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Stephen A. Schuker

Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936 figures in conventional historiography as one of the turning points in interwar diplomacy. At a stroke the Nazi leader rid his country of the last remaining symbol of inequality visited upon Germany by the Versailles treaty and transformed the strategic balance on the European continent. Once his army had secured and fortified the western frontiers, Hitler could turn his attention to the east and southeast—to Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland—with his trepidation about interference substantially diminished. In the last generation the dramatic aspects of this crisis have drawn the attention of numerous historians.¹ Few, however, have challenged the notion derived from

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A complete list of abbreviations used in the notes is printed at the end of this article.

¹ Useful works include Anthony Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936-1939* (London, 1977); Robert Young, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-1940* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978); J.-B. Duroselle, *La Décadence, 1932-1939* (Paris, 1979); James T. Emmerson, *The Rhineland Crisis, 7 March 1936* (London, 1977); Eva H. Haraszti, *The Invaders: Hitler Occupies the Rhineland* (Budapest, 1983); and Nicholas Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations, 1934-36* (London, 1984). Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-36* (Chicago, 1970), summarizes much of the German literature; but note particularly the still useful Max Braubach, *Der Einmarsch deutscher Truppen in die entmilitarisierte Zone am Rhein im März 1936* (Cologne, 1956). The principal articles on the subject include Maurice Baumont, "The Rhineland Crisis: 7 March 1936," in *Troubled Neighbours: Franco-British Relations in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Neville Waites (London, 1971), 158-69; John Cairns, "March 7, 1936: The View from Paris," *International Journal* (Spring 1965): 230-46; C. Christienne and P. Buffotot, "L'Armée de l'Air française et la crise du 7 mars 1936," in *Colloque franco-allemand: La France et l'Allemagne (1932-1936)* (Paris, 1980); R. Debicki, "The Remilitarization of the Rhineland and its Impact on the French-Polish Alliance," *Polish Review* 14 (Autumn 1969): 45-55; Colonel J. Defrasne, "L'Événement du 7 mars 1936," in *Les Relations franco-allemandes 1933-1939* [Colloque de Strasbourg, 1975] (Paris, 1976), 247-76; J.-B. Duroselle, "France and the Crisis of March 1936," in *French Society and Culture since the Old Regime*, ed. E. M. Acomb and M. L. Brown, Jr. (New York, 1966), 244-68; Michael I. Handel, *The Diplomacy of Surprise: Hitler, Nixon, and Sadat* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 31-96; Charles Keserich, "The Popular Front and

the early memoir literature that France retained the potential to react forcibly, and if necessary alone. The popular impression persists that a French government possessed of greater energy and determination, deploying an army led by less cautious generals, could have blocked Hitler's maneuver in 1936 and mounted a demonstrative warning against aggressions to come. Yet, given the military and financial resources actually available to Paris, nothing could be further from the truth.

The French parliamentary committee that, after the war, investigated the events of the 1930s imputed to the Army of the Republic in mid-decade not merely the capacity to reenter the Rhineland and to reoccupy the bridgeheads on the right bank of the river, but also the power to carry the war to the industrial centers of the Ruhr, Main, and Neckar valleys should the Reich continue to show itself obdurate.² Skeptics could discount this claim in part as political hyperbole—as an element in the refashioning of a useable past that would help the Fourth Republic to restore national self-respect. Recognized authorities on the other side of the Channel, however, tended to agree.

Winston Churchill, writing in 1948 with the sound and fury of the world struggle still echoing in his mind, seconded the emerging orthodoxy. By this time Churchill had apparently repressed the dismissive incredulity with which, during the Rhineland crisis, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee had greeted his portrayal of “all the countries of Europe hurrying to assist France and ourselves against Germany”—an assertion unaccompanied by discussion of their military readiness to do so.³ Twelve years after

the Rhineland Crisis of March 1936,” *International Review of History and Political Science* 7 (1970): 87-102; W. F. Knapp, “The Rhineland Crisis of March 1936,” in *The Decline of the Third Republic*, ed. James Joll, St. Antony's Papers, No. 5 (London, 1959), 67-85; Franz Knipping, “Frankreich in Hitlers Aussenpolitik 1933-1939,” in *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte*, ed. Manfred Funke (Düsseldorf, 1976), 612-27; Reinhard Meyers, “Rhein und Ruhr als Objekte der Politik der europäischen Grossmächte in den dreissiger Jahren,” in *Rheinland-Westfalen im Industriezeitalter*, ed. Kurt Düwell and Wolfgang Köllmann (Wuppertal, 1984), 3:7-20; R.A.C. Parker, “The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936,” *World Politics* 8 (1956): 355-73; E. M. Robertson, “Hitler und die Sanktionen des Völkerbundes—Mussolini und die Besetzung des Rheinlandes,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 26 (1978): 237-64; George Sakwa, “The Franco-Polish Alliance and the Remilitarization of the Rhineland,” *Historical Journal* 16 (1973): 125-46; and D. C. Watt, “German Plans for the Reoccupation of the Rhineland: A Note,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (1966): 193-99.

² *Les Événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945, rapport présenté par M. Charles Serre, député, au nom de la Commission d'enquête parlementaire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1952), 1:65.

³ Report on Foreign Affairs Committee, 12 March 1936, in Public Record Office, London (hereafter cited as PRO), PREM 1/194.

the fact, Churchill insisted that by remaining inert the French had muffed "the last chance of arresting Hitler's ambitions without a serious war." If the government in Paris had mobilized the nearly one hundred divisions at its disposal, the Führer "would have been compelled by his own General Staff to withdraw, and a check would have been given to his pretensions which might well have proved fatal to his rule."⁴ Similarly, Anthony Eden, who as British foreign secretary in 1936 had shown so much more profile than courage, yielded to no one in retrospective militance when he came to compose his memoirs. "If, as Clemenceau tells us, politics is the art of the possible," Eden observed sententiously, "Hitler's occupation was an occasion when the British and French governments should have attempted the impossible. . . . Once the obligation to uphold international engagements is evaded, pretext will follow pretext, until the structure of confidence is destroyed and respect for treaties hangs 'like a rusty mail in monumental mockery.'"⁵

Popular writers and historians have with few exceptions followed the memorialists. The journalist William Shirer accepts at face value the testimony offered from the dock at Nuremberg by General Alfred Jodl. The general argued that at the moment of remilitarization "the French covering army could have blown us to pieces." "It could have," Shirer agrees, "—and had it, that almost certainly would have been the end of Hitler."⁶ E. M. Robertson insists on academic caution: "It remains difficult on principle to draw a clear line across any given point of time and to claim that the errors of human judgment lie on one side and not the other." Nevertheless, after suitably beating about the bush, he adduces German evidence to the effect that "if Hitler could have been stopped he should have been stopped in March 1936"; moreover he finds French preponderance over Germany "overwhelming" at that time.⁷ Writing as late as 1979, the dean of French diplomatic historians, J.-B. Duroselle, reinforces this interpretation. Duroselle ends his semiauthorized treatment of the subject by quoting with approval the remark of Pius

⁴ Winston S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston, 1948), 194.

⁵ Earl of Avon, *The Memoirs of Anthony Eden: Facing the Dictators, 1923-1938* (Boston, 1962), 412-13.

⁶ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1960), 293. See also Shirer's extended treatment in *The Collapse of the Third Republic* (New York, 1969), 251-84; he cites Jodl again, 281.

⁷ E. M. Robertson, *Hitler's Pre-War Policy and Military Plans, 1933-1939* (New York, 1963), 79-81.

XI to the French ambassador at the Vatican: "If you had immediately sent 200,000 men forward into the zone reoccupied by the Germans, you would have rendered an immense service to everybody."⁸

If the French could have rebuffed the German forces so easily, why did they not do so? Was it simply fear of war and lack of will—the traumatic consequences of the devastating slaughter at Verdun still at work almost two decades after the guns fell silent, paralyzing the judgment of leaders and simple citizens alike? Certainly no one who had paid even casual attention to public affairs in France since the end of the Great War could remain oblivious to the implications for French security of a change in the Rhineland's status. Precious few issues in the 1920s had absorbed so much parliamentary debating time or consumed so much printers' ink. At the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the French military had argued with single-minded tenacity that the Rhine river constituted the only natural barrier to another invasion. "If we hold the Rhine solidly, France can set its mind at ease," Marshal Foch had reiterated. "If [France] doesn't hold the Rhine, . . . anything offered or given in exchange is mere illusion, appearance, and vanity."⁹

Premier Clemenceau had judged priorities differently. In the end, to preserve the solidarity of the victorious coalition, French negotiators had settled for a three-stage, fifteen-year interallied occupation of the left bank and four bridgeheads, accompanied by permanent demilitarization of the entire Rhineland, including an area extending fifty kilometers east of the river. In 1930 the Allies had withdrawn their rump occupation forces ahead of schedule in an effort to minimize German ill will. But in the Locarno treaties of 1925, Germany had freely accepted the obligation to maintain demilitarization, and Hitler acknowledged that he still viewed the Locarno stipulations as binding when he reintroduced conscription in 1935.¹⁰

⁸ Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 179.

⁹ Raymond Recouly, *Le Mémorial de Foch: Mes entretiens avec le maréchal* (Paris, 1929), 40. For the contemporary debate about the strategic significance of the Rhineland, see also Jere Clemens King, *Foch versus Clemenceau: France and German Dismemberment, 1918-1919* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); Harold I. Nelson, *Land and Power: British and Allied Policy on Germany's Frontiers, 1916-1919* (London and Toronto, 1963); Jacques Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes après la première guerre mondiale* (Paris, 1977); and Pierre Miquel, *La Paix de Versailles et l'opinion publique française* (Paris, 1972).

¹⁰ Weinberg, *Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, 240-41; Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations*, 164-65.

By 1936 changes in military technology had rendered demilitarization somewhat less important than it once had appeared. Airplanes could now fly over the area in minutes. Tanks and motorized personnel carriers could traverse it in a fraction of the time required by foot soldiers. Moreover, the French had completed the main fortresses of the Maginot line and thereby assured themselves of defensive protection against sudden attack from the east (although not from a thrust through the Ardennes or the northeast plain along the Belgian border). Nevertheless, remilitarization would still drastically alter the relationship of opposing armies in space and time. It would permit the Reich to use the dense railway networks on both sides of the Rhine for military purposes. It would afford the German armored divisions then in process of formation an increased opportunity for surprise—that great “force multiplier” in military parlance—in the event of a future move westward. Finally, it would limit French strategic options. Given their defensive orientation, French forces seemed unlikely to venture beyond their prepared positions in the Maginot line under most circumstances, and the topographical obstacles to an advance along a broad front except through Belgium weighed heavily on the planners’ minds. But remilitarization and fortification of the Rhineland would rob France of credibility should it even threaten such a maneuver as a deterrent to German action elsewhere.¹¹

If the French did not do what seemed in hindsight so sensible to men with such diverse perspectives as Churchill, Jodl, and the pope, their inaction did not derive from any lack of foresight about what lay at stake. Nor can historians account fully for the road not taken by references to the dispirited national mood, the festering domestic conflict between right and left, or the currents of pacifism running beneath the body politic. These factors merely provided the context in which soldiers and bureaucrats outlined specific policy options and in which cabinet members adopted certain recommendations and passed over others. The Sarraut cabinet—a center-left grouping of career politicians derided by opponents as a “Sarraut-Stavisky”

¹¹ On the role of surprise as a force multiplier, see the illuminating discussion by Bradford Lee, “Strategy, arms and the collapse of France, 1933-1940,” in *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War: Essays in Honour of F. H. Hinsley*, ed. R. B. T. Langhorne (Cambridge, 1985), 43-67. For analysis of the topographical obstacles to any offensive beginning between the Swiss border and the Ardennes, see the retrospective note on the situation in 1935 by Colonel Louis Buisson, former director of the 3^e Bureau (Operations), “L’Alliance France-Italie c’est du point de vue militaire la paix de l’Europe assurée,” 13 March 1938, Service Historique de l’Armée de Terre, Vincennes (hereafter cited as SHA), Carton 5 N 579.

government—comprised few men of heroic mold.¹² Yet ultimately it evaluated risks rationally. It made the choices that it did based on a panoply of real-world constraints.

Recently opened records, particularly those of the French War and Finance ministries, make clear beyond peradventure that a bold riposte to Hitler's coup was out of the question. France stood absolutely alone. A unilateral resort to force would have brought a storm of reprobation both from the country's putative allies and from the self-appointed guardians of the world conscience at Geneva. It would almost surely have exposed the virtual bankruptcy of the French treasury and toppled the franc off the gold-exchange standard a scant six weeks before parliamentary elections. Most seriously of all, the army could muster no such forces as either Churchill or the pope imagined, short of general mobilization. And it had scarcely any modern equipment to send forward with them. Army planners had formulated no scheme for large-scale sanctions beyond French frontiers for an excellent reason. They knew that, until the army was rebuilt, it *already* lay beyond their power confidently to take the offensive against Germany except within the framework of a coalition. Admittedly the Wehrmacht also stood in the early stages of rearmament. But the defense enjoys an advantage—if not in the precise three-to-one ratio that strategists during the interwar years employed as their rule of thumb.¹³ The French would be operating in hostile territory along strained logistic lines. An indeterminate standoff might well look both to enemies and allies (as well as to the French colonies) uncomfortably like a defeat. France, in short, faced a combination of political, economic, and military deterrents to action. Any one of them would have provided justification for hesitation. Given their mutually reinforcing nature, no responsible French government could have risked a war.

In 1966 D. C. Watt pointed out that Hitler was prepared to fight if required. Indeed, given the importance of the operation for Nazi prestige, he could hardly do otherwise once engaged.¹⁴ This view conforms to what diplomatic observers assumed at the time. Nevertheless, a measure of confusion remains because of what prominent Nazis asserted subsequently. Albert Speer, for example, reports that

¹² For the epithet, see Jean-Noël Jeanneney, *François de Wendel en République: L'Argent et le pouvoir 1914-1940*, 3 vols. (Lille and Paris, 1976), 3:1323n.

¹³ For discussion of the three-to-one rule and its limitations, see Lee, "Strategy," 46-47.

¹⁴ Watt, "German Plans for the Reoccupation of the Rhineland," 193-99.

even during World War II, when Hitler was waging war against the entire world, he always termed remilitarization of the Rhineland his most daring undertaking. "We had no army worth mentioning," Speer remembers Hitler saying; "at that time it would not even have had the fighting strength to maintain itself against the Poles. If the French had taken any action, we would have been easily defeated; our resistance would have been over in a few days."¹⁵ The interpreter Paul Schmidt recalls Hitler speaking in almost identical terms of the necessity to withdraw "in disgrace" if challenged—although he does not specify whether the withdrawal would have stopped at the Rhine line, or what would have happened thereafter.¹⁶ But whatever Hitler, or Goebbels for that matter, may have cared to say later in order to enhance their reputations for diplomatic gamesmanship, little evidence exists that they expressed these anxieties at the time.¹⁷

No doubt the Wehrmacht high command felt technically unready for Operation *Schulung*. But its position has been frequently misunderstood. Unlike the Foreign Office, the army had never accepted Locarno as a fundamental element of German security policy in the west. As early as the winter of 1931-32, subordinate levels of the Truppenamt had drawn up plans to distribute Reichswehr weapons to the police and SA and to stand and fight on the right bank of the Rhine in case the French attempted to reoccupy the zone. In November 1933 the Heeresleitung made formal representations concerning the need to remilitarize the Rhineland when feasible.¹⁸ It is true that in April 1935 Heeresleitung commander General von Fritsch, suffering still under the apprehension that the Allies might retaliate for the reimposition of conscription, referred to the demilitarized zone as "the hottest of pokers, which

¹⁵ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs* (New York, 1970), 72.

¹⁶ Paul Schmidt, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne: Erlebnisse des Chefdolmetschers im Auswärtigen Amt mit den Staatsmännern Europas* (Bonn, 1949), 320.

¹⁷ For a subtle and intelligent discussion of how Goebbels later propagated the idea that the Germans had entered the Rhineland crisis unprepared as part of a "disinformation" campaign, see the comments in Marcel Déat, "Mémoires, I^{ère} partie: Le Massacre des possibles" [1944], MS in Cabinet des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (hereafter cited as BN).

¹⁸ On the 1931-32 plans, see Zeugenschriftum General Otto Stapf, 6 June 1952, ZS-152, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich (hereafter cited as IfZ). At the time Stapf was serving as deputy chief of the General Staff organization department. On the 1933 Reichswehr position, see Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *General Ludwig Beck: Studien und Dokumente zur politisch-militärischen Vorstellungswelt und Tätigkeit des Generalstabs des deutschen Heeres 1933-1938* (Boppard am Rhein, 1980), 214-15. On the long-term evolution of German military strategy, Michael Geyer, *Aufrüstung oder Sicherheit: Die Reichswehr in der Krise der Machtpolitik 1924-1936* (Wiesbaden, 1980), offers important insights.

must not be touched under any circumstances." By the following November, however, Fritsch spoke more confidently to key subordinates: "Despite all worries, no armed power is in the position to impede our rise."¹⁹ At Christmas 1935, when Fritsch called in Lieutenant-Colonel Otto Stapf and General Friedrich von Manstein (the heads of his Organization and Operations departments) to inform them of the Führer's decision to remilitarize the zone, he focused his anxieties largely upon the foreign policy consequences of the maneuver.²⁰

The Oberkommando des Heeres would of course experience difficulty if the action led to an armed confrontation and lost the "symbolic" character planned for it. Not only had it formed scarcely over half of the thirty-six infantry divisions foreseen in the army expansion program and constituted only one of the three projected Panzer divisions, but it had not yet completed organizational arrangements for amalgamating the disparate paramilitary groupings—the police, SA, and NSKK—into a second-line border security force.²¹ At the same time, a strategic team working under Chief of Staff General Ludwig Beck had, at the end of 1935, laid final plans for the creation of an offensive attack army (*zu angriffsweiser Kriegführung befähigten Heeres*). The new conception involved infantry motorization, multiplication of the Panzer formations, and organization of reserve units on the model of regular divisions instead of militia in order to facilitate more rapid mobilization. All this required greater use of the Ruhr's industrial potential and free movement of troops and supplies along the rail networks on the banks of the Rhine. On 14 February 1936 Beck formally advised that, notwithstanding the risks, remilitarization amounted to a prerequisite for achieving the army's goals.²² Thus War Minister

¹⁹ "Ausführungen des Chefs der Heeresleitung von Fritsch am 24.4.35"; "Besprechung durch den Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres am 18.11.35," in *Aufzeichnungen General der Infanterie Curt Leibmann*, ED 1/1, IfZ.

²⁰ *Zeugenschriftum Stapf*, ZS-152, IfZ. The more ideological Nazis had always considered Fritsch a tepid enthusiast. Indeed, his name had stood on the original "hit list" of 30 June 1934—and he knew it. (See *Zeugenschriftum Major Otto Betz*, 15 October 1954, ZS-1842, IfZ.)

²¹ *Zeugenschriftum Stapf*, IfZ. The briefings given by Fritsch and Beck to top army brass on 18 November 1935 put a rather better face on the forces' current shortcomings; see *Aufzeichnungen Leibmann*, IfZ.

²² Müller, *Beck*, 216-34; see also his earlier book, *Das Heer und Hitler: Armee und nationalsozialistische Regime 1933-1940* (Stuttgart, 1969), 213-17. Beck's turnaround in February 1936 holds particular significance because his principal adviser, Col. Karl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel, had earlier preached caution. (See the latter's memorandum of 11 April 1935 in Müller, *Beck*, 434-36.)

von Blomberg's nervous tension during the crisis and his timid suggestion (which so outraged Hitler) that three battalions be withdrawn from border cities to avoid provocation represented, as Beck's biographer rightly insists, nothing more than a transitory difference about the atmospherics of the operation. It implied no basic reservation about remilitarization as such.²³

What the military, or for that matter the civilian leaders of the Third Reich, thought mattered only to a limited extent. As Hitler's personal adjutant reminds us, the Führer made all vital decisions by himself.²⁴ Yet in fact Hitler consulted his advisers fully in February 1936. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen's animadversions on the arbitrary style of National Socialist foreign policymaking will not bear close examination in this particular crisis. Hitler did not, as Jacobsen intimates, launch a risky operation largely to display his personal decisiveness, still less just to counter domestic dissatisfaction stemming from church-state conflict or economic distress.²⁵ The differences of opinion within German officialdom concerning the Rhineland focused exclusively on timing. Foreign Minister von Neurath, for instance, wondered during the key deliberations of 12 February whether the Reich could not secure the same ends through negotiation or whether it might prove expedient to wait until the French Senate had ratified the Franco-Soviet pact and thereby created a suitable pretext. But he came around quickly. On 7 March Neurath told friends through tears of joy that the entry of troops constituted "the greatest triumph of German diplomacy in this century."²⁶ And Reichsbank President Schacht, whom analysts abroad believed had opposed the coup, actually despatched a message of fawning charac-

²³ Müller, *Beck*, 217; Friedrich Hossbach, *Zwischen Wehrmacht und Hitler, 1934-1938*, 2nd rev. ed. (Göttingen, 1965), 83-86; also Foreign Minister von Neurath's rebuke to the war minister for his weakness in Neurath to Blomberg, 28 March 1936, in NS 10/37, Adjutantur des Führers, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz (hereafter cited as BA). Hossbach makes clear that Hitler's fleeting anxiety on 5 March derived solely from a rumor (which proved unfounded) that the Allies had gotten wind of the operation and that he would lose the advantage of surprise; it reflected no lack of resolve. Müller explains that Beck's opposition to the rebuke dispatched to the service attachés in London, who during the crisis had expressed worries about Allied intervention, merely indicated his concern to encourage the free reporting of foreign intelligence; the chief of staff in no way agreed substantively with the attachés.

²⁴ Fritz Wiedemann, MS Memoirs, Box 604, Captured German Documents Collection, Library of Congress.

²⁵ Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik 1933-1938* (Frankfurt and Berlin, 1968), 416-21.

²⁶ John L. Heineman, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister: Constantin Freiherr von Neurath* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979), 113-15.

ter assuring his Führer how tolerantly foreign colleagues at the Bank for International Settlements had reacted to the fait accompli.²⁷

Officials in Berlin devoted so little time in early 1936 to discussing the principle of unilateral remilitarization because in practice it had commenced much earlier. Just as the Germans had made substantial strides toward rearmament before announcing their conscription program in March 1935, so they had begun to maintain paramilitary and semimilitary forces in the Rhineland well before perfecting a scheme for formal remilitarization. This became an increasingly open secret. One could plausibly discount the offensive value of the 200,000 men in the SA, SS, Labor Service, and other paramilitary formations present in the zone in violation of the Locarno pact. Since 1934, however, the Germans had also maintained there the equivalent of two infantry divisions (22,000 men) of Landespolizei or militarized police, as well as an air regiment under nominal police jurisdiction. Elsewhere in Germany the Landespolizei formed part of the regular army after July 1935. Hence the Entente powers stood in the "somewhat humiliating position," as the Belgian military attaché observed, of having already tolerated German army units "camouflaged only by the color of their uniforms" and perhaps by a shortage of heavy artillery.²⁸

Moreover, beginning in mid-May 1935 French intelligence had noted a rising volume of reports about the refurbishment of barracks, construction of military roads, extension of airfields, and building of earthwork defenses in the zone. These reports rose to a

²⁷ André François-Poncet reported from Berlin that "certainly" Schacht and "perhaps" Neurath had opposed the operation. Robert Lacour-Gayet of the Bank of France told a British Treasury official that Hitler had been "led into this adventure by the extremists in opposition to the more moderate party" and feared that Schacht's position had consequently weakened. See François-Poncet telegram of 9 March 1936 in Commission de publication des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre 1939-1945, *Documents diplomatiques français 1932-1939*, 2^e Sér., Vol. I, No. 350 (hereafter cited as DDF, 2/I); Lacour-Gayet's view reported in Ernest Rowe-Dutton to S. D. Waley, 12 March 1936, copy in OV 45/9, France (country file), Bank of England (hereafter cited as BE). Actually, Schacht learned shortly before the coup that he had incurred the wrath of Reich Chancellery officials who objected to his "economic liberalism." He may have displayed his enthusiasm about the Rhineland coup the more openly to buttress his bureaucratic position. See "Telefonische Mitteilung von Herrn Reichsbankpräsident aus Basel," 8 March 1936, and Dr. Brinckmann, "Aktennotiz für die persönlichen Akten des Herrn Reichsbankpräsident Dr. Schacht," respectively in NS 10/32 and NS 10/30, BA.

²⁸ See the Bulletins de renseignements of the Belgian military attaché in Berlin, Lt. Gen. Schmit, 16 January and 9 March 1936, in Belgium, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et du Commerce Extérieur (hereafter cited as BMAE), Série Politique No. 11.115 (1936); also the retrospective "Note sur la réoccupation de la zone rhénane" by the French army 2^e Bureau, 6 April 1936, SHA, 1 N 36; and DDF, 2/I, No. 92 (21 January 1936).

crescendo during the first two months of 1936, accompanied contrapuntally by a German press campaign rehearsing the iniquity of this hangover of Versailles. The only matter left for surprise was the exact date on which formal remilitarization would take place.²⁹ As early as New Year's day 1936, Pierre Arnal, the French deputy chief of mission in Berlin, ventured a shrewd guess. On a visit home, he reminded René Massigli, assistant director of political affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, that anyone who believed the Hitler government considered Locarno eternal was "quite mad." If Premier Laval thought that Germany would consent to talk about limiting air forces after France ratified its pact with Soviet Russia, he was in for disappointment. Grave risks existed that the Reich would react to such ratification by placing France immediately before a *fait accompli* on the Rhine.³⁰

Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, and others discussed the question of the date for action frequently in the weeks before the Führer made his final decision on 2 March. Hitler's main preoccupation was to square Mussolini. He needed to make sure that the Abyssinian controversy had irremediably alienated Italy from Britain and France. He sought to confirm that Mussolini—the most resolute leader of the Stresa Front the previous spring—would not uphold Locarno now that the League of Nations had imposed sanctions upon him. Hitler received this assurance on 22 February.³¹ Thereafter he hesitated no longer. Indeed he decided to act as soon as the French Chamber had ratified the Soviet pact and not to wait for the Senate to follow suit. Goebbels would know how to present the matter as a national crusade. "There can be no question of retreat," Goebbels crowed during the first days of the operation. "Das Volk

²⁹ For the reports of the French Service de Renseignements, see Ministère des Relations Extérieures (formerly Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, hereafter cited as MAE), Série Z-Europe, 1930-1940, Grande-Bretagne, vols. 296-98; typical reports and summaries by Quai d'Orsay officials in DDF, 2/I, Nos. 37, 40, 53, 63, 75, 96, 122, 126, 183, 188, 277, 288. For the orchestrated German press campaign, see BA, Sammlung Brammer, ZSg. 101, Nr. 7, fol. 49-177 (20 January-7 March 1936).

³⁰ Arnal to Massigli, 2 January 1936, Carton VI, René Massigli Papers, MAE.

³¹ On Hitler's approach to Mussolini, see Manfred Funke, *Sanktionen und Kanonen: Hitler, Mussolini und der internationale Abessinienkonflikt 1934-1936* (Düsseldorf, 1970), 82-124; and Jens Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini: Die Entstehung der Achse: Berlin-Rom 1933-1936* (Tübingen, 1973), 471-78. The key documents are in E. M. Robertson, ed., "Zur Wiederbesetzung des Rheinlandes, 1936," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 10 (1962): 178-205. For the key Mussolini-Ambassador von Hassell meeting on 22 February, see also *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (Washington, 1962), Ser. C, vol. IV, No. 579 (hereafter cited as DGFP).

steht auf, der Sturm bricht los—the people are rising; the fight now begins.”³²

Quite possibly Hitler and his advisers felt relatively confident because of an unofficial warning from Paris that had backfired. On 10 February Jean Dobler, French consul-general in Cologne, returned to his post and through an intermediary informed Berlin that his government would reply to remilitarization with escalating steps—a break in diplomatic relations, then a trade embargo, and finally a proposal for economic sanctions through the League. “A year ago it was at least uncertain whether we would simply acquiesce in a German occupation of the Rhine zone,” Dobler admitted. “Now the whole Quai d’Orsay is united in ruling out such an attitude.”³³

If Paris meant to convey determination through this back channel, it miscalculated grievously. Hitler had recently told Lord Rothermere in a widely circulated letter that he cared not a whit for economic sanctions and that, in his opinion, the character of leadership mattered more than economics in determining the destiny of nations.³⁴ It comes as no surprise, then, that Hitler and Goebbels focused on the single crucial issue on 7 March. “Foreign reactions splendid,” exulted the latter on the evening after the coup. “France will involve the League. Fine! It therefore will not act. That’s the main thing. Nothing else matters. (Alles andere ist Wurscht.)”³⁵

As happened so often in the diplomacy of the 1930s, Hitler and his acolytes had grasped the essentials of the problem. Could France hope to persuade its Locarno guarantors to interevne militarily? If not, could it risk unilateral military action? Otherwise, as Goebbels so plainly observed, nothing else mattered. Once upon a time, visionaries had presumed that collective security through the League of Nations would provide a remedy for problems like these. But the Manchurian and Abyssinian crises (and many that had come before) had made painfully clear to men of this world—certainly to those paid to think about such issues at the Quai d’Orsay—that the League

³² Joseph Goebbels Diary, 17 January–28 March 1936, in Nachlass Goebbels, Nr. 63, BA.

³³ Dr. G. Erdmann, Westdeutscher Beobachter, “Unterredung mit dem französischen Generalkonsul J. Dobler,” 10 February 1936, in Gauleiter Köln to Goering, 12 February 1936 (marked by Goering “sofort an Führer”), in NS 10/199, BA.

³⁴ Hitler to Lord Rothermere, 20 December 1935 (with circulation to the whole top leadership in the British government), copy in Viscount Sankey Papers, Ms. Eng. hist. c. 513, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

³⁵ Goebbels Diary (“Beim Führer”), 7 March 1936.

offered no substitute for national armies and the willingness to use them.

No one who had read the cable traffic in the recent past could reasonably expect that the Locarno powers would offer concrete assistance. Italian diplomats expressed sympathy for the French predicament, and some no doubt meant it sincerely. But Mussolini explained as forthrightly to his allies as he did to the Germans that he would not intervene so long as Italy itself faced sanctions.³⁶ Nor could the French place the slightest reliance on Belgium. The Belgian army had deteriorated so markedly by 1936 that it could not even man the fortified places east of Liège with trained troops. The Franco-Belgian military accord for which Marshal Foch had labored so assiduously after World War I had lapsed, to all intents and purposes, in 1931. Yet there existed not the slightest prospect of getting either Socialist or Flemish legislators to vote for the necessary military reforms unless the government denounced this long-obsolete arrangement publicly and demonstrated ostentatious resolution to stay out of the French orbit. While Belgian diplomats perceived Hitler's action as an opportunity once again to solicit a security guarantee from Great Britain, the chief of the Belgian General Staff shed no tears about the prospective construction of German fortifications in the newly reoccupied zone. Such fortifications would, in his estimation, signal the intention of the Reich to move east rather than west, and thus to leave Belgium alone.³⁷

In a moment of careless hyperbole Stanley Baldwin had once told the House of Commons that the British frontier no longer lay on the chalk cliffs of Dover, but rather on the Rhine.³⁸ Yet the prime minister's cautious attempts to nudge the British public into accepting a measure of rearmament to match the corresponding German

³⁶ DGFP, C/IV, Nos. 485, 525, 564, 575, 579, 592, 598, 603. On the private anguish of Ambassador Cerruti, see the reports of his Belgian colleague in Paris, esp. Kerchove to van Zeeland, 10 and 17 March 1936, in BMAE, Classement Politique, Légations [CPL]-France, 1936; and on the views of the Italian military attaché in Paris, see Note Schweisguth, 9 March 1936, Papiers Victor-Henri Schweisguth, 351 AP 3, Archives Nationales (hereafter cited as AN).

³⁷ Note van Zuylen, 10 April 1935, BMAE 11.098; Note van Zuylen, 24 April 1935, 11.115; van Zeeland testimony, Réunion de la Commission des Affaires Etrangères de la Chambre, 23 January 1936; Notes van Zuylen, 2, 3, 20, 26 February 1936; Lt. Col. Raquez (attaché militaire, Paris) to Chef de la Maison Militaire du Roi, 9 March 1936; Avis du Gén. van den Bergen (Chief of the General Staff), 11 March 1936, all in 11.115.

³⁸ *H. C. Debates*, 30 July 1934; quoted by C. L. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars, 1918-1940* (Chicago, 1955), 476, and numerous other works.

buildup had thus far encountered limited success. In September 1935 Baldwin had tried to explain the parlous state of British defense to Labour opposition leaders and to enlist their cooperation in remedying its defects. He had met with a curt refusal, not merely from the Christian pacifist George Lansbury, the titular leader of the Labour party, of whom he expected little, but also from the hardbitten Trades Union boss Ernest Bevin, whom he thought might show more realism. The fall election campaign brought further confirmation that many on the Opposition benches rejected preparedness not from political calculation only, but out of profound conviction that armaments led to war. Baldwin had taken fright. The last thing he wanted was a Continental involvement that might further alienate working-class voters and make it impossible to build a consensus for national defense.³⁹ Foreign Office professionals agreed. They too considered it imperative to get on terms with Germany. Britain had too many enemies, they believed, and not enough resources to cope with them. The improbably handsome Anthony Eden, the youngest foreign secretary in a century, had neither cause nor inclination to jeopardize a promising career by taking an unpopular stand of his own.⁴⁰

In mid-February 1936 Foreign Office representatives informed the French frankly that the demilitarized zone did not constitute a vital British interest.⁴¹ Shortly thereafter Eden urged the Cabinet to enter into wide-ranging negotiations with Germany "for the surrender on conditions of our rights in the Zone while such surrender has still got a bargaining value."⁴² The various experts had not completed their review of acceptable economic, military, and colonial concessions when the Führer pounced. Yet Eden and the Foreign Office staff held undeterred to the view that the national interest

³⁹ On Baldwin's approach to Lansbury and Bevin, see Walter Citrine memoranda of 5 April 1943 and 19 March 1952; also Citrine to G. M. Young, 22 June 1948, and to A. W. Baldwin, 27 February 1957, in Baron Citrine of Wembley Papers, file 7/1, London School of Economics and Political Science (hereafter cited as LSE). G. M. Young, *Stanley Baldwin* (London, 1952), evidently thought the incident too sensitive to report. On Baldwin's position during the crisis see also Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography* (London, 1969), 901-25. For Lansbury's belief in unilateral disarmament and the manifestoes of his Labour colleagues during the general election of 1935, see vols. 11-16, George Lansbury Papers, LSE.

⁴⁰ David Carlton, *Anthony Eden: A Biography* (London, 1981), 71-83.

⁴¹ Note Corbin, DDF, 2/1, No. 184 (13 February 1936).

⁴² *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, Ser. 2, Vol. XV, No. 521 (hereafter cited as DBFP) (Memorandum by Mr. Eden on the Rhineland Demilitarized Zone, 14 February 1936); see also No. 509, Eden memorandum of 11 February 1936.

commanded the conclusion of "as far-reaching and enduring a settlement as possible while Hitler [was] still in the mood to do so." Even economic sanctions would therefore prove counterproductive. Foreign Office strategic goals, the categorical advice of the service chiefs that Britain could not defend itself (let alone intervene against the Reich), the fears of the London City that financial penalties would lead to German repudiation of the Standstill debt, and Eden's ideological preference for continuing to tighten the screws on Italy all reinforced the trend of policy.⁴³ Actually the Foreign Office obtained some hours' advance warning of the reoccupation from an intelligence officer in Germany. This made no difference.⁴⁴ To journalists as well as to his colleagues, Eden expressed the settled determination to "bring good out of evil."⁴⁵

In the light of the documents now available, one can scarcely understand what impulse later led Churchill to propagate the story of Central Department head Ralph Wigram wailing to his wife during the crisis: "War is now *inevitable*. . . . Wait for bombs now on this little house."⁴⁶ In fact, ministers and officials saw what was coming, grasped its implications for East Central Europe, and acquiesced with open eyes. The Foreign Office position did not rest simply on the observation that Eden attributes to his taxi driver: "I suppose Jerry can do what he likes in his own back garden."⁴⁷ The former foreign secretary, Sir John Simon, had set the tone for what one wing in the Office believed upon his return from the Stresa Conference in the spring of 1935. "No ring-fence is going to keep Germany in, as she is going now. If she acts, it is surely better that she should act in the East. That will at worst occupy her energies for a long time and may well prove a lesson and not a stimulus."⁴⁸

⁴³ For reviews of possible concessions, see DBFP, 2/XV, No. 522; DBFP, 2/XVI, Nos. 4, 5, 48 (quotation from Eden memorandum on Germany and the Locarno treaty, 8 March 1936). For the grim warnings of the service chiefs about Britain's military incapacity, see C.O.S. 441, Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee Report, "Possible Despatch of an International Force to the Rhineland," 17 March 1936, in PRO, CAB 53/27. For fears of the London City that economic sanctions would boomerang, see DBFP, 2/XVI, Nos. 55 and 79. For Eden's virtual obsession with Italian misconduct in Ethiopia and his determination to maintain his standing with the League of Nations Union, see Eden and Cranborne correspondence with Lord Robert Cecil, March-April 1936, Cecil Papers, Add. Mss. 51083 and 51087, British Library, London.

⁴⁴ Haraszi, *The Invaders*, 81.

⁴⁵ Eden comment to Geoffrey Dawson, editor of *The Times*, Dawson Diary, 8 March 1936 (note also reports of other meetings with Eden on 6, 18, and 20 March), vol. 40, Geoffrey Dawson Papers, Bodleian Library.

⁴⁶ Churchill, *Gathering Storm*, 198.

⁴⁷ Avon, *Memoirs of Anthony Eden*, 389.

⁴⁸ "Pencilled memo written in aeroplane returning from Stresa-Geneva," 17 April 1935, vol. 82, 1st Viscount Simon Papers, Bodleian Library.

Viscount Cranborne, parliamentary undersecretary to Eden, elaborated the theme at the height of the Rhineland crisis when he warned his superiors against extending a substitute guarantee to France. Without the demilitarized zone, he noted, France could not effectively fulfill its obligations in Central and Eastern Europe. The liquidation of those obligations was inevitable. "Do we want to delay the process, and to make it possible for France not to face facts? . . . The great Power of Central Europe must inevitably be Germany."⁴⁹

Prime Minister Baldwin sounded an analogous note of impatience when he told the Cabinet that it seemed "very unfriendly" of France to press Great Britain while the latter remained disarmed. Besides, if France with the aid of Russia did succeed in crushing Germany, "it would probably only result in Germany going Bolshevik."⁵⁰ Finally, the lord privy seal and former prime minister, J. Ramsay MacDonald, weighed in with his own characteristic analysis. "That blot on the peace of the world, the Treaty of Versailles, is vanishing, and for that I am thankful. . . . France has again had a severe lesson, and I hope it will take it this time. In any event the folly of pandering to it by standing rigidly to the letter of Versailles or Locarno . . . must now be plain and this logical and legalistic nation should be brought to face reality."⁵¹

Certain French negotiators experienced a measure of disorientation when they caught echoes of the emotional undertone in London during the postcrisis negotiations in mid-March.⁵² It will be argued that, by that time, the decision not to meet force with force had become irrevocable. But French cabinet members who did their homework could not have failed to comprehend the fundamental thrust of British policy earlier. For one thing, the British kept reminding them of it. The well-informed Frank Walters, deputy

⁴⁹ DBFP, 2/XVI, No. 122.

⁵⁰ CAB 18 (36), Cabinet Conclusions, 11 March 1936, CAB 23/83, PRO.

⁵¹ J. Ramsay MacDonald Diary, 8 March 1936. PRO 30/69/1753. One can find similar expressions of opinion at every level of British government. See, e.g., the views expressed by the assistant secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence: "We are certainly in no position (even if we wanted to) to use force—nor are the French though they will squeal and sulk and ask for help. It is the *inevitable* result of trying to keep down a virile population of over 70 million. The kettle has been seething for years; now it has boiled over. The French are to blame for trying to keep the lid down against a force greater than human strength—and we are to blame for condoning, even seconding, the French." See Brian Bond, ed., *Chief of Staff: The Diaries of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, 1933-1940* (London, 1973), 104 (8 March 1936).

⁵² See especially comments by Joseph Paul-Boncour as reported in Schweisguth Diary, "Mission à Londres, 17-23 mars 1936," 351 AP 3, Schweisguth Papers, AN.

secretary-general of the League, urged Massigli on 3 March not to be deceived by statements, even from the highest authorities, that "our frontier is on the Rhine," or that "we cannot remain indifferent to German aggression in Europe." "You will never get effective British support on the Continent except through the League," Walters said flatly.⁵³ On the very next day Foreign Minister P.-E. Flandin assured Eden in Geneva that, when Hitler moved, the French government would inform the League Council and its Locarno cosignatories and "not proceed to any isolated action." (He had already made an analogous declaration to the Belgians.) Surely Flandin must have suspected that this was a prescription for inaction.⁵⁴ And while Premier Sarraut blustered about not accepting remilitarization "under any circumstances" when he testified to a Senate commission on 6 March, he remained significantly vague about his plans if France's allies did not play up.⁵⁵

Very probably Sarraut already understood that he could not surmount the multiple obstacles to a riposte by France alone. The Germans could make a persuasive case that the peaceful entry of troops into the Rhine zone without an intention to penetrate beyond German frontiers would not constitute the "flagrant violation" of the Locarno pact justifying unilateral countermeasures. The Quai d'Orsay lawyers realized that a country that made such a fetish about the rule of law could scarcely find grounds for any procedure other than that adumbrated by Flandin to Eden.⁵⁶ But what could the French hope to gain at best from following the legal route? The brief that Massigli drew up for Flandin on 8 March included nothing that might induce the Germans to climb down. One could request a declaration from the Locarno powers reaffirming their obligations under the pact, a second statement declining to enter into negotiations with the Reich so long as German forces remained in place, and possibly a third threatening not to participate in the forthcoming Berlin Olympics. France might then offer a curious compromise.

⁵³ Frank Walters to Massigli, 3 March 1936, Carton VI, Massigli Papers, MAE.

⁵⁴ Flandin assurance to Eden in DBFP, 2/XVI, No. 12; his declaration to Ambassador de Kerchove of Belgium on 27 February in DDF, 2/I, No. 241.

⁵⁵ See report of his testimony in "Auditions des ministres," 6 March 1936, Commission de l'Armée, Box 160, Archives du Sénat, Palais du Luxembourg, Paris.

⁵⁶ For the full statement of the case under international law, plausibly argued by the German legal adviser, Friedrich Gaus, see DGFP, C/V, No. 3 (5 March 1936). For René Massigli's inability to work around the legal obstacle, see DDF, 2/I, No. 143 (6 February 1936); for the British confirmation of the position, DBFP, 2/XV, enclosure to No. 521 (14 February 1936).

It would “reduce” its demand for military assistance provided that Britain and Italy urged the League to adopt economic sanctions. This was demonstrably whistling in the dark—all the more so because Chancellor Schuschnigg of Austria loudly volunteered that his country could not afford to join in economic sanctions, and thus the whole southern flank of Germany would remain open to trade. Massigli’s wish list included only one concrete measure. France would press for the conclusion of bilateral air pacts with Great Britain and Belgium and for a British commitment to construct air bases on French soil. That way, when the discussions with Germany into which the Allies now declined to enter resumed nonetheless, the principle of bilateral air accords would be established.⁵⁷

The prospect of consultations among the Locarno powers with this as the agenda appeared bleak. Did the French cabinet have a practical alternative? It had one only if—in technical violation of the Locarno pact—it could project an army into the Rhineland and raise the funds to keep it there. But owing to the anemic level of military funding, the French army had long lacked a rapid deployment capacity in the European theater. It did possess a lightly armored mobile force designed for use in case of colonial unrest. Aside from that, however, the active army constituted a skeleton organization designed to hold the most crucial eastern defenses during a six-stage, seventeen-day mobilization period. Only thereafter could the nation in arms take the offensive. The General Staff had elucidated this often enough for the dullest politician to understand. Both Sarraut and Flandin acknowledged privately that full mobilization would prove counterproductive. All prognostications suggested that the forthcoming elections would result in victory for the left. For years the Socialist leadership had voted against military appropriations, opposed the use of force except under the aegis of the League, shrilly promoted sanctions against Italy (the only potential ally with a serious army in being), and advocated further efforts to propitiate Germany. The Communists had evinced an even more worrisome record. And a considerable number of Radical-Socialist deputies,

⁵⁷ Note Massigli, and “Mesures à prendre par les puissances signataires de Locarno,” 8 March; and “Conclusion éventuelle d’accords aériens entre les signataires de Locarno autres que l’Allemagne,” 9 March 1936, all in Carton I, Massigli Papers, MAE. Significantly, the two most serious sanctions on Massigli’s list, an interruption of communications between France and Germany and a possible closure of Allied ports to German ships, were according to marginal notations put off for later review. For Schuschnigg’s statement of 8 March, see DDF, 2/I, No. 332.

impelled by the enthusiasm of their constituents for the Popular Front, would almost surely play along at first. Under the circumstances, mobilization in the absence of a direct attack on French soil might produce a Chamber with such a complexion as to compromise future national defense.⁵⁸

Historians have shown little sympathy for the cautious advice tendered by French military leaders in 1936. Even the scrupulously careful Gerhard Weinberg, writing before the French archives became accessible, charged General Gamelin and his colleagues with holding a "ridiculously exaggerated view of German strength."⁵⁹ Revelations about deficiencies in the Nazi military machine have so impressed other writers that they have embraced the conclusion that the Allied armies could have bested the Germans as late as 1938.⁶⁰ French military records suggest, however, that the General Staff understood German weaknesses reasonably well. It is true that, to leave a margin for error, French intelligence officers tended to treat German units in the process of formation as if they had already become operational. But their bleak assessment of the prospects reflected far less an overestimation of German forces than an all too accurate evaluation of their own.⁶¹

The government had authorized construction of the Maginot line in anticipation of the eventual necessity to terminate the Rhineland occupation. But having taken that fundamental step, it never

⁵⁸ For the detailed workings of Plan D-bis, in force at the beginning of 1936, see SHA, 7 N 3697. On the evolution of the successive plans during the later 1930s, see Lt.-Col. Henry Dutailly, *Les Problèmes de l'armée de terre française (1935-1939)* (Paris, 1980). For proof that even the Germans expected the elections to go well to the left, see Hans W. Fell (Paris representative, Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger) to Alfred Leitgen (Adjutant des Stellvertreter des Führers), 17 February 1936 (copies to Hitler and Ribbentrop), NS 10/200, BA. For Sarraut's acknowledgement of the political costs of mobilization, see his comments to Air Minister Marcel Déat, reported in Déat, "Mémoires," chap. XVI. Flandin amassed a large collection of newspaper clippings from *Le Populaire* and other journals, in which he or a staff member underlined statements opposing forceful action. See Carton 74, Pierre-Etienne Flandin Papers, BN.

⁵⁹ Weinberg, *Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, 243.

⁶⁰ See for example Telford Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace* (New York, 1979); and Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939* (Princeton, 1984).

⁶¹ French intelligence officers did frequently complain that, as a result of security precautions taken by German armament factories, it became increasingly difficult after 1933 to obtain anything approaching accurate information about weapons in the production stage. See Note Jamet for the Haut Comité Militaire, 22 March 1935, SHA, 2 N 19. Defrasne, "L'Événement du 7 mars 1936," esp. 259-65, argues the traditional case that the French overestimated German strength. For an example suggesting that the 3^e Bureau (Operations) did count German units in formation as already prepared for action, see Note pour le Haut Comité Militaire [probably by Col. Buisson], 18 January 1936, SHA, 7 N 3697.

consulted the army in 1930 about the security implications of withdrawing all troops behind French frontiers five years ahead of schedule. General Maxime Weygand complained bitterly that his advice was solicited only about the technical implementation of the withdrawal. The civilian higher-ups did not inquire into the consequences for strategic doctrine or materiel procurement—perhaps because they feared receiving unpalatable answers about the multiple dangers posed and the army's inability to deal with them under current budgetary constraints.⁶² For a short time, the Military Operations Bureau continued by rote to churn out schemes for moving back into the zone should the need arise. As early as November 1931, however, a senior officer dismissed as “self-deception” the notion that the active army could carry out in present circumstances a Ruhr-style intervention. In June 1933, after French capacities had deteriorated further while German powers of resistance had grown, it became settled doctrine under the so-called Plan D that any *prise de gages* or sanction would require a major recall of reservists and acceptance of the risk of war. This virtual abandonment of offensive operational planning did not remain much of a secret. The Socialist leader Léon Blum, intent on displaying France's pacific intentions, indiscreetly told his German contacts about a briefing he had received on the subject, and in due course word filtered back to Abwehr headquarters in Berlin.⁶³

Meanwhile, between 1932 and 1934 General Weygand fought a desperate rearguard battle against the steady compression of the military budget. A succession of unsympathetic war ministers (of whom Paul-Boncour and Daladier figured as the most notorious from the General Staff's perspective) ordered him to make bricks without straw—that is, to prepare for a fall in the number of recruits during the low birthrate years of 1935-39 without increasing either the term of service or armament procurement.⁶⁴ Owing to growing antimilitarism particularly among the youth generation, even well-

⁶² Handwritten Weygand note, “Evacuation de la Rhénanie, zone des 15 ans,” SHA, 7 N 3496.

⁶³ “Etude du 3^e Bureau,” June 1931; Note Weygand, “Au sujet du plan de prise de gages avec les moyens du temps de paix,” 22 June 1933; and generally the “Prise de Gages (Plan D)” folders in SHA, 7 N 3497. On Blum's breach of security, see Bericht der Abwehrstelle Lindau Nr. 23/geh. vom 18.8.34, Nachlass Generaloberst Ludwig Beck, F 40/1, IfZ.

⁶⁴ This summation rests on dozens of exchanges between war ministers Paul-Boncour, Daladier, and Pétain with Gen. Weygand, November 1932-January 1935, in SHA, 1 K 30 (Maxime Weygand Papers), and 1 N 32-34. In his autobiography, Weygand sought to hold his feelings somewhat in check. See his *Mémoires*, vol. 2, *Mirages et réalités* (Paris, 1957), 340-435.

disposed members of parliament considered an increase in the term of service hopelessly unrealistic. Furthermore, during the Disarmament Conference of 1932-33 the successive governments resisted any spending on new weapons systems that might generate unfavorable publicity or ultimately have to be scrapped. Subsequently, the failure of the attempt to limit arms by international agreement brought precious little relief. The governments of Daladier, Sarraut, Chautemps, and even the nominally more sympathetic Doumergue continued to squeeze army appropriations in a desperate if misguided effort to pursue deflation and hold France on the old gold parity.⁶⁵

According to Weygand's figures, the total military budget fell by 17 percent between 1930 and 1934. But naturally these cuts fell unevenly. One could not easily economize on food, uniforms, and housing of recruits. The Maginot line could not be curtailed in the middle of construction. The principal saving had to come on materiel procurement. To put it another way, the strategic planners had committed themselves to the expensive Maginot line fortresses during the prosperity of the late 1920s, when they targeted the limited number of soldiers as the chief constraint of the following decade. They found themselves bound by this decision during the Depression years, when restricted funding turned out to represent a still more formidable difficulty. The failure to develop new weapons systems as World War I armaments approached the end of their normal life span locked the French ever more rigidly into a defensive strategy that capitalized on their investment in the Maginot line. By early 1934 the army had actually expended no more than 30 percent of the sums proposed for new weaponry in the 1927 and 1930 programs. And it had received fewer weapons than even that figured implied because, as procurement fell erratically, unit costs increased.⁶⁶ In May 1934 the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre noted

⁶⁵ See the correspondence cited in n. 64, supra; also the solid interpretation in Maurice Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord: La Politique française en matière de désarmement, 9 décembre 1930-17 avril 1934* (Paris, 1981), esp. 59-77, 587-94.

⁶⁶ For figures and their interpretation from the army point of view, see the dossier "Budget," in SHA, 1 N 43 (dossier 3). Weygand's figures suggest a more alarmist assessment than that implied in the retrospective analysis of Robert Frankenstein, *Le Prix du réarmement français (1935-1939)* (Paris, 1982), 15-42. Lee, "Strategy," 62-63, offers an elegant formulation of the ways in which the chief constraint shifted over time. But some French parliamentarians in the 1930s grasped the basic idea that the Maginot line had crowded out other expenditures (none more clearly than those with links to the steel instead of the construction industry). See Jeanneney, *Wendel*, 2:784-85.

the progress of the German armed forces and warned that "in its present condition, the French army is not in a position to cope, without grave risks, with such a menace." Before leaving active service in January 1935, Weygand again voiced his dispirited frustration at the glacial pace of improvement.⁶⁷ Ominously, Weygand's replacement as chief of the General Staff, the military intellectual Maurice Gamelin, billed himself as a "strategist" rather than "administrator." Weygand departed from War Ministry headquarters in the rue Saint-Dominique with the sinking feeling that Gamelin would not develop the political skills to reverse the tide.⁶⁸

The French army of 1935 could man the eastern fortresses and keep order in the colonies. In other respects it was a broken reed. It had but 200 useable tanks, and only a few prototypes of the modern B1. It had no antitank weapons whatever, and little medium or heavy artillery except for mothballed World War I leftovers. Lack of procurement funds and the absence of an assured fuel supply had required postponement of plans for motorization of the infantry to the Gallic Calends. But a dearth of saddle horses also made it difficult to assure mobilization the old fashioned way. The 1,847 military aircraft that had given rise to so much negative press attention at the Geneva disarmament talks were mostly canvas relics, more suitable for an air museum than for service on the front line. Antiaircraft defenses existed only on the drawing board. Industrial mobilization, though debated endlessly for a decade or more, had not yet really begun.⁶⁹

These interrelated problems admitted of no easy solution—even if, by a political miracle, the financial spigot opened again. To start with, neither the airframe nor the armament factories had developed a capacity for mass production. When modern planes and tanks were authorized, they could not consequently be efficiently produced. The Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre deliberated, to take one example among many, on how to deal with the evolution of tank warfare under these unpromising conditions. The old Renault F.T. machines, designed in World War I to climb over trenches, still clogged the army inventory in impressive numbers but

⁶⁷ Procès-verbal, Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, 17 May 1934, 15 January 1935 (hereafter cited as PV, CSG), SHA, 1 N 22; also Weygand to Pétain, 17 May 1934, 1 N 34; and Weygand to Maurin, 17 and 18 December 1934, 1 N 42.

⁶⁸ Weygand, *Mémoires*, 2:434.

⁶⁹ PV, CSG, 15 January 1935 (Weygand testimony), SHA, 1 N 22; Jamet note for the Haut Comité Militaire, 22 March 1935, 2 N 19.

had little residual value, even in training. The replacement D2 had a fundamental design flaw: when armored sufficiently for combat purposes, its treads wore out too quickly to accompany infantry. Tank commanders greatly respected the armor, speed, and reliability of the larger B1 (and its 1936 successor, the B1 bis). But as a result of its complexity this tank required hand manufacture and cost several times more than the D2; moreover it proved too heavy to traverse many bridges in eastern France. One could not responsibly advocate an expensive B1 buildup without concomitantly funding the repair of bridges and roads in the frontier departments; one could not plump for a crash motorization program without simultaneously financing a major navy expansion to ensure that the Mediterranean fleet could protect the delivery of fuel from North Africa. The arresting notion of a shock force comprising six armored divisions, promoted by Lieutenant Colonel Charles de Gaulle and Deputy Paul Reynaud, did not address these logistic problems—and it would equal in expense the entire weapons budget of the army over the previous five years. Eventually the CSG fastened on an unexciting short-term compromise: it ordered the technically limited but economical new Renault and Hotchkiss light tanks for the accompaniment of infantry. But even these would not reach the forces in substantial numbers before mid-1936.⁷⁰

The financial penury that had so constrained weaponry choices also affected personnel adversely. Training in the army had suffered gravely, not merely owing to the low morale of the career military, but because lack of funds had required cancellation of all field maneuvers outside the camps. Although the nominal strength of the army amounted to 651,000 men, the number of trained troops available for frontline service did not exceed 195,000 at any one time. (One would have to weigh the gravity of the emergency against the political disadvantages before deploying in a European campaign the 82,000 North Africans assigned to the *force mobile*.) Theoretically, one could also mobilize 550,000 men of the active reserve within three days. In fact, only a third of the reserve officers and a tenth of the reserve non-commissioned officers had taken

⁷⁰ Ibid. On tanks, see also PV, CSG, 24 March 1934, esp. 5-18, in SHA, 1 N 34; also Gén. Julien Dufieux, "Note Nr. 3 sur un programme de construction de chars," 13 January 1934, and "Note sur la modernisation du matériel," 20 December 1934, both in SHA, 1 N 42. Dutailly, *Les Problèmes de l'armée*, 139-66, 191-96, provides a helpful overview on some technical issues; Lee, "Strategy," 60-62, calculates the cost of the Reynaud-de Gaulle armored corps program.

their training seriously; hence the value of this reinforcement at the beginning of a conflict seemed uncertain at best.⁷¹

Under the circumstances, German reintroduction of conscription merely reinforced a wave of pessimism that had already engulfed the French armed forces. The three service chiefs could not give an unqualified answer when Foreign Minister Pierre Laval asked them in April 1935 if they could intervene massively in the event of a violation of the demilitarized zone or a German takeover of Austria. Laval had prompted them: if they could not reply affirmatively, France would no longer find allies and would be condemned to suffer "a German peace." Nevertheless, Gamelin first laid stress on the necessity for complete mobilization prior to action, then underscored the need for a year's delay in order to build gas masks and antitank weapons, and finally expatiated on the crucial importance of an alliance with Italy. The air force admitted to only sixty planes that could reach Berlin with bombs. The navy frankly despaired of results from a blockade or the interdiction of German commerce, but thought that with Italian cooperation it could keep the sea lanes open to North Africa despite the superiority of the new German pocket battleships.⁷²

Within the confines of the War Ministry, civilians and military professionals alike took a still bleaker view. The Haut Comité Militaire on 22 March 1935 accepted as a given General Jamet's presumption that the demilitarized zone would "soon be abolished in fact, if not in law."⁷³ On 2 April War Minister Maurin described Germany as "the strongest military power in Europe" and told regional commanders that Locarno had already in effect disappeared.⁷⁴ The informal assessment at the rue Saint-Dominique held that Germany would ineluctably remilitarize the zone when it felt ready to do so. Significantly, the Staff now designated this as an

⁷¹ Sources cited in n. 67, *supra*, also discuss personnel problems. For a clear explanation of the distinctions between the various stages of mobilization (alerte, alerte renforcée, sûreté, couverture, prémobilisation, and mobilisation générale), see Dutailly, *Les Problèmes de l'armée*, 416-18.

⁷² Gamelin to Ministre de la Guerre, 6 April 1935, in SHA, 5 N 579; Conseil des Ministres, 6 April 1935; Maurin to Président du Conseil, 8 April; Note du Conseil Supérieur de la Marine, 8 April; Note du Ministre de l'Air, 9 April 1935; all in SHA, 2 N 19.

⁷³ "Note du Gén. Jamet [secrétaire-générale du Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale] sur la situation relative des forces allemandes et françaises et sur les conséquences à en tirer aux points de vue national et international," 22 March 1935; also PV, Haut Comité Militaire, 22 March 1935, both in SHA, 2 N 19.

⁷⁴ Maurin remarks at Réunion de commandants de groupes d'armées, 2 April 1935, SHA, 1 N 35.

augury of future danger rather than as a direct menace to French security in the short term. The best riposte would be for France to proceed with its own rearmament.⁷⁵

Eight months later, at the start of 1936, the French General Staff rated the country's defensive military posture somewhat improved. But at the same time the international situation had radically deteriorated. Thanks to strenuous efforts made under the leadership of war ministers Maurin and Fabry, parliament had at last agreed to the resumption of two-year military service. The army now had a gas mask for every soldier and a fair number of antitank vehicles. It had also placed orders for some new artillery and motorized artillery carriers, for several hundred light tanks, and for antiaircraft guns and ammunition. These new systems would come on line gradually in the course of 1936. The emergency buildup had forced planners to confront directly, however, the weaknesses of the French industrial structure. It had demonstrated that the nation's manufacturers lacked the capacity to mass-produce a good heavy tank and that to turn out technologically up-to-date airplanes at a pace to match the Germans would disorganize the aeronautical industry. At a crucial meeting of the Haut Comité Militaire in November 1935, ministers and service chiefs plaintively agreed that France had to "gain time."⁷⁶

For political reasons as well, the top military brass fell prey to deep discouragement at the beginning of 1936. The reasons for their despondency lay in the sudden collapse of military cooperation with Italy. Notwithstanding the disrepair into which the French army had fallen, planners at the rue Saint-Dominique had sustained a small measure of optimism in the spring and summer of 1935 for one reason—the growing collaboration between the French and Italian armed services. This seemed to offer a providential lifeboat on a barren and perilous sea. The origins of the rapprochement between the two countries went back to 1933. Special Ambassador Henry de Jouvenel had then persuaded his compatriots that the day had passed when they could satisfy Mussolini's ambitions with "a few

⁷⁵ Notes Schweisguth, 19 and 29 March 1935, Schweisguth Papers, 351 AP 2, AN.

⁷⁶ On weapons procurement, see General Bloch testimony at Réunion d'Étude du CSG, 15 January 1936, SHA, 1 N 36; account also in Note Schweisguth, 15 January 1936, 351 AP 3, Schweisguth Papers, AN; deficiencies discussed at Haut Comité Militaire, 21 November 1935, copy in Carton 2 B 188, Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air, Vincennes (hereafter cited as SHAA); handwritten Gamelin version in SHA, 2 N 19. On the crucial role of Fabry, see his "Journal de marche du ministre de la guerre," 15 June 1935-10 January 1936, SHA, 5 N 581.

palm trees in Libya." For decades the French had haughtily brushed aside Italy's claims in Africa. In early 1935, however, Premier Laval (after wearisome preliminary negotiations) had granted recognized status to the Italian minority in Tunisia and agreed not to oppose what he foresaw as Italian economic penetration of East Africa. Mussolini had reciprocated not merely with pledges concerning the defense of the Brenner, but, after the Stresa Conference, by taking the initiative in pressing for a full-scale military and aerial alliance.⁷⁷

The mood in French military circles suddenly seemed transformed. For the first time in years, the bureaus of the rue Saint-Dominique turned their hand to offensive plans. In April the two air forces initialed a working arrangement so detailed that it specified the potential aerial targets in Germany assigned to each. In June Gamelin visited Marshal Badoglio in Rome (they had long ago struck up a friendship while serving together as military attachés in Brazil). He returned with an understanding, endorsed by Mussolini, for the despatch of three Italian army corps to the French eastern front and for the corresponding assignment of one French army corps on the right of the Italian line, where in case of hostilities it could serve as a liaison with Yugoslav forces on the Klagenfurt road. The Quai d'Orsay continued to hold back. The diplomats did not wholly agree among themselves, but reflexive antifascism, a continued preference for bilateral accords with England, the fear of precluding a rapprochement with Germany, and the desire not to push the Yugoslavs too fast inclined all of them to caution. Yet the military continued its preparations. By late September plans for implementation had worked their way through the bureaucracy and landed on the desk of General Georges. The Operations staff continued to fret about Italian technological backwardness. (One observer noted with euphemistic delicacy that Badoglio's infantry attached "less importance to power and armor than to maneuverability and speed.") But despite Italy's manifest weaknesses, no

⁷⁷ For the military perspective on the 1935 negotiations with Italy, see Gamelin's records in SHA, 5 N 579 and 1 N 43; also the Air Ministry files in SHAA, 2 B 97. For the most helpful discussion of Franco-Italian relations in general during this period, see William Shorrock, "The Tunisian Question in French Policy toward Italy, 1881-1940," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 16 (1983): 631-51, and *ibid.*, "The Jouvenel Mission to Rome and the Origins of the Laval-Mussolini Accords, 1933-1935," *The Historian* 45 (1982): 20-30. For the evolving views of the French military attachés in Rome, see Robert J. Young, "Soldiers and Diplomats: The French Embassy and Franco-Italian Relations, 1935-6," in *Journal of Strategic Studies* 7 (1984): 74-91. Some older works on this subject betray lack of sympathy for Italy.

other potential ally offered comparable forces in being. For the first time ever, a topographically plausible scheme appeared in the offing by which France could hope to safeguard Austrian independence and provide the Little Entente with more than soothing words.⁷⁸

Within weeks, the outbreak of the Ethiopian war had fatally undermined this happy prospect. For France, the war meant nothing but trouble. The French military had little patience with the moralistic sentiments that animated the British public; they perceived the struggle as an old-fashioned imperial dispute in which they wished to stay strictly neutral. If anything, their natural sympathies lay with Italy; both Gamelin and Navy Minister François Piétri pointed out that even a restricted success of the Abyssinians would have "the most serious repercussions" on France's North African colonies.⁷⁹ Yet they looked on with agonized impotence as the two nations whose joint friendship they deemed indispensable to preserve European stability drifted ever further apart over a peripheral matter.

However reluctantly, France had to choose between the two. The French delegation at the League of Nations pointed out that Britain, with its far-flung empire and financial and moral influence, still rated as the leading world power. Italy, whatever the present quality of its army, had a weak industrial base and virtually no standing in the world; moreover, an alliance with a mercurial dictator was at best "a lottery ticket." Gamelin expressed outrage at the tone of this analysis, but in the end he could not disagree with its risk-averse conclusion.⁸⁰ The French now had to redeploy troops to the Alpine frontier, strengthen the North African garrisons, and draw up modified mobilization plans to take account of possible

⁷⁸ The most important documents include E.M.G. de l'Armée de l'Air [Loliard], "Note sur la convention aérienne franco-italienne," 25 April 1935, and Foreign Minister to Air Minister and President of the Council, 2 May 1935, in SHAA, 2 B 97; Gamelin, "Note pour le ministre au sujet des relations franco-italiennes," November 1934; "Etude sommaire des forces de la Petite Entente," 3 May 1935; "Procès-verbal des conversations tenues à Rome," 27 June 1935; Gamelin "Note relative à la collaboration franco-italienne," 1 July 1935; Note Noiret, "Manœuvres de l'armée italienne en 1935," n.d. [summer 1935]; Etat-Major de Général Georges, "Collaboration franco-italienne," 27 September 1935, all in SHA, 1 N 43.

⁷⁹ 2^e Bureau, "Note envisageant les répercussions possibles du conflit anglo-éthiopien," 9 September 1935; PV of meeting of service ministers and chiefs of staff with the colonial minister, 26 September 1935, both in SHA, 5 N 579.

⁸⁰ Geneva memorandum, "Le Conflit italo-éthiopien et la France," 19 October 1935 (with extensive marginal notations by Gamelin), SHA, 5 N 579; see also Gamelin's confirmatory remarks to the British ambassador on 26 October, cited by Young, "Soldiers and Diplomats," 85, 90.

Italian hostility. The diversion of force amounted to between ten and seventeen divisions—somewhere between a fifth and a third of the potential strength that France had counted on projecting along the German border.⁸¹

In what new strategy could the high command now repose its hopes? Gamelin had little patience with Laval's neo-Bismarckian grand design for a series of interlocking understandings that might preserve the peace by dint of their very contradictions. After one Haut Comité Militaire meeting in November, he went home and literally cried at what he considered the "defeatism" of the politicians.⁸² Yet by early 1936 he had no constructive idea but to live from day to day. To the Franco-Soviet pact imposed by the politicians he attributed no military value; perhaps with luck it would not permanently alienate Poland. And with greater luck, time might eventually reconcile Italy and Great Britain.⁸³

These were the circumstances in which the General Staff considered what to do about the Rhineland. General Louis Colson, Gamelin's deputy, took a perfectly clear line on 24 January 1936. He reiterated the point now generally accepted at army headquarters: Germany could "place France brutally before a fait accompli" simply by rearranging the administrative zones of its army corps and changing the status of the Landespolizei. He took it for granted that Hitler would then fortify the zone and regain the ability to deal with the East as he wished. Colson wasted no time, however, crying over spilt milk. The army had to recruit 63,000 new career soldiers, finish its fortifications, strengthen its specialized forces, pursue motorization, and generally reconstruct a viable defense force. That would take money and time. It was advisable, Colson concluded, "to seize the opportunity of the reoccupation of the demilitarized zone and to profit from the emotion occasioned by this German gesture to explain the ramifications of the entire problem to parliament and

⁸¹ 3^e Bureau, "Jeu du plan D bis, modifié au 15 octobre 1935," 10 December 1935; also Note pour le Haut Comité Militaire, 18 January 1936, in SHA, 7 N 3697.

⁸² Gamelin, "Réflexions d'une mauvaise nuit au sortir d'un Haut Comité Militaire," 21-22 November 1935, SHA, 2 N 19.

⁸³ On Gamelin's general pessimism and on the desperate efforts of the War Ministry to stop ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact by having it referred to the Hague Court, see Notes Schweisguth, 10, 24, and 27 February 1936, Schweisguth Papers, 351 AP 3, AN. Most of the top brass did not trust the Soviet Union and did not wish to sacrifice the friendship of the East European states on which it had obvious designs. They considered the pact entirely a political maneuver. For the views of a dissenter, General Loizeau, see Dutailly, *Les Problèmes de l'armée*, 46-47.

public opinion and to ask for the appropriations corresponding to this long-term program."⁸⁴ The task would not prove easy. Indeed, Generals Colson and Bloch returned from their appearance before Chamber and Senate army commissions on 27 February rather crestfallen. The parliamentarians had evinced some interest in new weapons systems "in order to cover themselves in case the foreign situation deteriorated." But the politicians would still not "contemplate the appropriation of the sums necessary to resolve these questions."⁸⁵

Meanwhile, as signs of the impending German action multiplied, the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre authorized General Maurin to seek a meeting with Foreign Ministry officials in order to explain the conditions in which reoccupation of the zone appeared likely to occur and to seek authorization to take defensive precautions.⁸⁶ During the following month, a flurry of notes passed back and forth between the rue Saint-Dominique and the Quai d'Orsay, interspersed with meetings at which Flandin and his staff showed their dissatisfaction with the incompleteness of War Ministry preparations. It is hard to believe that Flandin, who had served throughout 1935 as premier or minister of state, was really as surprised as he later claimed by the reiteration of familiar military views. Nor is it likely that he dissented appreciably from General Maurin's judgment that it was better to let Germany tear up the treaty demonstrably than to negotiate. Only under the impact of a major international "crisis," after all, could one hope to launch a diplomatic campaign for the restoration of the Anglo-French-Belgian entente on both a political and a military level. Very likely the Quai d'Orsay professionals were engaged partially in compiling a record for a future edition of the *Documents diplomatiques français*. But some may have believed against all the evidence that a partial reoccupation of the zone by France remained within the realm of the possible. General Colson complained disgustedly on 28 February that the government did not seem to realize that such action meant war, and that evening Gamelin confronted Alexis Léger, secretary general of

⁸⁴ Note Colson, 24 January 1936; elaboration in Note Georges, 29 January 1936, SHA, 1 N 36.

⁸⁵ Note Schweisguth, 27 February 1936, 351 AP 3, AN.

⁸⁶ "Lettre adressée aux Affaires Etrangères au sujet des problèmes liés de la conférence navale d'une part et de la réoccupation de la zone démilitarisée de l'autre," 8 February 1936, SHA, 1 N 36. The letter from Maurin to Flandin, 12 February 1936, DDF 2/I, No. 170, appears to be a revised and shortened version.

the Quai d'Orsay, in order to set him straight.⁸⁷ Léger, for one, continued to take an unusually vehement line throughout the crisis, and at least one observer, Senator François de Wendel, emerged from a trying session with him suspecting that it was perhaps difficult for those with a "Briandiste" past to admit to themselves that "Locarno, the League, and all the crack-brained notions of these last years are over and done with."⁸⁸

The well-known later recollections of Sarraut, Flandin, Paul-Boncour, and Maurin about the crucial cabinet meetings of 8 and 9 March contain minor contradictions. But perhaps more important, these reports may all have suffered somewhat in accuracy owing to the postwar atmosphere in which they were produced.⁸⁹ Air Minister Marcel Déat's account, written earlier, provides a possible correction. As Déat recalls, no one at the Elysée meeting of 8 March really favored military action. The Jewish conservative Georges Mandel and the left-wing university Radical Henri Guernet took the strongest position: both called for mobilization as a "gesture" that might move Germany and Europe. Flandin called for a similar gesture with the essential preoccupation of strengthening the French position for forthcoming talks with Great Britain, although he also indulged the slim hope that Hitler might be frightened into retreat. Déat had the impression that everyone agreed nothing could be done without British backing and that, even if Mandel grumbled under his breath, he never said that it was "time to take Hitler by the throat" or uttered the "other historic phrases that generous reporters later attributed to him."⁹⁰ Undoubtedly the assembled politicians blew off a good deal of steam. Maurin's military assistant found them "full of illusions" and regretted that his chief had not explained the basis of French mobilization plans with sufficient

⁸⁷ DDF, 2/I, Nos. 170, 186, 196, 202, 203, 223, 269. The key Maurin letters of 17 and 18 February are Nos. 196 and 202. For Flandin's later assertion of "great surprise" at learning on 8 February that the army had only a defensive strategy in mind, see his *Politique française 1919-1940* (Paris, 1947), 195-96. For Colson's views and Gamelin's effort to brief Léger, see Note Schweisguth, 29 February 1936, 351 AP 3, AN.

⁸⁸ Jeanneney, *Wendel*, 2:786 (Wendel Diary, 14 March 1936). For Léger's explicit acknowledgement earlier of his position as a true believer in the Briand line, see his "Note au sujet de la politique de Stresemann," n.d. [March 1933], Dossier 9, Papiers Alexis St.-Léger Léger, MAE.

⁸⁹ Flandin, *Politique française*, 198-201; Joseph Paul-Boncour, *Entre deux guerres: Souvenirs sur la III^e République*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1946), 3:32-36; *Les Evénements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945. Témoignages et documents*, 9 vols. (Paris, 1947-51), 3:559-643, 5:1262-68.

⁹⁰ Déat, "Mémoires," chap. XVI.

clarity.⁹¹ But what, in their heart of hearts, did the ministers really want? We have some evidence concerning the private views of Mandel. On 9 March, very much the self-conscious imitator of Clemenceau, he blustered to Francois de Wendel that “as mediocre as our preparation for war is now, it is as good or better than it will be two years from now; time is working against us and we must intervene before Germany gives itself freedom to act in the east.” But four days later, he confessed sadly to Joseph Caillaux, “Do you think that, in this country, one can mobilize just a few months before the elections?”⁹²

In any event, by Wednesday, 11 March, the military men had essentially won their point. Sarraut and Flandin had asked the military to draw up proposals for a limited armed demonstration that might lead Hitler to withdraw if he were bluffing and would at worst serve as a bargaining chip for France to use with the other Locarno powers. Gamelin told his staff that he wished to block any “mad solutions,” but did not want the military to stand in the way of “virile decisions” or give credence to the belief that the army was not ready for action.⁹³ Perhaps this sounded less ambiguous to contemporaries than it appears in retrospect. General Georges obligingly drew up two options: the seizure of the left bank of the Saar river from Saarbrücken to Merzig or the occupation of Luxembourg. But Georges himself did not believe that either scheme had merit. The seizure of Luxembourg would be an act of aggression liable to embarrass French diplomats rather than to strengthen their hand. The Saar *gage* lacked any military value and, if executed without full mobilization, might well lead to a German riposte at a weak point elsewhere on the French frontier. Subsequent retrospective studies by the War Ministry confirmed these judgments fully. The Navy plan, for the seizure of certain German merchant vessels on the high seas, lay open to obvious legal objections.⁹⁴ Déat reports on

⁹¹ Testimony of Col. Louis Buisson, chef du cabinet militaire du ministre de la guerre, in Note Schweisguth, 13 March 1936, 351 AP 3, AN.

⁹² Jeanneney, *Wendel*, 2:783-84 (Wendel Diary, 9 March 1936); Emile Roche, *Avec Joseph Caillaux: Mémoires, souvenirs, et documents* (Paris, 1980), 51.

⁹³ Note Schweisguth, 9 March 1936 (reporting meeting of the CSG at Gamelin's house), also “Rapport” of 10 March 1936, 351 AP 3, AN.

⁹⁴ For the forms of these plans presented to the Foreign Ministry, see DDF, 2/I, Nos. 390-92. For the initial version of the army plan by General Georges, 11 March 1936, his later reflections of 23 March, and further studies by the 3^e Bureau on 23 March, by General Billotte and others on 2 May, by the 3^e Bureau again on 29 April, and by the 2^e Bureau and the Etat-Major de l'Armée on 20-29 April 1936, see SHA, 1 N 36.

the meeting of service ministers and chiefs of staff that Sarraut called at his home to discuss these proposals. At first the military men rolled out their maps in preparation for operational deliberations. But soon enough the conversation turned to the general prospects. Gamelin explained eloquently the conclusions that he would later elaborate formally in his note of 28 March. If a limited riposte led to war between France and Germany alone, the short-term result would probably be a deadlock on a narrow front despite the marginal superiority of the French forces. In a longer perspective, however, Germany might well prevail owing to its larger population and resources and more developed war industries. It seemed to him an illusion for France to expect victory except within the framework of a coalition.⁹⁵

If the French cabinet had really wished to pass beyond rodomontade and consider resorting to force to chase Hitler out of the Rhineland, it would have had to examine the financial consequences of the operation. Significantly, it never initiated such an examination. General Gamelin informed Sarraut that it would cost 30 million francs a day, around a milliard francs a month, to maintain *couverture*—the step before general mobilization. This roughly equaled the total monthly expenses of all the armed services combined. Since France spent only a modest 5.8 percent of national income on defense overall, a sacrifice of that magnitude did not seem inconceivable over a short period.⁹⁶ But obviously the direct expense would be the mere tip of the iceberg. Calling large numbers of men to the colors would break the momentum of the industrial recovery that had begun in 1935, disorganize the economy, and occasion a drop in tax revenues. It would also undoubtedly provoke a run on the franc.

Astounding as it might appear, surviving Finance Ministry records contain no evidence of advance contingency planning to defend the franc in case French troops took action. Nor does it appear that the Quai d'Orsay called for such plans. If it had, the Treasury would have had to confess that it could not hope to defend the currency if the army moved. Once the moment for decision had

⁹⁵ Déat, "Mémoires," chap. XVI; Note Gamelin, 28 March 1936, in DDF, 2/I, No. 525 and SHA, 1 N 36; also the reiteration of the same ideas in "Note résumant l'exposé fait par le Général Gamelin à la réunion du 4 avril à la présidence du conseil," SHA, 1 N 36.

⁹⁶ For these ratios, see Frankenstein, *Le Prix du réarmement français*, 35; and Alfred Sauvy, *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres*, rev. ed., 3 vols. (Paris, 1984), 3:84.

passed, one bureau at the rue de Rivoli forwarded to Sarraut a fatuous memorandum arguing that Germany stood "on the verge of an economic and financial catastrophe" which should "logically" induce Hitler to reduce his pretensions if he were not provoked into some "desperate" decision.⁹⁷ But the chief Treasury officials did not believe this. They knew that the shoe was on the other foot. As early as 8 January 1936 Wilfrid Baumgartner, director of the *Mouvement général des fonds* (the equivalent of permanent undersecretary), had informed outgoing Premier Laval that the Treasury could no longer meet its expenses by borrowing on the home market and was living perilously from week to week.⁹⁸

It is easy to see in retrospect that France should not have clung to the old gold parity for so long. After the United States devalued the dollar by 41 percent in 1933, France faced a disagreeable choice. If it wished to maintain employment and production, it could either impose exchange controls, devalue in turn to restore competitiveness, or restore equilibrium by internal deflation. Frenchmen of all persuasions united in rejecting the solution, embraced by the totalitarian countries, of retreating to a closed economy. Only a few prophets like Paul Reynaud were prepared to accept devaluation and a subsequent domestic inflation as a lesser evil. Public opinion in France, as in other countries that had experienced the social injustice accompanying high inflation in the 1920s, gagged at swallowing even a small dose of the inflation remedy prescribed by forward-looking economists.⁹⁹ At the 1933 World Economic Conference, one of the delegates had likened the problem to that of alcoholism: "A man who has drunk too much . . . must be a teetotaler while the ordinary man can take his wine without danger."¹⁰⁰ Between 1930 and 1935 the French had thus pursued deflation. Few nonspecialists had foreseen how the degree of deflation required to reestablish a suitable equivalency with sterling and the dollar would distort price and wage relationships between the sheltered and the nonsheltered sectors of the domestic economy. Nor had they realized the extent to which deflation would bring in its train new forms of injustice and social unrest.

⁹⁷ "Note au président du Conseil," 24 (?) March 1936 [probably by Georges de Castellane], F³⁰/1419, Ministère des Finances [now Ministère de l'Économie—Ministère du Budget, Paris, hereafter cited as MF].

⁹⁸ Wilfrid Baumgartner, "Note pour le Ministre," 15 January 1936, MF, F³⁰/2344.

⁹⁹ Sauvy, *Histoire économique*, 1:125-230.

¹⁰⁰ Italian Finance Minister Guido Jung, cited in Per Jacobssen Diary, 5 July 1933, copy at LSE.

Between 1930 and 1935 France experienced a peculiar form of depression. Real national income fell some 8.5-11.5 percent (depending on the method of measurement). But a precipitous downturn in business revenues and net investment accounted for nearly all of this decline; consumption fell hardly at all. The real weekly salary of the average worker increased 12 percent, that of a typical minor government functionary 18.9 percent, and the adjusted income of all persons drawing pensions rose 46 percent. Owing to money illusion, however, the beneficiaries of this windfall continued to focus on their nominal revenues and did not appreciate what they had gained. A large proportion of the increased burden of salaries, pensions, and other transfer payments fell on the government. The attempts (culminating with Laval's decree laws) to establish levels of compensation that more nearly reflected the state of the economy met with furious resistance. Between 1930 and 1935 government revenue grew from 15.5 percent to 17.9 percent of national income, but expenditures over the same period exploded from 14.3 percent to 22.6 percent of national income.¹⁰¹ The Treasury had to make up the difference by borrowing. However, once it became clear that deflation had reached its political, if not its economic, limit, the money markets would refuse to lend any more. That is what happened in the fall of 1935.

Until the early autumn, French diplomats in London and elsewhere had comforted themselves by reporting the admiration of foreign bankers for Laval's energetic attempts to cut government expenses by decree.¹⁰² But a Bank of England analyst, as early as August, doubted that these efforts would work. "The fear of inflation is the most powerful force but one in France today. It is only surpassed by an obstinate refusal to accept sacrifices. . . . This state of affairs cannot continue indefinitely, and the State will ultimately have to choose between reverting to direct advances by the Bank of France, which will certainly bring France off the gold standard, or reducing the gold burden of its debts by simple decree. . . . 'Un pays qui n'a pas l'économie de son franc finira bien par avoir le franc de son économie.'" ¹⁰³ By October, the forthright French financial at-

¹⁰¹ These figures are extrapolated from Sauvy, *Histoire économique*, 1:191, 194; 2:314-17; 3:379-84.

¹⁰² For reports by French diplomats on foreign views of the French currency, see Série Y-Internationale, No. 228, MAE.

¹⁰³ Norman Biggs memorandum for H. A. Siepmann, Overseas and Foreign Department, 20 August 1935, OV 45/9, BE.

taché in London, Emmanuel Mönick, was imploring his superiors to bite the bullet and to announce a unilateral devaluation. There was no use waiting for Britain to help provide political cover for the retreat in the form of a multilateral stabilization agreement, he advised; that country was too preoccupied by the drain of capital to the United States to cooperate. But Laval, echoed by Bank of France officials, declined even to contemplate devaluation without guarantees against retaliation.¹⁰⁴ The impasse continued. Nothing could wreak greater political havoc than a run on the franc and a devaluation in panic as the elections approached. On the other hand, in mid-December Deputy Governor Fournier of the Bank of France confessed to his English banking contacts that it had become "impossible to place any more Treasury bills with the market."¹⁰⁵

By the time the Sarraut cabinet took office in late January, the Treasury had exhausted its bag of tricks. It had even liquidated its deposits at independent government agencies and withdrawn its funds from the Moroccan State Bank. Baumgartner anticipated an unusually heavy schedule of bond refundings in the following months. He informed his new minister, Marcel Regnier, that he perceived only one way to get through this difficult period: a foreign loan. Whether one favored further deflation or devaluation, Baumgartner insisted, "we must do everything to maintain the franc up to the electoral consultation, upon which a monetary crisis coming in extremis would have the most unfortunate repercussions."¹⁰⁶ After taking soundings in the New York market and confirming that it remained closed because France had defaulted on its war debt, the Treasury on 17 February arranged for a short-term £40 million sterling loan with a consortium of London banks. By intervening with Neville Chamberlain at the British Treasury, Flandin even succeeded in preventing the Board of Trade from attaching political conditions regarding French trade policy.¹⁰⁷ Regnier rejoiced in the

¹⁰⁴ Mönick to Ministre des Finances, 5 October 1935; also cautious endorsement in Corbin to Laval, 9 September 1935, MF, B 12678.

¹⁰⁵ Rowe-Dutton to Waley, 13 November 1935 (reporting Laval's testimony to the Chamber Finance Commission); C. F. Cobbold memorandum of conversation with Fournier, 9 December 1935, both in OV 45/9, BE.

¹⁰⁶ Baumgartner, "Note pour le Ministre," 15 January 1936, and "Exposé remis à M. Marcel Regnier en vue du premier Conseil de Cabinet du ministère Sarraut," 26 January 1936, in MF, F³⁰/2344.

¹⁰⁷ For the approach to the United States, see the numerous reports by J. Appert in MF, B 21848; for the successful negotiations with Britain, see the various Mönick memoranda of February 1936 in MF, B 12862.

“honorable terms,” and indeed, by drawing on the funds more rapidly than the contract stipulated, France managed to get through the weeks of the Rhineland crisis without an open financial breakdown.¹⁰⁸ All the same, the money would barely suffice to cover the gap between tax receipts and on-budget expenses until the end of March. When the Senate Finance Commission asked Regnier on 6 March how he planned to cover some 5.3 milliards of off-budget expenses for public works, armaments, and refunding, he could only mumble about “other authorizations of emission”—which could scarcely mean anything except some type of fiat inflation.¹⁰⁹

Hitler’s remilitarization finally toppled the Treasury over the edge of the precipice. The first week of the crisis saw a substantial gold outflow (only partially masked by the British credit), heavy withdrawals from the savings banks, the greatest fall in the quotation on long-term *rentes* for any comparable period in recent history, and an ominous increase in the spot/forward differential for sterling and dollars.¹¹⁰ The situation never got so much out of hand that a panic developed among the general public, but largely (as Lacour-Gayet of the Bank of France frankly admitted to the British) because the financial markets anticipated that some basis for peaceful negotiation with the Germans would turn up. Baumgartner, while admitting his anxiety about what would happen “if the period of suspense is unduly prolonged,” managed to persuade the British financial attaché that events had developed not so badly “as some of the rumourists may like to make out.”¹¹¹

In fact, however, on 18 March, just as the conflict with Germany was easing through *de facto* French acceptance of the *fait accompli*, Baumgartner reported to his chief in anguish that the Treasury had gone bankrupt. In mid-March a railway loan had failed dismally. Market specialists informed him that if he now sought a Treasury loan to cover anticipated refunding needs for the next months, the lenders would not lend on any basis. In desperation Baumgartner called in the representatives of the main deposit institutions and

¹⁰⁸ Baumgartner “Note pour l’exposé du ministre au Conseil des Ministres,” 26 February 1936, MF, F³⁰/2344. For the necessity of drawing on the credit ahead of schedule to counter capital flight during the Rhineland crisis, see G. L. F. Bolton memorandum, “French Credit,” 13 March 1936, OV 45/9, BE.

¹⁰⁹ “Réponse au questionnaire du Sénat,” 6 March 1936, MF, F³⁰/2344.

¹¹⁰ Baumgartner “Note pour le Ministre,” 11 March 1936, MF, F³⁰/2344.

¹¹¹ Rowe-Dutton to Waley, 12, 13, and 20 March 1936, OV 45/9, BE.

twisted their arms to subscribe to short-term instruments that they could immediately discount at the Bank of France. Baumgartner did not hide from Regnier that this was no temporary expedient, but "very probably a virtually definitive measure of inflation."¹¹² With the aid of these disguised advances from the Bank of France, one could hope somehow to stumble through the election period. On 23 March the parliament exempted off-budget armament and public works expenditures from the statutory debt limit to facilitate the deception; the discount rate was advanced from 3.5 percent to 6 percent in part to raise general interest rates and thus to sweeten the pot for the banks. Between 19 March and 12 June, the Bank of France very unhappily doubled its commercial loan portfolio on an "exceptional basis." It discounted short-term treasuries in private hands amounting to 9.490 milliards—an amount equal on an annual basis to all government revenue from other sources.¹¹³ The public reckoning was thus postponed for the post-election regime to handle. But foreign exchange dealers grasped the true situation in short order. By 27 March the premium on three-months forward sterling had jumped to 16.5 percent. The market had already anticipated a devaluation.¹¹⁴ If France had mobilized and moved troops over the borders three weeks earlier, a managed deception would have immediately erupted into a full-scale monetary crisis.

When Foreign Minister Flandin arrived in London on 12 March for the scheduled meeting of the Locarno powers, he could not have felt much optimism. He had a very weak hand to play. Moreover, as a former denizen of the minister's office on the rue de Rivoli, he had a sufficient grasp of finance as well as diplomacy to recognize where he stood. Before leaving Paris, Flandin had reminded Gamelin that in negotiations "one must first go beyond the position to which one consents to be forced back."¹¹⁵ But how far could one carry a bluff? On 9 March the League of Nations representative in London had conveyed the prevailing sentiment there with devastating clarity to

¹¹² Baumgartner "Note pour le Ministre," 18 March 1936, MF, F³⁰/2344.

¹¹³ See Baumgartner's retrospective memorandum, "Situation de la Trésorerie," 11 June 1936, MF, F³⁰/2344. For the figures, see M. Petsche, "Evolution du bilan de la Banque de France," 27 May 1936; for differing interpretations of the Treasury and the Bank of France whether the former's resort to disguised advances had caused the heavy gold losses that the bank experienced, see Baumgartner, "Note pour le Ministre," 7 May 1936, both in F³⁰/2344.

¹¹⁴ Rowe-Dutton to Waley, 28 March 1936, OV 45/9, BE.

¹¹⁵ "Rapport" of 10 March 1936, Schweisguth Papers, 351 AP 3, AN.

his secretary-general, Joseph Avenol, who undoubtedly passed it on to Paris: "The central point of British opinion is that experience doesn't encourage the use of nonmilitary sanctions against Germany, and Germany's breach is not sufficiently grave to justify the tremendous responsibility of a preventive war."¹¹⁶ The experienced professionals at the French Embassy in London (Roger Cambon, Roland de Margerie, Boni de Castellane, and Girard de Charbonnières) who undertook to do the leg work for the visiting delegation expressed analogous pessimism. While going through the motions of churning out position papers, they traded ironic sallies among themselves concerning these "pseudo-negotiations," whose only value lay in permitting them "to verify the real state of Franco-British relations."¹¹⁷ The militant financial attaché, Emmanuel Mönick, offered an ingenious demonstration that economic sanctions might theoretically work. Germany financed 80 percent of its trade through clearing arrangements or bilateral accords; if every nation required Germany to pay for what it bought in cash, the Reich might have trouble importing crucial raw materials. Yet even Mönick sadly conceded that the British would never give up the benefits they drew from the 1934 Clearing, and that sanctions might well legitimize in the eyes of the German public restrictions on consumption that could palliate the damage to the Nazi industrial machine.¹¹⁸

Despite the gloom around him, Flandin soldiered on, talking about sanctions for another week until he could at length extract some sort of compensation from England—in the event an agreement to hold military staff talks.¹¹⁹ But these staff talks led nowhere. Indeed, the British had only agreed to an anodyne exchange of information, as Baldwin assured his fellow ministers, in order to "expose how empty was our cupboard" and to "get into the heads of the French that this was the case." The French military did not in the end get what they hoped for: the placement of British and Italian troops on their eastern border with the ostensible mission of separat-

¹¹⁶ H. R. Cummings (head of the League Information Section) to Avenol, 9 March 1936, Joseph Avenol Papers, Nr. 34, MAE.

¹¹⁷ Girard de Charbonnières, *La plus évitable de toutes les guerres: Un Témoin raconte* (Paris, 1985), 97-106.

¹¹⁸ Mönick memoranda, "Les Sanctions contre l'Allemagne," 14 and 18 March 1936, in MF, B 12619.

¹¹⁹ See the insightful interpretation of Flandin's motives in Young, *In Command of France*, 124.

ing the two sides, an acceptance by Britain of a French offer to provide air defense for London on the Continent, and a strengthened British commitment to defend Belgium.¹²⁰

It appears likely that in London Flandin and the Quai d'Orsay professionals aimed also at a more modest sort of damage control—to hold the pro-British line in French foreign policy against attacks at home. Flandin told Neville Chamberlain in high alarm on 15 March that enemies of the Sarraut government were exploiting the situation. “Tardieu was disparaging party institutions and there was a serious danger of a coalition between the Croix de Feu, Royalists, Tardieu &c. to destroy the whole democratic system and replace it by Fascism.” Hence the government had to “play for time” and required some vindication of international law.¹²¹ René Massigli of the Quai gave vent to similar anxieties on 17 March when he lamented to Assistant Chief of Staff Schweisguth that the very principles of mutual assistance were breaking down, the League itself was threatened, and that “if all this isn't repaired immediately, we stand on the verge of a complete change in policy and a return to continental alliances.”¹²² The agreement of the Locarno powers on 19 March (which the British foreign secretary would shortly insist was not an agreement at all but merely a set of proposals for further discussion with Germany) did not amount to much. But it did succeed in holding Franco-British dissension within bounds and in quieting matters down until after the French elections.¹²³

The tactical decision of the French military to insist on the strength of their army in the April staff talks with the British led to one curious result. The French sought to behave as “givers” and not as “takers” in those discussions. If they portrayed themselves as *bündnisfähig*, perhaps the British would take them more seriously.¹²⁴ But Flandin and Paul-Boncour, among others, soon came to believe in their own propaganda. By 21 April Flandin was saying that

¹²⁰ Baldwin remarks at meeting of ministers, 30 March 1936, DBFP, 2/XVI, No. 184. On French military goals during the staff talks, see Memento Schweisguth, 1 April 1936, 351 AP 3, AN.

¹²¹ Neville Chamberlain diary of talk with Flandin at Farnham Royale, 15 March 1936, NC 2/23A, Neville Chamberlain Papers, Birmingham University Library. The version in DBFP, 2/XVI, No. 115 is somewhat sanitized.

¹²² Schweisguth, “Mission à Londres, 17-23 mars 1936,” 351 AP 3, AN.

¹²³ DBFP, 2/XVI, No. 114 (Proposals), and Nos. 165 and 178 (French election issue).

¹²⁴ Memento Schweisguth (conversation with Gamelin), 1 April 1936; Schweisguth Note (talk with Maurin), 11 April 1936, 351 AP 3, AN.

France had "let slip a magnificent opportunity that would not come again" and that domestic opinion would have marched more willingly for the Rhine than for Austria. "From retreat to retreat," he lamented to the assistant chief of staff, "where will we stop?"¹²⁵ The elaboration of a myth had begun.

In retrospect the March 1936 remilitarization of the Rhineland appears as a manufactured crisis with a predictable outcome. It figured in no sense as a turning point of the 1930s. The chance to "stop" Hitler was already lost. Historians would do well to shift their attention to an earlier period. One can plausibly argue that the last realistic opportunities to curb German resurgence disappeared as a consequence of three developments in the first half of the decade: Anglo-American lack of realism during the Disarmament Conference of 1932-33; French pursuit of deflation, which made it politically difficult to maintain the army in fighting trim; and the loss of broad perspective that led to disruption of friendly relations between France and Britain on one side and Italy on the other during the Ethiopian war.

¹²⁵ "Compte-rendu d'une conversation entre M. Flandin et le Général Schweisguth," 21 April 1936, 351 AP 3, AN. Maurin and Gamelin were outraged by Flandin's statement, and Gamelin drew the conclusion that in the future major strategic questions ought to be vetted by the Haut Comité Militaire before being submitted for idle discussion by the full cabinet.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
BA	Bundesarchiv, Koblenz
BE	Bank of England
BMAE	Belgium, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Brussels
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
CSG	Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre
DBFP	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy</i>
DDF	<i>Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939</i>
DGFP	<i>Documents on German Foreign Policy</i>
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich
LSE	London School of Economics
MAE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris
MF	Ministère des Finances, Paris
PRO	Public Record Office, London
PV	Procès-verbal
SHA	Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes
SHAA	Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air, Vincennes