cognizant of the absence of political discipline in Russian diplomatic circles, especially in the East, should have taken serious alarm at the attitude of Russia's representative at Belgrade, which they had every reason to consider as being, if not inspired, in any case openly tolerated, by the Russian government.⁴⁵

Giesl too, with his close association with military circles willing to adopt violent solutions, was not an ideal representative in a time of tension. As we have seen, during the July crisis, even before the Serbian rejection of the ultimatum, he favored a military action. After he returned to Vienna with the Serbian answer to the ultimatum, he argued that the Habsburg government had really no alternative but war.

The Habsburg decision that a military solution was the only means to assure its prestige as a great power and among its own Slavic nationalities unleashed a chain of events that Vienna could not control. The basic failure of the leadership to judge conditions realistically, including its gross overestimation of the Serbian threat and the closeness of the Serbian-Russian relationship, initiated a process that led to the final catastrophe. In pre-1914 Europe, all states, great powers and small nations alike, accepted war as an instrument of national policy, but an examination of previous crises shows that most governments made careful preparations and did not plunge blindly

into dark waters. What is difficult to understand is why Habsburg statesmen, who certainly received repeated, and often inflated, reports on Russian influence in Serbia, believed for even one minute that they could carry out extreme measures against Belgrade without consulting St. Petersburg, an action that flew in the face of current realities as well as a two-century-old tradition of cooperation in the Balkans.

ENDNOTES

1. Samuel E. Williamson, Jr., "Vienna and July 1914: The Origins of the Great War Once More," in S. R. Williamson, Jr. and Peter Pastor, eds., Essays on World War I: Origins and Prisoners of War (New York: Social Science Monographs, Brooklyn College Press, 1983), p. 26.

2. For Hartwig's background see A. V. Nekludoff (Nekliudov), Diplomatic Reminiscences before and during the World War, 1911-1917 (London: John Murray, 1920), pp. 47-50; and Marco (Božin Simić), "Nikola Hartwig -- Spoljna politika Srbije pred svetski rat," Nova Evropa XVII: 8 (1929), pp. 256-78.

3. Nekludoff, Diplomatic Reminiscences, pp. 50-51.

4. Ugron to Berchtold, No. 237 A-B, Belgrade, November 1, 1913. Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Politisches Archiv, (cited hereafter as HHS). In May 1913, the Bulgarian minister in Belgrade, D. Rizov, reported that "Hartwig enjoys such an unlimited influence in the Serbian government and society...that his[diplomatic]colleagues privately call him 'the Regent', for, in reality, he fulfills the functions of the ailing Serbian King." Andrew Rossos, Russia and the Balkans: Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy, 1908-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 175.

5. Nekludoff, Diplomatic Reminiscences, p. 47.

6. Wladimir Giesl von Gieslingen, Zwei Jahrzehnte im Nahen Orient (Berlin: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1927), p. 254.

7. Ibid., p. 253.

8. Nekludoff, Diplomatic Reminiscences, p. 163. Hartwig was judged much more harshly by some of his colleagues. See D. C. B. Lieven, Russia and the Origins of the First World War (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 41-42.

9. Hartwig to Sazonov, no. 6, Belgrade, February 11/24, 1914. Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v epokhy imperializma (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1933), series III, vol. 1, pp. 410-11. This series of documents is cited hereafter as M.O.

10. Hartwig to Berchtold, tel. no. 160, Belgrade, May 20/June 2, 1914. M.O., III: 3, pp. 172-73.

11. Hartwig to Sazonov, no. 34, Belgrade, June 3/16, 1914. M.O., III: 3, pp. 329-30.

12. Hartwig to Sazonov, nos. 33 and 34, Belgrade, June 3/16, 1914. M.O., III: 3, pp. 327-30. This is the first published report. Others may exist in the Soviet archives.

13. Col. Artamonov to the Russian General Staff, reports 75, 100, secret, Belgrade, May 7/20 and June 4/17, 1914. M.O., III: 5, pp. 450-51, 453-58.

14. Hartwig to Sazonov, no. 35, Belgrade, June 3/16, 1914. M.O., III: 3, pp. 330-32.

15. Giesl, Zwei Jahrzehnte, pp. 289-91.

16. Rudolf Kiszling, Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand von Osterreich-Este (Graz: Hermann Bohlaus, 1953), p. 187.

17. Giesl's personal relations with the Montenegrin ruler had also declined: he "often exchanged harsh, undiplomatic words with the king and boasted of his brusqueness in his dispatches and memoirs." John D. Treadway, The Falcon and the Eagle: Montenegro and Austria-Hungary, 1908-1914 (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1983), p. 205.

18. There are frequent references to Franz Ferdinand in Giesl's memoirs. The Belgrade journal Politika reported on November 11, 1913 that the appointment of Giesl was part of a pattern of diplomatic changes involving the appointment of Szilassy to Athens and Czernin to Bucharest to reflect the wishes of Franz Ferdinand. He and his supporters believed that Habsburg policy in the three capitals had not been represented in an energetic enough fashion. "Thus in the Foreign Ministry in Vienna (Count Forgach) and in Belgrade, Bucharest and Athens, and Cetinje men will be placed who, according to the opinion of Franz Ferdinand, represent more energetically the interests of Austria-Hungary." Included in Ugron to Berchtold, no. 246B, Belgrade, November 11, 1913. HHS, Politisches Archiv.

19. Giesl, Zwei Jahrzehnte, p. 226.

20. Ibid., p. 235.

21. Giesl to Berchtold, no. 67 AB, confidential, Belgrade, and no. 72 AB, confidential, May 16, 1914. Ludwig Bittner and Hans Uebersberger, editors, Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik, 1908-1914 (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1930), VIII, pp. 19-20 and 41-42. The series will be cited hereafter as Ö.A.

22. Giesl to Berchtold, no. 72 AB, confidential, May 8, 1914, cited above.

23. Giesl to Berchtold, no. 82 AB, very confidential, Belgrade, June 6, 1914. Ö.A., VIII, pp. 118-20.

24. Storck to Berchtold, no. 226 confidential, Belgrade, October 22, 1913. HHS, Politisches Archiv.

25. The Russian military attaché's experiences are described in Victor A. Artamonov, "Erinnerungen an meine Militärattachézeit in Belgrad," in Berliner Monatshefte, July and August, 1938, pp. 583-602.

26. The death of Hartwig is described in detail in Giesl's memoirs, pp. 257-60, his report, no. 10193, July 11, 1914 (Ö.A., VIII, pp. 396-98); and in Shtrandtman to Sazonov, tel. no. 189, Belgrade, June 27/July 10, 1914. M.O. III:IV, p. 220. In regard to the rumors Artamonov commented on Hartwig's very unhealthy manner of life. He not only had heart trouble and was overweight, but he drank tea and smoked cigarettes continually. He also worked at night and slept only from 5 to 9 AM and 2 to 4 PM. Artamonov, "Erinnerungen," p. 596.

27. Giesl, Zwei Jahrzehnte, p. 260. After the death of Hartwig the Triple Entente did not have competent observers in Belgrade. The British representative did not enjoy influence or respect, while the French minister Descos had suffered a mental breakdown and had not fulfilled his official functions during the previous months. Giesl report, no. 10294, Belgrade, July 16, 1914. Ö.A., VIII, pp. 456-57.

28. Giesl, Zwei Jahrzehnte, p. 257.

29. Ibid., pp. 255-56.

30. Ibid., p. 257. In his memoirs Giesl denied the description of his reactions at this time as reported by Conrad von Hötzendorff. The general wrote that Giesl had said that Serbia would not accept the Habsburg demands and that war would come: "The moment for it was splendid (glänzend)" Franz Conrad von Hötzendorff, Aus meiner Dienstzeit (Vienna: Rikola Verlag, 1923), IV, p. 57.

31. Giesl report, no. 10437 secret, Belgrade, July 21, 1914. Ö.A., VIII, pp. 548-52.

32. Nikolai Nikolaievich Schebeko, Souvenirs: Essai historique sur les origines de la guerre de 1914 (Paris: Bibliothèque diplomatique, 1936), p. 218. Shebeko commented: "The diplomatic and military chancelleries emptied, and Europe abandoned itself for some weeks to a sort of half-sleep during which it seemed that by common agreement nothing particular should be undertaken."
33. Czernin to Berchtold, tel. no. 131, St. Petersburg, June 30, 1914. O.A., VIII, pp. 224-25.
34. Czernin to Berchtold, no. 31 A, St. Petersburg, July 3, 1914. O.A., VIII, pp. 282-83.
35. Szápáry to Berchtold, tel. no. 146, St. Petersburg, July 18, 1914. O.A., VIII, p. 495.
36. Szápáry to Berchtold, tel. no. 156, St. Petersburg, July 24, 1914. O.A., VIII, pp. 645-46.
37. Szápáry to Berchtold, tel. no. 157, St. Petersburg, July 24, 1914. O.A., VIII, pp. 646-47.
38. Szápáry to Berchtold, tel. no. 160, St. Petersburg, July 24, 1914. O.A., VIII, pp. 648-49. The hastily prepared dossier was sent to the major embassies on July 25, but there is no evidence that it was ever delivered to the respective governments. The text is printed in Ibid., pp. 665-703.
39. Szápáry to Berchtold, tel. no. 165a, St. Petersburg, July 27, 1914. O.A., VIII, pp. 804-806.
40. Szápáry to Berchtold, tel. no. 173a, St. Petersburg, July 29, 1914. O.A., VIII, pp. 896-97.
41. Berchtold to St. Petersburg, tel. no. 202, Vienna, July 30, 1914. O.A., VIII, pp. 933-34. Here Berchtold reports on a conversation with Shebeko.
42. Alexander Musulin, Das Haus am Ballplatz (Munich: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1924), p. 240.
43. Hugo Hantsch, Leopold Graf Berchtold (Graz: Styria Verlag, 1963) II, pp. 615-16. The author raises doubts whether Giesl's opinion was really so important, but admits that the minister was considered "one of the best experts on the Serbian mentality."
44. Serge Sazonov, Fateful Years, 1909-1916 (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1928), p. 80.
45. R. R. Rosen, Forty Years of Diplomacy (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1922) II, p. 129.