3 Strategic rivalries and complex causality in 1914

*Karen Rasler and William R. Thompson**

It sometimes seems as if explaining the outbreak of war in 1914 is a holy grail for international relations specialists in war etiology. The First World War, of course, was not a minor event in the annals of international history and that helps to explain some of its allure. Its reputation as the war no one wanted also makes it something of a magnet for scholarly entrepreneurs. Explaining the inexplicable is always a worthy challenge. Moreover, the developments that transpired prior to the outbreak of war are sufficiently complicated that almost every model ever created in international relations seems to fit. Yet underlying the whole explanatory edifice is the early and continuing search for blame, its evasion, and its former implications for postwar reparations and war guilt. Which country was most responsible for bringing about the onset of the First World War?[1] In addition, a disproportional number of the central research foci in international relations – security dilemmas, spiral dynamics, offensive–defensive arguments, crisis dynamics, alliances, arms races – stem to varying extents from interpretations of the onset of the First World War.[2] If we get the outbreak of this "wrong" or have overlooked significant factors, we may be heading in the wrong direction in our search for general explanations of war causes.

We do not propose to introduce a novel approach to explaining the First World War. To the contrary, we choose to elaborate a model that was introduced in 2003. The model encompasses several elements: relative

* This chapter was originally prepared for delivery at the canceled annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, September 2012, and the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, California, April 2013.

1 Certainly, earlier analyses should have laid this hoary question to rest. See, for instance, Sidney B. Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, rev. 2nd edn. (New York: Macmillan, 1930); Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, 3 vols., trans. and ed. Isabella M. Massey (London: Oxford University Press, 1952–1957). But as Samuel R.Williamson, Jr. notes, the German blame paradigm has been with us for nearly a century. See his "July 1914 Revisited and Revised: The Erosion of the German Paradigm," Chapter 2, this volume.

2 See, for example, Keir A. Lieber, "The New History of World War I and What it Means for International Relations Theory," *International Security* 32(2): (2007): 155–191.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107336995.006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

decline of the global leader; regional leadership challenge; bipolarization among major powers; and nonlinear rivalry dynamics. The first three factors are fairly well known. The fourth factor, nonlinear rivalry dynamics, needs to be elucidated. In an earlier journal article, Thompson advanced an argument about the importance of nonlinear dynamics prior to the First World War.[3] However, an explanation about how precisely these dynamics actually played out was not spelled out. In this chapter, we propose to resolve this omission. In doing so, we will advance an argument that implicitly absolves any single country from blame for the onset of war in 1914. Although a general war might well have been avoided in 1914, a complicated sequence of interactions within a favorable structural context made it more probable. At the same time, an emphasis on rivalry dynamics is not exactly novel either. Scholars have noted the importance of rivalry in the onset of the First World War, but they tend to focus on a single rivalry, represent it as dyadic conflict, or in some cases single out a couple of rivalries for special attention.[4] Alternatively, they leave the rivalry

[3] William R. Thompson, "A Streetcar Named Sarajevo: Catalysts, Multiple Causation Chains, and Rivalry Structures," *International Studies Quarterly* 47(3) (2003): 453–474. More general exposure to the explicit analysis of rivalries may be found in William R. Thompson (ed.), *Great Power Rivalries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); William R. Thompson, "Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 45(4) 557–586; Michael P. Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William R. Thompson, *Strategic Rivalry: Space, Position and Conflict Escalation in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); William R. Thompson and David R. Dreyer, *Handbook of International Rivalries, 1494–2010* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2011). Rivalries are deemed to be important to an understanding of interstate conflict because they have been responsible for generating roughly 75 percent of conflict between states in the past two centuries. Yet their numbers are relatively small when one stops to think about how many possible pairs of states there are in the world. Despite being relatively rare phenomena, rivalries take up a wholly disproportionate amount of space in diplomatic histories. For political science, the argument is that we should spend more time studying recidivism in conflict patterns as opposed to assuming that all states have an equal probability of engaging in conflict with one another. It could be quite beneficial if historians could be persuaded to view rivalries in a more self-conscious way as well.

[4] The point is not that First World War specialists are unfamiliar with rivalry dynamics in a general sense. They are, but they tend to focus on one or two rivalries as most critical and neglect the rest. For instance, G. P. Gooch long ago advanced France–Germany, Austro-Hungary–Russia, and Britain–Germany as the key to understanding the First World War; Dale C. Copeland stresses the Russian–German rivalry; Paul W. Schoeder focuses on the Austrian–German–Russian triangle, which encompasses three rivalries; Ned Lebow prefers to privilege France–Germany, Russia–Germany, and Britain–Germany; long-cycle analyses have long emphasized the significance of the Anglo-German rivalry, as does N. Ferguson; and both J. Vasquez and S. Williamson urge us not to forget the Austro-Hungarian–Serbian rivalry that initiated the formal onset of war. See G. P. Gooch, *Franco-German Relations, 1871–1914* (London: Longman, Green, 1923); Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Dale C. Copeland, "International Relations Theory and the Three Great Puzzles of the Great War," Chapter 7, this volume; Paul W. Schroeder, "The Life and Death of a Long Peace, 1763–1914," in Raimo Vayrynen (ed.), *The Waning of Major War: Contrary Views* (London: Routledge, 2005); Richard N. Lebow, "Contingency Catalysts and International System Change," *Political Science*

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107336995.006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dimension of the dyadic relationships implicit. It is, for instance, the Russo-German or Anglo-German dyads that are thought to be critical. Instead, we believe that we can gain greater explanatory leverage if we explicitly link the interactive effects of rivalry dynamics as a key causal mechanism to the onset of the First World War. Some dyads are more important than others, but it is the way in which the field of rivalries interacts in larger structural contexts that we think is most critical.

The nonlinear rivalry ripeness model

The nonlinear rivalry ripeness (NRR) model is inspired in part by massive freeway auto accidents.[5] For instance, one driver falls asleep and hits another car. That car bounces into two or three others, one of which turns sideways and is hit by a fast moving truck. The car immediately behind the truck slams into the now-flaming truck, as do three other vehicles. Still more collisions occur, especially in the presence of heavy traffic, constrained space, and the disruption of normal traffic. Without a great deal of intent, a single actor can trigger a series of cascading events that can produce tremendous damage. We believe that rivalry fields – multiple rivalries that overlap to varying degrees – can function similarly. A change in one rivalry can impact how several other intersecting rivalries function. Changes in a second rivalry can then reverberate through the field of other rivalries. In a complex rivalry field, it may not be possible for any decision-maker to foresee or even track the implications of a change in one part of a tightly connected network of interstate hostilities.

Quarterly 115(4) (2000): 591–616; William R. Thompson, *On Global War: Historical-Structural Approaches to World Politics* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); John A. Vasquez, "Was the First World War a Preventive War? Concepts, Criteria and Evidence," Chapter 8, this volume; Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., "July 1914 Revisited and Revised, Chapter 2, this volume. Even so, these analyses tend to treat rivalries as foreign policy dyads of particular interest, as opposed to rivalries explicitly. Our emphasis is on the field of explicit rivalries and its impact on conflict probabilities. That said, we found Mulligan particularly helpful in providing a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of feuding dyads in the developments leading to the First World War. See William Mulligan, *The Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

5 More intellectually, it was inspired by Perrow's analysis of the complexity of technological accidents. See Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living with High Risk Technologies* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). Bruce Russett suggested something similar; see his "Cause, Surprise and No Escape," *Journal of Politics* 24(1) (1962): 3–22. What Russett suggested, however, is very different from what we have in mind. He applies an accident report template to each of the major actors that differentiates between remote causes with later consequences, points of surprise as decision-makers abruptly realize that the danger of war has escalated, and points of no escape when decision-makers believe that war cannot be avoided. Thus, his approach is monadic and assumes that no drivers intended to have an accident, but that a variety of factors made one involving multiple "automobiles" more probable. Our approach is neither monadic nor does it assume the absence of premeditation. Where we overlap is the emphasis on unforeseen developments that have later consequences for making war more probable.

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Our quantifiable model has three components. The first, *rivalry intensity*, exploits the generalization that serial clashes within a rivalry improve the probability of escalation to war. After two or three clashes, a rivalry is more likely to go to war than it is after its first clash.[6] If the disputants are constrained in their choice of allies and are obliged to come to their aid, the spread of conflict, once it starts, is more likely to occur than situations in which the actors had no alliance obligations. The second component, *major power bipolarization*, looks at the extent to which the field is bipolarized into two competing communities. The third element of our model, *global leader decline* and *regional leader ascent*, is based on the assumption that all rivalries are not equally important. Those rivalries that involve structural transitions, either at the global or regional level, tend to be more dangerous than rivalries in nonstructural transitions.[7] Therefore, the presence of regional and global transitions that involve competitions over leadership positions should make conflict and its diffusion more likely than in nontransitional situations.

Is this all that we can say about nonlinear rivalry ripeness? The answer is no, and in a later section of this chapter we will make an attempt at isolating the specific "pinball" dynamics of the 1914 case. Unfortunately, rivalry pinball dynamics do not yet lend themselves readily to quantitative analysis. Until we can devise a way to capture them directly and systematically, we opt for a different strategy that involves operationalizing those factors that will increase the probability that a complex rivalry field will produce conflict and conflict diffusion. We expect to find that the operationalized components will come together just before 1914 in such a way that conflict throughout the rivalry field becomes highly probable.

In an earlier test of the NRR model in the First World War, Thompson measured *rivalry intensity* as the number of militarized disputes within the European or major power rivalries – some of which were given increasing weight as more clashes occurred within each rivalry.[8] *Bipolarization* was calculated with the use of Wayman's bipolarization index.[9] *Global*

[6] Of course, this argument ignores other considerations. For instance, von Strandmann notes that the two Moroccan crises, although not that far apart in timing, involved different international constellations of actors and concerned North African territory about which most European decision-makers found it difficult to become too excited. He also notes that the 1908–1909 Bosnian crisis did involve many of the same actors as in 1914, but in the earlier confrontation Russia, France, and Britain were all unwilling to take a strong stand – unlike 1914. See Hartmut P. von Strandmann, "Germany and the Coming of the War," in R. J. W. Evans and Hartmut P. Strandmann (eds.), *The Coming of the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 140–159.

[7] See, for instance, Karen Rasler and William R. Thompson, *The Great Powers and Global Struggle, 1490–1990* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

[8] To be given more weight, a second or third clash had to occur within ten years of the preceding one. Otherwise, it was assumed that the clashes were not really serial in nature. See Thompson, "A Streetcar Named Sarajevo."

[9] Wayman first counts the number of major powers that form blocs by possessing defense pacts with each other. He then counts the number of poles (the number of blocs plus the number of nonbloc major powers) and computes the ratio of actual poles to potential

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Table 3.1 *Indicators for nonlinear rivalry ripeness model*

Years	Rivalry intensity	Bipolarization	Global leader decline	Regional leader ascent	Average score
1815–19	0.011	0.60	0.451	0.050	0.278
1820–24	0.011	0.80	0.451	0.230	0.373
1825–29	0.114	0.20	0.451	0.188	0.238
1830–34	0.125	0.20	0.357	0.192	0.219
1835–39	0.015	0.40	0.357	0.213	0.246
1840–44	0.162	0.60	0.417	0.150	0.332
1845–49	0.140	0.40	0.417	0.191	0.287
1850–54	0.324	0.20	0.454	0.204	0.296
1855–59	0.430	0.20	0.454	0.245	0.332
1860–64	0.051	0.17	0.500	0.187	0.227
1865–69	0.143	0.17	0.500	0.159	0.243
1870–74	0.162	0.00	0.481	0.156	0.200
1875–79	0.254	0.17	0.481	0.176	0.270
1880–84	0.081	0.17	0.570	0.178	0.250
1885–89	0.283	0.33	0.570	0.192	0.344
1890–94	0.007	0.33	0.667	0.182	0.297
1895–99	0.577	0.44	0.667	0.167	0.463
1900–4	0.463	0.38	0.755	0.159	0.439
1905–9	0.452	0.50	0.755	0.172	0.470
1910–13	1.000	0.50	0.854	0.304	0.665

Source: Based on William R. Thompson, "A Streetcar Named Sarajevo: Catalysts, Multiple Causation Chains, and Rivalry Structures," *International Studies Quarterly* 47(3) (2003): 469.

leader decline – as a proxy for global transition – was computed by examining the size of the gap in the shares of major power leading sector production of Britain and its German challenger. *Regional leader ascent*, as a proxy for regional transition, was gauged by examining the size of the gap in French and German shares of European major army sizes.[10] Table 3.1 displays the values of these variables by five-year increments, starting in 1815 and ending in 1913. As Table 3.1 shows, the average of the scores across these four variables for each five-year increment represents a

poles (the total number of major powers). An index score that approaches 1.0 suggests a high degree of multipolarization, while a score approaching 0 is taken to signify a tendency toward bipolarization. However, for the 2003 analysis, the scale was reversed by subtracting the outcome from 1.0 so that a high score suggests bipolarization and a low score indicates multipolarization. See Frank W. Wayman, "Bipolarity, Multipolarity, and the Threat of War," in Alan N. Sabrosky (ed.), *Polarity and War: The Changing Structure of International Conflict* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 115–144.

[10] The global transition scores are subtracted from 1 so that higher scores indicate approaching transition. In the case of the regional transition scores, France is designated as the regional leader up to 1871, and Germany is the leader afterwards. However, the army share gaps in the nineteenth century were normally not great, and those involving France and Germany, in particular, were often not large. So, in this case, we are looking for major shifts in relative position gap as an indicator of trouble.

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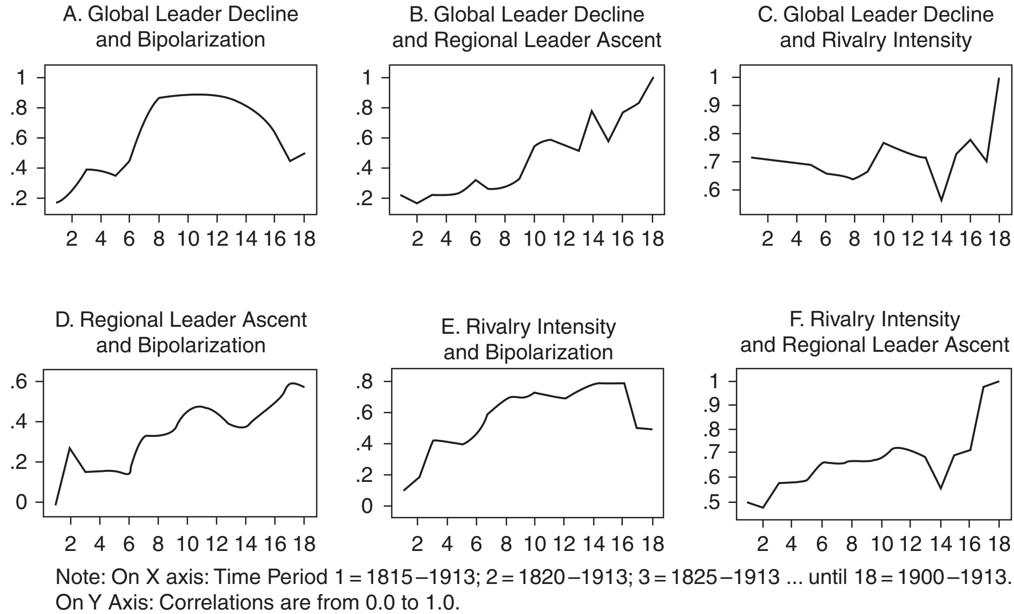

Figure 3.1 Bivariate correlations across varying time periods, starting with 1813–1913 and ending with 1900–1913

composite indicator (see Table 3.1, column 6) that does not change much until the 1890s. At this point, the composite indicator values shift upward rapidly in the last three time increments. Meanwhile, the values of three of the four variables (that is, *rivalry intensity*, *global leader decline*, and *regional leader ascent*) have higher scores in the 1910–1913 time period than at any previous time increment.

We can extend this examination a bit further. Figure 3.1 displays the bivariate correlations among the four indicators of *global leader decline*, *bipolarization*, *regional leader ascent*, and *rivalry intensity* at five-year increments, starting in 1815. The plots are not standard time series plots with each time period reflecting a single year. Instead, each time period reflects the bivariate correlation between two variables for a systematically varying slice of time. For instance, in subplot A in Figure 3.1, the first observation on the x axis reflects the bivariate correlation between global leader decline and bipolarization for the full time period, 1816–1913. The second observation reflects the bivariate correlation between these variables for 1820–1913; the third observations reflects the bivariate correlation for 1825–1913, and so on until the eighteenth observation, which reflects the 1900–1913 period. Hence, each observation on the x axis reflects a different slice or cross-section of time. What we expect to observe is that the correlations between the variables will become higher as the cross-section of time gets smaller and closer to 1914. If so, then the increasing correlations over these periods support our argument that the key ripeness variables, and the rivalry field in general, become more tightly connected in the years immediately prior to 1914.

In four of the six plots in Figure 3.1 (B, C, D, and F), the bivariate correlations demonstrate a clear positive trend across the long nineteenth century. In two cases – (a) global leader decline–bipolarization and (e) rivalry intensity–bipolarization – the trend is also positive, but the size of the correlations drops off in the later portion of the nineteenth century. This deviation suggests that all four indicators were not as closely intertwined over time as they might have been. However, there may be some measurement issues that are influencing the results. A glance at Table 3.1 (column 2), shows that the *bipolarization* index is the partial "culprit" due perhaps to its ambiguous climb in the second half of the century. In First World War annals, the split between Austria-Hungary and Germany on one side and France and Russia on the other is given prime attention. But, even so, it was an incomplete bipolarization. Another anomaly is the early peak (1895–1899) in the *rivalry intensity* scores, which then decrease in the early twentieth century while the *bipolarization* values increase. These outcomes say more about the crude operational measures we are relying on than the events that

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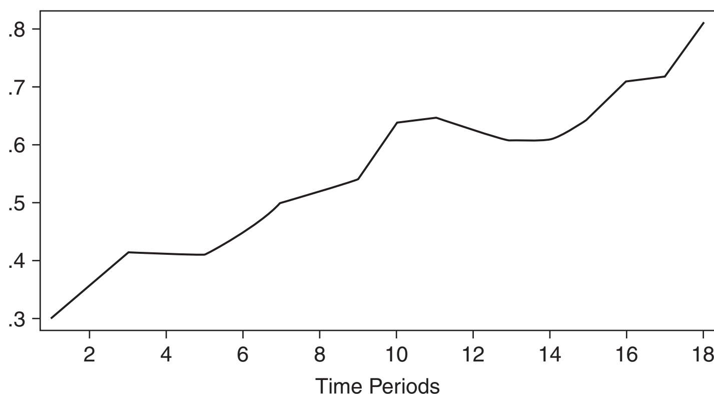

Note: On X axis: Time Period 1 = 1815–1913; 2 = 1820–1913; 3 = 1825–1913 ... until 18 = 1900–1913. On Y Axis: Correlations are from 0.0 to 1.0.

Figure 3.2 Average bivariate correlations across varying time periods. (for correlations in graphs B–F in Figure 3.1)

actually took place. We will explore this facet of rivalry ripeness more closely in the qualitative analysis section below.

Nonetheless, overall the indicators seem to point in the right direction. Figure 3.2, which plots the average bivariate correlations between the values that appear in subgraphs B–F, also reinforces this view. Figure 3.2, in fact, suggests a clear march toward the probability of conflict escalation throughout the 1816–1913 period, albeit with some leveling off in the mid-century. This image contrasts sharply with the notion that the First World War was the war no one wanted or expected. Conceivably, it remains possible that no one wanted or expected a world war, but the pertinent indicators suggest that the context was becoming increasingly ripe for some kind of trouble. Yet Figure 3.2 seems more linear than nonlinear. It would appear that we need to examine the specifics of rivalry interconnections and dynamics more closely.

The complexity of rivalry fields is certainly influenced by the number of rivalries underway.[11] In the fifty years preceding 1914, a less complex rivalry field with eight rivalries between major powers and four involving non-major powers in 1864 expanded to eleven rivalries between major powers and eleven involving non-major powers (see Table 3.2). In other words, a field with twelve rivalries almost doubled into a twenty-two rivalry

[11] See, for instance, John A. Vasquez, Paul F. Diehl, Colin Flint, Jürgen Scheffran, Sang-Hyun Chi, and Toby J. Rider, "The ConflictSpace of Cataclysm: The International System and the Spread of War, 1914–1917," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7(2) (2011): 143–168.

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Table 3.2 *Rivalries begun and ended, 1864–1913*

Year	Rivalries begun	Rivalries ended
1864	*Rivalries already underway by 1864* Austria–France, Austria–Italy, Austria–Ottoman Empire, Austria–Prussia, Austria–Russia, Britain–France, Britain–Russia, France–Prussia, France–Russia, Greece–Ottoman Empire, Ottoman Empire–Russia, Britain–United States	
1870		Austria–Prussia
1874	Japan–Russia	
1878	Bulgaria–Greece, Bulgaria–Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria–Serbia, Ottoman Empire–Serbia	
1879	Greece–Serbia	
1881	France–Italy	
1884	Italy–Ottoman Empire	
1889	Germany–United States	
1890	Germany–Russia	
1894		France–Russia
1896	Britain-Germany	
1898	Japan–United States	
1903	Austria–Serbia	
1904		Britain–France, Britain–United States
1908		Austria–Ottoman Empire
1913	Albania–Greece	

Note: Austria refers to Austria-Hungary during most of this interval. The rivalry onset and termination information is based on William R. Thompson and D. R. Dreyer, *Handbook of International Rivalries, 1494–2010* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2011).

field. That accounting also ignores the four major power rivalries (Austria–Prussia, France–Russia, Britain–France, and Britain–United States) that were terminated during this era. Yet the termination of these four rivalries probably made war more, rather than less, likely because they contributed to determining, or at least reflected, who eventually aligned with whom in the 1914–1918 combat. This quirk is one reason why it does not suffice to merely count the number of rivalries. The number of rivalries can provide useful information, but it can also be misleading if terminated rivalries can be just as significant as ones that are still underway. Another reason is that a simple count of rivalries does not tell us which rivalries are operating hot or cold. Hot rivalries, presumably, are more dangerous than ones that are relatively inactive. Finally, counting rivalries does not capture how changes

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in one rivalry influence the operation of other rivalries. These "pinball dynamics" lie at the very heart of why a rivalry field can exert nonlinear effects on the outbreak of war.

A qualitative analysis of "pinball" dynamics in the pre-First World War rivalry field

The most evident nonlinear component, and the least easy to operationalize, is the "pinball" process linking the functioning of multiple rivalries. It can be called a pinball process because an initial stimulus, not unlike launching a ball in a pinball game, affects (or can affect) a number of rivalry relationships existing in a field or network. The effect of a stimulus on one rivalry impacts other rivalries, which, in turn, have effects on still other rivalries. The initial stimulus (or stimuli) thus alters the way in which the rivalries in the field interact in direct and indirect ways that are often difficult to predict at the time of occurrence. We have the advantage of hindsight, however, and can at least make a case for a sequence of direct and indirect impacts.

Figure 3.3 portrays the multiple streams of interrivalry "pinball" dynamics in the First World War case. One stream begins in 1905 with Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. A second stream is initiated by Italy's attack on Turkey in partial response to French gains in North Africa. A third input is the bipolarization of European major powers, which was the outcome of eight rivalries. Meanwhile, the second stream of rivalry relationships intersects the French–German and British–German structural rivalries. How these last two rivalries functioned in 1914 was influenced by what had transpired earlier in the other rivalries. We highlight the "pinball" dynamics that occurred primarily in the last decade prior to the onset of the 1914 war. Although we acknowledge that rivalry behaviors interacted much earlier, we believe that the war outcome can be traced most directly to the rivalry interactions of the decade prior to the First World War.

This approach does not mean that the rivalry dynamics that preceded 1905 are insignificant. For us, it is primarily a matter of emphasis. We do believe that the rapprochements of 1904 (Britain with the United States and France) and the emergence of the Austro-Serbian rivalry in 1903 were critical. Before 1903, Serbia had more or less accepted its subordination to Austro-Hungarian preferences. Without a trouble-making Serbia, the lead up to the First World War might have worked out differently. We also acknowledge that the global and regional contests for leadership that are very much part of our model certainly preceded 1905. The ending of the Franco-Russian rivalry and the beginning of a German–Russian rivalry in the early 1890s were equally and perhaps even more crucial. If Austria had

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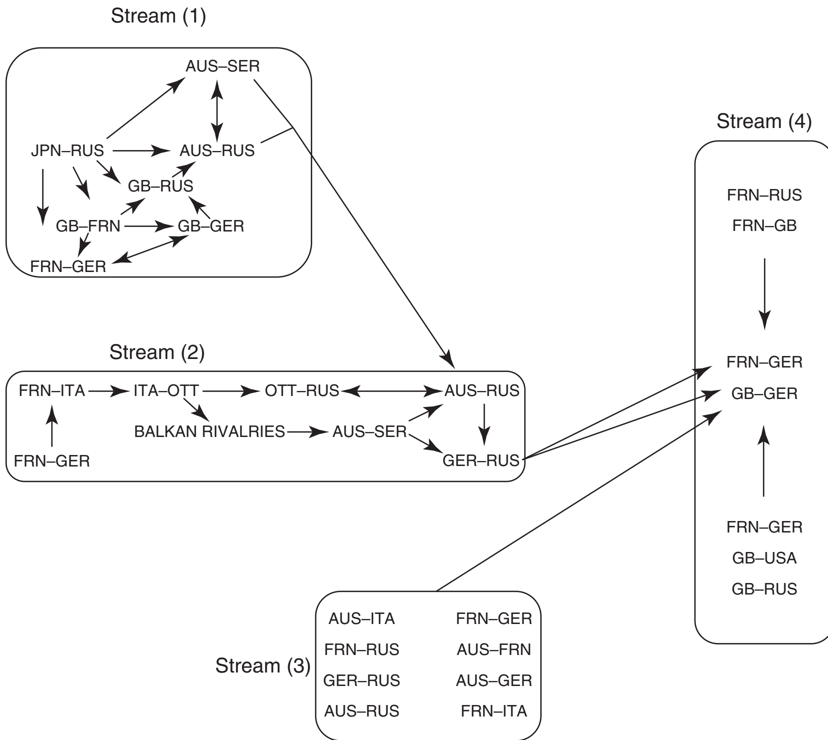

Figure 3.3 Four rivalry streams

not acquiesced to German superiority in 1870, would there have been a blank check in 1914? Rivalry field dynamics are a bit like pulling on loose strings in a ball of twine. It is difficult to know where to start. We think, however, that the nonlinear aspects of pre-First World War dynamics can be best demonstrated by the beginning of 1905 – ten years before the outbreak of war in 1914.

Mulligan suggests that 1871, 1879, 1890, 1894, 1905, 1908, and 1911 are the usual suspects for turning points in the movement toward the First World War.[12] Certainly, plausible cases can be advanced for pushing the starting point back in time. Our choice of 1905 (Mulligan credits 1904–1907 as "a great turning point") reflects only a feeling that developments became increasingly nonlinear after this point. For instance, Mulligan also argues that Europe was closer to war in 1885–1887 than

[12] Mulligan, *Origins of the First World War*, p. 91.

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at any other time between 1871 and 1914. He notes the following about prominent pairs of states – what we would call increasing rivalry intensities: France and Italy were clashing over colonial territory in North Africa; French revanchism over Alsace-Lorraine was briefly in the ascendance; Britain and France were engaged in friction over Egypt; Britain was greatly concerned about the Russian advance toward India; Britain and Austria-Hungary were opposing Russian and Bulgarian attempts to expand their influence in the Balkans; and in Germany some voices were calling for a preventive war on Russia. With the advantage of hindsight, however, one could point to how these frictions checked one another. It is unlikely that all major powers would fight one another in an unstructured melee encompassing multiple warring dyads. Britain and Austria-Hungary were cooperating; Britain, France, and Russia were not.

Various developments took place after 1885–1887 to change the context of conflict within the rivalry field and to make a general European war more probable. These considerations do not justify directly an emphasis on post-1905 dynamics, but they do suggest that we need not survey the entire century prior to 1914. If we had to pick one development, our choice is the Russian defeat in the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War, and Russia's renewed interest in the Balkans and the Straits which set up a respectable proportion of the dynamics on which we focus. As long as Russia remained preoccupied in the Far East, its rivalry with Austria-Hungary was less likely to escalate into war. On the contrary, the two powers were able to cooperate in attempting to contain tensions in southeastern Europe prior to Russia's defeat, as Mulligan and others have noted. We hasten to add that such a choice does not mean that Russia (or Japan) should be blamed for starting the First World War.

Stream 1: Russian foreign policy, according to LeDonne, can be viewed as a series of alternating initiatives to the east, south, and west.[13] When an initiative in one direction faced too much resistance, the Russians shifted their foreign policy to a new one. In 1904–1905, Russia performed poorly in the Russo-Japanese War, signaling a major foreign policy defeat in terms of its Manchurian/Korean ambitions. In the decade or so prior to the war, Russia had cooperated with Austria on Balkan issues. After the war, Russia renewed its competitive interests in the Balkans and the Black Sea Straits, thereby switching its foreign policy priorities from the west to the south. In the absence of its war defeat, there is no guarantee that Russia would have continued cooperating with Austria in southeastern Europe, but the probability of increased Austro-Russian conflict was

[13] John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Contraction* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

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certainly enhanced. The Russians' shift in focus to the south was further encouraged by the de-escalation of the long-running Anglo-Russian rivalry in 1907, which was, in turn, made more probable by their defeat in 1905 and subsequent revolutionary turmoil in that year.[14] Russian decision-makers were encouraged to reconsider their foreign policy objectives at a time when British decision-makers were searching for ways to reduce the number of perceived threats to their global empire. Far from being over, the downturn in Anglo-Russian rivalry relations reflected a temporary truce in Central Asia/Persia in order for both sides to focus more narrowly on a mutual German threat. The British initiatives on this front were designed to simplify the threat environment, in conjunction with the de-escalation of rivalries with France and the United States in 1904. Even the Russo-Japanese rivalry helped to diminish the threat environment with a temporary de-escalation in 1907, and a secret treaty between the parties acknowledging their respective spheres of influence in Manchuria and Mongolia. Consequently, Russian foreign policy objectives in the south were less likely to be menaced by developments in the Far East. In sum, events and several interactive rivalry dynamics "conspired" to encourage a Russian refocus on the Balkans in the half-decade or so leading up to 1914.[15]

But this first stream is further complicated by other considerations. One inter-rivalry connection is asserted by Mombauer, who argues that the Schlieffen Plan predicating a German attack on France first was influenced by the German appreciation that a Russia defeated by the Japanese was not likely to represent much of a threat in the east, at least very quickly.[16] Thus, one had time to knock France out before turning on the Russians. Another consideration is that Britain had allied with Japan in part to discourage Russian expansion in east Asia. With Russia and France and Britain and Japan allied in separate pacts, the threat of Britain and France being drawn into a war between Russia and Japan had become

[14] Hew Strachan, *The First World War, vol. 1: To Arms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 20.

[15] Zeman argues that Austria-Hungary sought to encourage conflict between Bulgaria and Serbia after 1905, with the primary and unintentional outcome of driving Serbia closer to Russia. See Zbyněk Anthony Bohuslav Zeman, "The Balkans and the Coming of War," in R. J. W. Evans and Hartmut P. von Strandmann (eds.), *The Coming of the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 19–32. The most recent examination of the Russian entry into the First World War is Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

[16] Annika Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus* (London: Longman, 2002), pp. 7–8

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greater. Both Williamson and Mombauer credit the British interest in improving relations with France to this factor.[17] France had on its own problems in Morocco and therefore had reasons to seek cooperation with the British, who initially preferred no European power to occupy the African shore across from Gibraltar. After the Russian defeat in 1904–1905, France had all the more incentive to keep Britain on its side because it could not rely on Russian support in Great Power machinations. To complicate things further, Mombauer describes Germany as willing to challenge France in Morocco (1905) because (a) it knew Russian support for France would not be forthcoming and (b) it hoped to break up the fledgling Anglo-French entente.[18] That it had the opposite effect – reinforcing Anglo-French cooperation – in turn had implications for Anglo-German relations. In brief, it meant that an Anglo-German understanding was less likely to come about. Nearly a decade later, the combination of the early German decision to attack France first (most likely through Belgium, given the best route of attack) and the improvement in Anglo-French relations increased the probability of British intervention on behalf of the French. As it turned out, these early developments were not enough to ensure British intervention, but it made British intervention and the side on which the British chose to intervene more probable.

Stream 2: Italy and France competed for territorial control in North Africa, a competition that France was consistently winning after 1881 and its gains in Tunisia at Italy's expense. In the early 1900s, however, France and Italy had secretly agreed to acknowledge their respective claims in Morocco and Libya. Yet French advances in Morocco and the outcome of the second Franco-German crisis over Morocco encouraged Italy to make its claims on Libya, then controlled by Turkey, more overt. Bosworth relates how the Italian prime minister had resisted a Libyan adventure prior to the Second Moroccan Crisis.[19] Rather presciently, he had argued that:

> The integrity of what is left of the Ottoman Empire is one of the principles on which is founded the equilibrium and peace of Europe . . . What if, after we attack Turkey, the Balkans move? And what if a Balkan war provokes a clash between the two groups of Powers and a European war?

[17] Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 4–14; Mombauer, *Origins of the First World War*, pp. 7–8.

[18] Mombauer, *Origins of the First World War*, pp. 7–8.

[19] R. J. B. Bosworth, "Italy and the End of the Ottoman Empire," in Marion Kent (ed.), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), pp. 51–72, at 60.

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Nonetheless, faced with the prospect of being left out of North Africa, the Italian prime minister was able to suppress his own objections. Italy began a war with Turkey in 1911 to resolve the question.

As Giolitti had predicted, the weak Turkish response highlighted the recurring question of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Much of the nineteenth century had been devoted to attempts to preserve the empire against various threats to dismember it. By the first decade of the twentieth century, dismemberment was perceived as increasingly likely even by former defenders of the imperial status quo. Two more direct effects of the Turkish defeat in the 1911 war involved Russian concerns over controlling the Black Sea Straits and Balkan interests in expelling the Turks from southeastern Europe.

The Russian interest in controlling Constantinople and the Dardanelles was a long-standing one. In many respects, it was the primary focus of its push to the south which began as early as the seventeenth century. The Russian motivation went beyond the matter of traditional imperial expansion. The Turkish ability to close the Straits affected Russia's ability to export a considerable proportion of its grain to the west by sea. Russian decision-makers felt highly vulnerable to this economic threat, and not without reason.[20] The Turks tended to close the Straits in times of conflict in the general area, as they did during the Balkan Wars much to the alarm of the Russians. In addition, the Russians had a long-standing interest in removing restrictions on the movement of Russian naval vessels from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, which they could eliminate with their control of the Straits. In this respect, the Italo-Turkish War encouraged greater tensions in the Russo-Turkish rivalry. Yet Russia also worried about Austrian gains in the area immediately north of the Straits.

German gains in Turkey also exacerbated tensions in the area. The Liman von Sanders crisis in late 1913–early 1914 exposed Russia's increased concerns about Germany's role in Turkey. Liman von Sanders was a German general sent to Turkey to assist in reforming the Turkish army in the aftermath of its poor performance in the wars of 1911–1913. The assistance in retraining troops was one matter; still another was the fact that von Sanders was to be given direct control of Turkish troops in the vicinity of the Straits. The Russians demanded that the appointment be reversed. It was reversed in a formal sense, but the German general continued to be in charge of the Turkish army's training. The Russians were alarmed by the German gains in position in the area, and this issue has been

[20] Some 37 percent of Russian exports and 75 percent of its grain shipments transited through the Straits from the Black Sea area according to Dominic C. Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 45–46.

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isolated as a critical event that changed the nature of the Russo-German rivalry. Up until this point, Russo-German tensions had been largely indirect and influenced by Austro-Russian tensions. Now, Russia and Germany had direct reasons for conflict.[21]

The other arena affected by the Turkish defeat in 1911 was the Balkans, a hotbed of rivalries among states with varying degrees of official independence. Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria sought to take Macedonian territory at Turkey's (and each others') expense. The Young Turk revolt in 1908 was motivated by a desire to defend the Ottoman position in Europe. However, Turkey's war with Italy and its subsequent defeat in 1911 exposed its vulnerabilities. In the aftermath, Serbia and Bulgaria recognized the opportunity to exploit the local weakness of their Turkish rival. The first Balkan War in 1912 focused on finally expelling the Ottoman Empire from Europe. Successes in the first war led to a falling out among the victors, which was less than surprising since most had been rivals with one another prior to the outbreak of war. The second Balkan War in 1913 primarily focused on the reduction of Bulgarian gains and the re-division of Macedonian territory. The defeat of Bulgarian ambitions had at least three indirect consequences. Turkish weaknesses were further highlighted. Serbia was a major winner in the two Balkan wars, roughly doubling its territorial and population size, which made it a more formidable foe of Austria-Hungary. Further Serbian expansion heightened threat perceptions by Austria-Hungary and increased Austro-Serbian conflict over control of Albania. Finally, the Bulgarian defeat in the second Balkans War meant that Russia was encouraged to give more attention to supporting Serbia, as opposed to dividing its diplomatic support among Slavic states in the area.

Stream 3: The European region became increasingly bipolarized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This process encompassed eight rivalries most directly. At one point, the conservative major powers had been united in their opposition to France and the threat of its reemergence as a hegemonic aspirant. But that point of view had collapsed around the mid-nineteenth century. A strong rivalry between Prussia and Austria-Hungary terminated after Prussia defeated Austria-Hungary and then went on to defeat France in 1870–1871. Italy, although aided by France initially, drifted toward the more formidable support that Germany could provide. France and Russia, former rivals, became allies in the early 1890s. Germany and Russia, former allies, became rivals at

[21] Schroeder argues that the key to the First World War lies in the changing relationships among Austria, Germany, and Russia. See Schroeder, "The Life and Death of a Long Peace."

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107336995.006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

roughly the same time. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, a French–Russian bloc confronted the triple alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Neither side was so strongly connected to its allies that anyone could predict without qualification who would side with whom if it came to a showdown. Italy eventually defected and joined the opposite side. The Austro-German relationship became more closely connected, but the German blank check for Austrian aggression in the Balkans only emerged quite late in the game. At times, French decision-makers seemed to fear a Russo-German rapprochement as much as they regarded Germany as a threat. Britain's position seemed ambiguous for some of the period leading up to 1914, but it eventually sided with two of its former rivals, France and Russia, against states with which it had once been allied in opposition to France in earlier times.

Nonetheless, the bipolarization tendencies reduced freedom of maneuver in times of crisis. It also encouraged German war plans that were predicated on removing France as a threat quickly in order to deal with a presumably slowly mobilizing Russia. If it came to war in Europe, the Germans not only felt it necessary to attack France quickly, it also meant that an attack through Belgium was quite likely. Both considerations increased the likelihood that a war between Austria-Hungary and Russia would quickly draw Germany, France, and, because of the Belgian attack, Britain into the fray.

Stream 4: One of the structural ironies of the lead up to the First World War is that neither the global leader–challenger confrontation between Britain and Germany nor the regional leadership contest between France and Germany seems to have loomed large in the dynamics that led to the immediate outbreak of war in 1914.[22] We are certainly not suggesting that these rivalries played no role whatsoever. However, we do understand that the Anglo-German rivalry had de-escalated somewhat by 1912, with Germany conceding its global naval inferiority so that it could direct its attention more on developing its army for continental purposes. Of course, that meant that its rivalries within Europe became more salient as its rivalry with Britain, a state separated from the continent by the English Channel, receded in priority. Nonetheless, Britain had de-escalated three of its rivalries (with France, the United States, and Russia) in order to concentrate on the German threat. This fact ultimately meant that if Britain intervened, it was less likely to do so on behalf of the Germans. As it turned out, Britain was not at all eager to come to the aid of France,

[22] Arguments for deemphasizing the Anglo-German rivalry's role are reviewed in Jan Rüger, "Review Article: Revisiting the Anglo-German Antagonism," *Journal of Modern History* 83(3) (2011): 579–617.

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107336995.006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

but was drawn in by the full German assault on Belgium and the implications of German control of opposing shores.[23] That Britain could intervene on the French–Russian side, in turn, had been made more probable by the earlier de-escalation of the Anglo-French and Anglo-Russian rivalries.

The related issue is whether Germany expected British intervention or hoped that Britain would sit out the continental war. The conventional view has been that German decision-makers had hoped unrealistically that Britain could be made into an ally or, at best, would remain aloof. If British behavior encouraged the Germans to think that the forces arrayed against them might be less than more, British vacillation could be blamed for encouraging pro-war forces in Germany. However, Lieber argues quite strongly that this view is simply wrong and that most of the main decision-makers in Germany anticipated British entry into the war against them.[24] If so, the potential British entry had little deterrent effect.

Does that imply that a theoretical emphasis on system leader–challenger relations as critical to understanding the outbreak of major power warfare is also wrong? The answer lies in the affirmative if the argument is that the system leader–challenger rivalry is the key rivalry and that others count for much less. But this perspective seems more applicable to a power transition approach in which the catch-up of an ascending challenger provokes war with a declining dominant power.[25] In the leadership long-cycle program, system leader decline and rising regional challengers are important, but not only for their specific rivalry dynamics. The movement toward leadership decline and aggressive challengers tells us more about "system time" than anything else. It is a larger context in which rivalry fields are apt to become less predictable. Power is/has deconcentrated. Actors are scrambling for allies as old alignments are seen to be less reliable than they once were. Revisionist powers see new and enticing opportunities to advance their expansionist and irredentist programs. In the absence of a declining system leader and rising challenger(s), these behaviors are less likely to emerge. In this respect, the system leader–challenger rivalry is

[23] Michael Brock, "Britain Enters the War," in R. J. W. Evans and Hartmut P. von Strandmann (eds.), *The Coming of the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 145–178, but, for a different interpretation, see J. Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (New York: Longman, 1984). Lambert's new focus on economic warfare puts still a different spin on this question. See Nicholas A. Lambert, *Planning Armageddon: British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[24] Lieber, "The New History of World War I," p. 187.

[25] See, for instance, Ronald L. Tammen, Jacek Kugler, Douglas Lemke, Carole Asharabati, Brian Efird, and A. F. K. Organski, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House, 2000).

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critical, but not always because of its specific dynamics. Rather, it should be viewed as an important manifestation of larger forces afoot.

In the build-up to 1914, the Franco-German rivalry, paradoxically, appears to be one of the least significant sources of increasing tension.[26] France and Germany had clashed verbally in Morocco, but there was no discernible movement on the part of France to get even over the earlier loss of Alsace-Lorraine before the war started. French decision-makers were certainly aware of the German military threat, but its activation was linked to war with France's ally (but former rival), Russia, as opposed to rising Franco-German tensions. Nevertheless, it is rather difficult to disentangle the Franco-German rivalry from the German strategic problem of fighting a two-front war. Whether or not there was a Schlieffen Plan, a war between Austria-Hungary and Russia over Serbia could not be limited to the Balkans. To defeat France and Russia, Germany needed to do significant damage to one before the other mobilized. A slower mobilizing Russia, therefore, meant that Germany needed to attack quickly and hard in the west so that it could deal with its eastern foe later. While this interpretation seemingly places emphasis on the Franco-Russian alliance, the less direct question is why there was a Franco-Russian alliance in the first place. In this respect, the Franco-German rivalry is an easy explanation for at least the French side of the motivation question.

The two structural rivalries, Britain–Germany and France–Germany, therefore, were contributory to the general setting of the rivalry field. In particular, they increased tensions in the period prior to the last few years of the lead up to world war. The antagonists made choices that led to some alignments becoming more probable and feasible by terminating or de-escalating major power rivalries (France–Russia, Britain–France, and Britain–Russia) so that they could deal with a rising Germany. Yet their direct contribution to the overall conflagration should not be exaggerated. The First World War was not brought about by one or two rivalries; it took a village of rivalries to bring it about.

[26] See Michael S. Neiberg, *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 58–60, for instance, on how the French population seemed to be largely indifferent or not inclined to resort to violence over the status of Alsace-Lorraine in the years leading up to 1914. Keiger also argues that French decision-makers knew that they were unprepared for war and acted accordingly. See Keiger, Chapter 10, this volume. Schroeder, in contrast, makes a strong case for the Austro-French rivalry as the least significant major power antagonism leading up to 1914. The case is made in Paul W. Schroeder, "A Pointless Enduring Rivalry: France and the Habsburg Monarchy, 1715–1918," in William R. Thompson (ed.), *Great Power Rivalries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 60–85.

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The stream metaphor envisions the confluence of four channels converging and energizing a turbulent gyre from which the First World War emerged. Presumably, the more contributing streams and the stronger the converging flows, the greater the potential for something like a world war spreading rapidly. Another apt metaphor, this one borrowed from meteorological phenomena, is the perfect storm. Different types of storms converging from multiple vectors create monster storms on rare occasion. Of course, these metaphors (freeway pile-ups, pinball dynamics, converging streams, perfect storms) – while they can provide quick mental images of complicated processes – do not substitute for well-defined theory.[27] Our argument is that within a larger field of rivalries, changes in one rivalry reverberate through a chained sequence of a string of rivalries. For instance, the Italian problem of competing with France in Tunisia led to Italian–Ottoman problems in Libya and contributed to increased activity in the Balkan nest of rivalries, both of which had implications for Russo-Ottoman relations (see Stream 2). One of these sequences can be sufficiently complicated in its own right. If there are several ongoing simultaneously, international politics become incredibly complicated and less predictable. The potential for escalation in conflict and warfare are accentuated in a nonlinear fashion. The First World War was the product, at least in part, of interactions among an unusual number of intensifying rivalries.

When viewed from this perspective, alternative interpretations need not be dismissed out of hand. Some interpretative emphases are complementary. Alliances and arms races, for instance, add various types of fuel to the intensifying rivalry "flames." Alliances can help to cluster rivalries and thereby make sequential reverberations more probable within the clusters. Arms races between rivals can contribute to their intensification. Structural rivalries, as in the case of regional leadership competitions or a declining system leader–ascending challengers situation, can create their own streams of rivalry escalation, just as they also contribute to a larger context of heightened tensions. Crisis dynamics, if not treated as a standalone explanation, but instead linked to rivalry interactions, can certainly contribute more explanatory power. Of course, the emphasis on rivalry streams brings into question the comparative explanatory value of cumulative rivalry antagonisms versus the July Crisis *per se*.[28] At the same time, once one starts with rivalry considerations, other types of explanations,

[27] An endorsement of the "perfect storm" imagery is found in Williamson, "July 1914 Revisited and Revised: The Erosion of the German Paradigm," Chapter 2, this volume.

[28] We do not see this as an "either–or" question. Analytically, it is a matter of how much additional variance is explained by adding the crisis pathologies to the rivalry antagonisms.

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such as security dilemmas or the cult of the offensive, pale in attractiveness because they seem either out of place (security dilemmas) or more than a bit esoteric (offense–defense arguments).

Conclusions

When we say that a field of rivalry dynamics was responsible for the outbreak of war in 1914, we do not mean to imply that the field alone was responsible. First, the nonlinear rivalry ripeness model incorporates both bipolarization and structural transition tensions. Second, we are fully aware that other authors have made strong cases for the contribution of processes that we have ignored in this chapter. Arms races have already been mentioned, but even they are also a reflection of rivalry dynamics.[29] Similarly, much of the interest in alliances as a causal factor in explaining conflict dates back to the First World War. We have not given much explicit attention to alliances other than through the bipolarization component. Ideally, we might model the relationships that we have been talking about as a network linking both rivalries and alignments, and then show how both types of relationship have negative and positive effects.[30] We are not quite there, though. It serves our immediate purpose to focus primarily on rivalries.

Nonetheless, we have no interest in promoting a single-factor causal argument. Our only claim is that the field of rivalry dynamics appears to have contributed significantly to the outbreak of war. Just how much significance should be attributed to rivalry dynamics and how much credit/blame to bestow on other phenomena would require a different kind of investigation. Our intent in this chapter was to elaborate a claim made in 2003 that had yet to be substantiated. The evidence in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 provides further substantiation to claims made earlier about the interaction among the NRR model's components. The diagram of rivalry

[29] The presumption is that arms races between nonrivals are not as dangerous as those between rivals. More generally, see Toby J. Rider, "Understanding Arms Races Onset: Rivalry, Threat, and Territorial Competition," *Journal of Politics* 71(2) (2009): 693–703; Toby J. Rider, Michael Findley, and Paul F. Diehl, "Just Part of the Game? Arms Races, Rivalry and War," *Journal of Peace Research* 48(1) (2011): 85–100. First World War-specific work can be found in David Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War: Europe, 1904–1914* (Oxford University Press, 1996); David G. Herrmann, *The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

[30] See Zeev Maoz, Lesley C. Terris, Ranan D. Kuperman, and Ilan Talmud, "What is the Enemy of My Enemy? Causes and Consequences of Imbalanced International Relations," *Journal of Politics* 69(1) (2007): 100–115; John A. Vasquez *et al.*, "The ConflictSpace of Cataclysm," for network analyses that do combine rivalry and other types of information.

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dynamics in Figure 3.3 sketches what we have in mind about the pinball nature of dynamics in the immediate pre-1914 rivalry field. Regrettably, to take the argument any further would require events data for a number of states in the decades leading up to 1914. It might then be possible to test how behavior in one rivalry impacted other rivalries. Yet even if we had these data, it might remain a serious methodological challenge to try to capture the dynamics sketched in Figure 3.3.

Our inability to measure rivalry dynamics with any precision, nevertheless, is no reason to ignore the phenomena. They seem important – perhaps vitally so. It cannot be said that the events that we are highlighting have been entirely ignored by First World War historians.[31] How else would we know about them if they had not been described and, quite often, singled out as important behaviors? Our modest contribution is to propose that the outbreak of the First World War be attributed in some degree to the ripeness of a complex field of rivalries that were subject to pinball dynamics in the years immediately leading up to 1914. If our case is plausible, it means that we need to pay more attention explicitly to rivalry behavior and to interactions between and among rivalries. In 1914, Austrian intransigence, Serbian-assisted terrorism, German ambitions, Russian desires to get even for backing down earlier or just to get control of the Dardanelles, French revanchism, British waffling, Italian opportunism in the Mediterranean, or Japanese opportunism in Asia and the South Pacific were not singularly responsible for the outbreak of war. They all were. It is not a case of the system making them do it. It was a case of their complex interactions via rivalries and alliances that contributed to the increased probability of a general war breaking out in ways that few observers at the time foresaw – or perhaps could have seen.

[31] In some respects, our approach parallels Paul W. Schroeder's tone in "World War I as Galloping Gertie: A Reply to Joachim Remak," *Journal of Modern History* 44(3) (1972): 319–345. The difference is that Schroeder's argument is almost entirely focused on individual countries, as opposed to our emphasis on rivalries.

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