



A production of H-Diplo with the journals *Security Studies*, *International Security*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, and the International Studies Association's Security Studies Section (ISSS).

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H-Diplo | ISSF Article Review 49

Simon Catros and Bernard Wilkins. "Flirting with Fascism: The 1934 Report of General Renondeau." *Intelligence and National Security* 30:4 (2015): 538-544. DOI: 10.1080/02684527.2014.945349. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2014.945349>

Reviewed by **François Romon**, Emeritus Professor, l'Université de Technologie de Compiègne

Published by ISSF on **24 February 2016**

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This article is based on a report written by General Gaston Renondeau, who served as military attaché to the French embassy in Berlin, to the French Government and to the 2^e Bureau de l'État-Major de l'Armée (EMA, the French external military intelligence agency) on 13 November 1934. Thanks to a thorough analysis of the political and military context, the authors demonstrate that military intelligence must be considered not only from a factual angle (enemy capacity, movement of troops, and evaluation of industrial potential and technological level) but also from a psychological perspective, which includes the role of political propaganda. The authors aim to contribute to the historiographical analysis of the French defeat of May-June 1940, which has traditionally been presented as either the result of the Third Republic's pacifism or as a consequence of the French High Command's incompetency. These two explanations are irreconcilable and equally simplistic.

The article investigates a field that has been left aside by most historians: the psychological and sociological study of those who played an important part in the international crisis, in this case military decision makers and politicians. This study is based on a single document, but the report, written in 1934, is very interesting

and premonitory. The French military attaché, General Gaston Renondeau, even foresaw the future when he wrote that “France might pay the highest price for her weaknesses.”¹

Simon Catros and Bernard Wilkin have produced an extremely pertinent historical background based on an impressive array of secondary sources. Their comparison of the French and the German points of view on young men war training is original. As they demonstrate, both sides shared the same aspirations and felt equally frustrated by political pacifism, blamed for the youth’s lack of readiness for the war to come. The title of the article even suggests ideological similarities between the French and the Germans.

This study highlights other interesting points such as an exploration of the specific role played by France’s general staffs in shaping France’s foreign policy based on the relationship between diplomatic corps, High Command, and political leadership within democracies. Thanks to sources that have recently come to light,² Simon Catros and Bernard Wilkin deepen a recent current of historical works³ revisiting the established historiography of the French defeat in May-June 1940⁴

It is regrettable that this analysis, which is otherwise very thorough, does not look at other studies detailing the reasons for which the French High Command opted for a strictly defensive strategy⁵. The article could also have included more details explaining how the German military leadership’s complaints about the quality of recruitment in the Wehrmacht relate to Nazi leader Adolf Hitler’s accession to power, the joining of the Hitler Youth by young Germans, and the formidable German military success against France, Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands. There was an evolution between the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, the Nazis coming to the power supported by a deep need of revenge of the German people. For example, the treaty of Versailles had a serious impact on the Wehrmacht⁶.

The authors investigate several topics in this short article: war preparation, the role of military intelligence, and the consequences of political, psychological, and ideological interferences not only on soldiers’ morale but also on those responsible for French national safety. They hint at a French inferiority complex against the German military, mentioning generals commanding in chief, Maurice Gamelin and Maxime Weygand on this particular point. I agree with this and would highlight how paradoxical it is that the French historians use

¹ Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (MAE): Société des Nations, 1020, Folios 237-242

² French archives repatriated from Moscow in 1990’s ; Privates archives of General Gamelin.

³ See more particularly Robert A. Doughty, Karl-Heinz Frieser, and Julian Jackson in Maurice Vaisse, dir., *Mai-Juin 1940. Défaite française, victoire allemande, sous l’œil des historiens étrangers*, Editions Autrement, 2012

⁴ See Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France, La Décadence, 1932-1939*, Paris, Seuil, 1983

⁵ See for instance Olivier Forcade, Robert Franck, Stefan Martens and Klaus-Jürgen Müller in Christine Levisse-Touze, dir., *La campagne de 1940*, Paris, Tallandier, 2001

⁶ Julian Jackson, « Etrange défaite française ou étrange victoire anglaise ? » in Maurice Vaisse, dir., *Mai-Juin 1940. Défaite française, victoire allemande, sous l’œil des historiens étrangers*, Editions Autrement, 2012, 177-213

the label ‘Campaign of France’ to mention the lightning campaign led by the Germans in France in May-June 1940⁷, as if the vanquished side had adopted the winner’s point of view.

In conclusion, Catros and Wilkin offer a pioneering article, one which opens the path for many new historiographical investigations, mainly on the role played by France’s general staffs in the decision-making process.

François Romon, Emeritus Professor of the Université de Technologie de Compiègne, received two Ph.D.s, one in Management Sciences, Ecole Centrale Paris (ECP) and one in Modern and Contemporary History, Université Paris 4 – Paris-Sorbonne. His recent publications in the history of World War II include “La résistance du GCR et du STN,” *Bulletin de l’Unatrans*, No. 24 (2010): 46-54; “Un transmetteur dans la Résistance: le lieutenant-colonel Gabriel Romon, 1905-1944,” *Transmetteurs*, No. 8 (2014), 49; “Un transmetteur du GCR toujours volontaire pour les missions les plus périlleuses: le colonel François Cart, 14 août 1922-8 mars 2014,” *Bulletin de l’Unatrans*, No. 35 (2015).

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⁷ This is common to all the French historians since the foundation of the French historical works on the Second World War, (Henri Michel, *La Seconde guerre mondiale*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1969)