The debate about the outbreak of the First World War is divided between those who place the burden of responsibility on Germany and those who locate German policy within a much broader explanation for the breakdown of international relations. Of the first viewpoint, the case put forward by Fritz Fischer of Hamburg University in *Germany’s Aims in the First World War* (London, 1967) is the most important. Fischer argued that Germany was aggressively expansionist. Its ruling elite believed that conquest abroad would secure imperial Germany’s autocratic political and social order at home. For Fischer, German decisions in 1914 were the culmination of a premeditated ‘grab for world power’ (*Griff nach der Weltmacht*). Adversaries of the Fischer thesis attacked the parallels he drew between Bethmann Hollweg in 1914 and Hitler in 1939. They questioned the primacy he attached to domestic factors. And, most of all, historians have recently illustrated how Germany’s ‘calculated risk’ in 1914 sprang from a deteriorating position within a states system in crisis.