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Peter Jackson and Martin S. Alexander. "French Military Intelligence responds to the German Remilitarisation of the Rhineland, 1936 - Note concerning the consequences that follow, from a military point of view, from Germany's renunciation of the Locarno Treaty." *Intelligence and National Security* 22.4 (2007): 537-545. DOI: 10.1080/02684520701640506.

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Peter Jackson. "French Military Intelligence responds to the German Remilitarisation of the Rhineland, 1936 - A look at French intelligence machinery in 1936." *Intelligence and National Security* 22.4 (2007): 546-562. DOI: 10.1080/02684520701640514.

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Martin S. Alexander. "French Military Intelligence responds to the German Remilitarisation of the Rhineland, 1936 - The military consequences for France of the end of Locarno." *Intelligence and National Security* 22.4 (2007): 563-572. DOI: 10.1080/02684520701640548.

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Reviewed by **William R. Keylor, Boston University**

In the history of Germany's successful dismantling of the Versailles and Locarno settlements during the 1930s, there is no more important turning point than the successful remilitarization of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936. The perpetual demilitarization of the river's west bank and a fifty-kilometer strip on its east bank represented, in the minds of most French strategists, France's surest guarantee against the threat of a resurgent Germany after the lapse of the American and British security commitments that Wilson and Lloyd George had proffered to Clemenceau at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. In our age of long-range bombers and missiles it may seem quaint for a great power to rely on a river—even one as wide as the Rhine—for protection against military aggression. But in those days it still functioned as such, and continued to do so right up to the end of the Second World War (when the American forces discovered how difficult it was to cross it in the other direction, even amid a full-scale German retreat).

The French attempt to enforce the reparation clauses of the Versailles Treaty through unilateral military pressure against Germany in 1923 ran into a buzz saw of opposition from Great Britain and the United States. Chastened by allegations of militarism from its two former associates in the war, France accepted the compromises embodied in the Locarno Treaties of 1925, which included Germany's recognition of its western border and the demilitarized status of the Rhineland, bolstered by an unprecedented British (and Italian) pledge to guarantee the arrangement. By the time the "spirit of Locarno" had resulted in the termination of the inter-allied inspection regime to verify German disarmament in 1927 and the evacuation of the last contingent of the temporary inter-allied occupation of the Rhineland in 1930, France had fully abandoned its earlier reliance on the threat of military force to deter German aggression. Instead, it had fallen back on a purely defensive strategy. The construction of the network of stationary fortifications along the German border known as the Maginot Line represented an insurance policy against the possibility that a future German government would renege on the Locarno pledge to respect the demilitarized status of the Rhineland. Without the wide river as a natural barrier to a German surprise attack, the man-made barrier would protect France from a sudden German military offensive. In the event of war the resulting stationary front, like the one in the last war, would keep enemy forces out of the national territory until British (and eventually American) financial and military aid could be thrown into the balance.

But if the Maginot Line had replaced the Rhine as the barrier to a German "attaque brusquée" against France, the new defensive strategy severely undermined that country's security commitments to its allies in Eastern Europe. As long as German forces and fortifications were kept out of the geographical buffer between France and Germany, France would be free to intervene unopposed in western Germany in response to a German attack against Czechoslovakia and Poland. A remilitarized Rhineland would serve as a protective shield for the Third Reich, enabling Hitler to crank up the pressure against France's eastern allies without fear of a response from his country's rear. How, then, to explain France's acquiescence in Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland, with its ominous implications for the French alliance system on the Continent?

Martin Alexander and Peter Jackson, two scholars admirably equipped to investigate French military strategy and foreign policy during the interwar period, have made a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate about the causes of the fall of France in 1940. They place under their magnifying glass a key memorandum circulated on April 8, 1936, by the Deuxième Bureau (the French army's intelligence department), which candidly assessed the military consequences for France of the entry of German military forces into the Rhineland a month earlier. The document, which they have translated for an English-speaking audience, demonstrates conclusively that French military intelligence analysts fully recognized the significance of the remilitarization, noting that it provided the Third Reich with the "possibility to fortify its western frontier and thus to acquire the liberty of action indispensable in order to realize Hitler's political aims in central and eastern Europe." It carefully reviewed the Fuehrer's short-term foreign policy goals as

adumbrated in Mein Kampf--the annexation of Austria, the Sudetenland, and the Polish Corridor. The German dictator's ultimate objective in the west was accurately portrayed: the defeat of France and the removal of British military power from the Continent in order to facilitate his long-term objective of eastward expansion to regions where "the German people will find the means to develop."

The author of the memorandum argued that the ultimate goal of French policy should be "the immediate and coordinated action of all powers resolved to oppose Germany." Britain and Belgium represent the most obvious candidates, although public opinion in those two countries seemed reluctant to endorse such a bold step at this stage. But the real prize would be Italy's membership in the proposed anti-German coalition. Mussolini's service in preventing the Anschluss with Austria was deemed "indispensable" as the first step toward the reconstitution of the Stresa Front of 1935. The French government's immediate objective should be the launching of general staff conversations with Britain, Belgium, and "as soon as possible with Italy...despite the events that have regrettably distanced us from this country (an obvious reference to Anglo-French sanctions against Italy over its invasion of Ethiopia)." It is difficult to imagine a more clear-headed, perspicacious analysis of France's challenge, except for one thing: the intelligence community adamantly refused to entertain the prospect of converting the Franco-Soviet Pact, which had been ratified by the French Chamber of Deputies on 27 February 1936 and was used by Hitler as a pretext for the Rhineland remilitarization, into a full-fledged military alliance.

In his assessment of the document Martin Alexander accuses the Deuxième Bureau of exceeding its authority by addressing the diplomatic (as opposed to the strictly military) challenges facing France. The document's blatant exaggeration of the potential value of the Italian army, together with its underestimation of the usefulness of the Red army as a counterweight to German power in the east, reflected the ideological prejudices of the French high command. Alexander's assessment confirms Michael Carley's assertion that the anti-Communist sentiments in France's military and political elite played a critical role in preventing the reconstitution of the Franco-Russian alliance that had helped to prevent a rapid German victory against France at the beginning of the last war.¹ With the possibility of the Russian alliance put in the deep freeze, Alexander reviews the sorry record of inter-allied cooperation in the west as the German threat mounted. The hope of employing British and Belgian troops to compensate for the loss of the Rhineland buffer were dashed: In Franco-British joint staff talks in mid-April 1936, Britain could offer only two unmotorized divisions in the event of a war on the Continent, and even that commitment was hedged with qualifications. The Belgians hemmed and hawed and finally repudiated their 1920 alliance with France in October 1936, delivering a painful blow to French defense planning.

¹ Michael J. Carley, 1939: *The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (1999).

Alexander pitilessly exposes the fateful weaknesses of the unstable political system of the Third Republic. The notorious revolving cabinets prevented continuity of policymaking. The first round of the parliamentary elections that brought to power the Popular Front coalition in the spring of 1936, with its ideological posturing on both ends of the political spectrum, focused on domestic socio-economic issues and virtually ignored foreign and defense policy at this important turning point. The resulting vacuum permitted the military, and especially its intelligence service, to exceed its statutory limits and provide the sliver of continuity in the foreign policy debates that existed. In the end, Alexander holds the entire French political, defense, and intelligence communities responsible for the failure to adapt to the critical challenge posed by the loss of the Rhenish glaxis in the spring of 1936.

Peter Jackson's lucid article concentrates on laying bare the inner workings of the French intelligence apparatus during this critical period for France. His purpose is to trace the link between intelligence and policymaking. The main purveyors of raw intelligence were the army spies stationed along the German border as well as military attachés in embassies abroad. Jackson judges their reports on the immediate military threat posed by Germany to be excellent, but faults them for producing unreliable and ideologically influenced analyses of the policies of foreign powers. He agrees with Alexander that "Political imperatives intruded into the intelligence process at every level," a judgment that should resonate in the United States in the aftermath of the Iraq War. The absence of an intelligence service attached to the foreign ministry (as in Great Britain) enabled the military to dominate the process of intelligence gathering and analysis. This military monopoly generated resentment and the inevitable bureaucratic resistance and foot-dragging at the Quai d'Orsay, which had come to disdain information emanating from the rival ministry (particularly when it trod on the Foreign Ministry's turf, as the Deuxième Bureau's reports often did). Jackson notes that the paucity of archival documentation—reports were usually conveyed orally and the French cabinet kept no minutes-- makes it impossible to trace the influence of intelligence on policymaking with any degree of certitude. He finds it impossible even to identify the author of the memorandum under discussion, or to identify the members of the government who received it. Astonishingly, he doubts that it ever reached Foreign Minister Pierre Etienne Flandin or Prime Minister Albert Sarraut, the two policymakers in a caretaker government during the Rhineland crisis who could have organized a military response to Hitler's coup.

This sad story of bureaucratic turf battles, inter-ministerial wrangling, evasion of responsibility, and ideological distortion of intelligence assessment helps to explain why the entry of German military forces in the Rhineland in the spring of 1936 did not provoke the kind of hard-nosed decisionmaking in Paris that might have altered the course of history.

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H-Diplo Article Review

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