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Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Mass Army, and Military Power | The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War have precipitated an epidemic of nationalist conflicts. Nationalism was hardly quiescent during the last forty-five years: it played a key role in the decolonization process, fueling both revolutionary and inter-state warfare. But students of strategy concerned themselves with the dynamics of superpower conflict and its effects on regional enmities more than with the dynamics of nationalist rivalries. Thus, we lack sufficient analysis to explain our current predicament; instead, we invoke folk theories about ancient hatreds, or sorcerer leaders who have miraculously called them forth. We fear nationalism because of its close association with the destructive warfare of the first half of the century. Many believe that nationalism permitted or even compelled leaders to conduct reckless foreign policies that produced wars; prolonged the wars by promoting escalation of war aims; increased the destructiveness of war by providing distilled industrial power in the form of vast quantities of armaments; and sustained the most intense combat imaginable with

the energies and the blood of millions of young men.' Although these widely held propositions about the dangerous consequences of nationalism are by no means proven, when we express concerns today about the re-emergence of long-suppressed nationalism, this is what we fear. Given that so much curiosity about nationalism is driven by its apparent association with war, it is noteworthy that few scholars have tried directly to connect the two phenomena. Most scholarship on the origins of nation

Barry R. Posen is Professor of Political Science at MIT and a member of its Defense and Arms Control Studies Program. The author would like to thank Omer Bartov, Liah Greenfeld, Jack Snyder, and Stephen Van Evera for comments on earlier drafts. The Committee on International Conflict and Cooperation of the National Research Council arranged for several helpful reviews. The Levitan Prize and the Carnegie Corporation of New York provided financial support.

1. For an example of such views, see Michael Howard, *War in European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 109-115; Carlton J.H. Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion* (New York: Macmillan: 1960), pp. 120-124. *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 80-124 © 1993 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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181 alism addresses the political, social, and economic development processes that have affected the formation of national identities. This literature is striking in its richness, but it pays little attention to war. Most scholarship on the origins and conduct of the great wars we associate with nationalism, especially the two world wars, traces only imprecisely their connection with nationalism. In this article I argue that nationalism increases the intensity of warfare, and specifically the ability of states to mobilize the creative energies and the spirit of self-sacrifice of millions of soldiers. Several of the elements of nationalism long stressed by scholars of the subject are caused or intensified by the task of preparation for warfare, and by the experience of warfare, particularly "mass mobilization" warfare. It is not merely coincidental that nationalism seems to cause intense warfare; I argue that it is purveyed by states for the express purpose of improving their military capabilities.

Security Competition and Military Imitation

I define nationalism as the propensity of individuals to identify their personal interest with that of a group that is too large to meet together; to identify that interest on the basis both of a "culture" that the group shares, and a purported history that the group purportedly shares; and to believe that this group must have a state structure of its own in order to thrive.

2 Nationalism would thus help generate the individual commitment and the organized cooperation that make for combat power on the battlefield. Once nationalism is in place, the kind (although not necessarily the incidence) of warfare that we have seen since the French Revolution follows. Most of the interesting questions arise as to how both the beliefs and the shared culture come to be, and how they come to be in many states more or less...

Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power

Barry R. Posen

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War have precipitated an epidemic of nationalist conflicts. Nationalism was hardly quiescent during the last forty-year years: it played a key role in the decolonization process, fueling both revolutionary and inter-state warfare. But students of strategy concerned themselves with the dynamics of superpower conflict and its effects on regional enmities more than with the dynamics of nationalist rivalries. Thus, we lack sufficient analysis to explain our current predicament; instead, we invent folk theories about ancient hatreds, or surcerer leaders who have miraculously called them forth.

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