Georges Boulanger: The Third Republic’s Spy Master?

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The name Georges Boulanger, or le Général Revanche, evokes a familiar image to students of French history, recalling the bearded general on horseback whose presidential candidacy shook French politics at the end of the 1880s. Analyses of the career of General Boulanger, and of the affair bearing his name, fill volumes, yet none touch on the General’s role in the development of bureaucratized intelligence, nor on the significance of intelligence in shaping Boulanger’s own career, and his legacy. This article aims to rectify this, and argues for the necessity of acknowledging Boulanger’s place in defining the character of a French intelligence community at the fin-de-siècle.

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Franco-Prussian War did intelligence begin to be integrated into the framework of the French Third Republic. However, the process was anything but straightforward, and remained fragmented among the military, the police, and diplomats.\(^4\) France’s first official intelligence service thus emerged with the reorganization of the army’s *état-major*, or high command, in 1871. This yielded the introduction of the *Deuxième Bureau*, to collect and analyze information, and within the *Deuxième Bureau*, a smaller, less official office, charged with the task of regulating the nation’s espionage and counterespionage activities, known from 1886 to 1899 as the *Section de Statistique*, or Statistical Section.\(^5\)

The appearance of Boulanger as Minister of War would stimulate this system and boost France’s intelligence services. His role in the process is thus illuminating both for the direction in which he took French intelligence, and in the impact that his concern with intelligence had on his own legacy. Boulanger was able to have such influence because, as War Minister, he tapped into two major preoccupations in France during the mid-1880s: firstly a deep paranoia of outside infiltration, and secondly a strong desire for revenge for loss in the Franco-Prussian War. During his year and half at the war ministry, these concerns became the guiding principles for the way French intelligence developed under his watchful eye, taking a strong turn from the gathering and analysis of intelligence, to prioritizing counterespionage, and vesting the army with far more leverage in this task than it had enjoyed prior. In turn, this preoccupation of intelligence existed. An example of such a band of agents was the King’s Secret, Louis XV’s entourage of men assigned varying roles to assess and further France’s place in the Continental balance of powers. Napoleon is also well known for his spy team, led by the likes of Fouché and Schulmeister. Gary Kates, *Monsieur d’Eon is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and Jean Savant, *Les Espions de Napoléon* (Paris: Hachette, 1957).

\(^4\) This fragmentation led to challenges in developing any sort of “intelligence community,” which as a result, and because of the stigma attached to intelligence gathering within the army, meant that it was not until the First World War that France finally settled into its formal intelligence apparatus.

\(^5\) General André Bach discusses some correspondence between administrators in the *Deuxième Bureau* seeking a name for this service as late as 1886. He notes that the term *section de statistique* referred to a part of the *Dépôt de la guerre* at the end of the Second Empire, designating a small team responsible for keeping up to date useful information for an idea of the real force of armies that the country might confront. The Germans had named their intelligence service a “*service des renseignements.*” Thus the French sought a different name, and wanted to choose something that wouldn’t be obvious to the press, or to others. They therefore chose Statistical Section. André Bach, *L’Armée de Dreyfus: une histoire politique de l’armée française de Charles X à l’Affaire,* (Paris: Tallandier, 2004), 540. By the decision of 12 September 1899, the *Section de Statistique* officially took the name *Section de Renseignements* and was declared an integrated part of the *État-Major de l’Armée*. Xs 42, Archives de la Service Historique de la Défense (SHD), Paris.
resulted in the definition and creation of the very enemies that he sought out, contributing to the xenophobic mentality prevalent in Third Republic France. Capitalizing on these common concerns, Boulanger therefore took many tangible steps to improve French intelligence so that in time, his attitude towards espionage and counterespionage became solidified – and even exaggerated – contributing to his own image as a strong general, willing to use any means necessary to protect France from her enemies.

Georges Boulanger joined the Freycinet cabinet as Minister of War on 7 January 1886 at the urging of Radical minister Georges Clemenceau. His interest in intelligence manifested itself in a variety of ways throughout the year and five months that he served as Minister of War, beginning with the relationships that he entered into. He surrounded himself with advisors known to be partial to intelligence at the time when it was just in its infancy, including his choice for chef du cabinet, Theodore Jung, his head of the Statistical Section, Colonel Honoré Vincent, and Commandant, later Colonel, Conrad Jean Sandherr, Boulanger’s choice for Vincent’s replacement as intelligence director in December 1886. Sandherr had already served the Republic in intelligence operations in Germany and in Tunisia, experiences – in particular the practice of collecting intelligence on a variety of communities in North Africa – which would contribute to him becoming France’s foremost intelligence practitioner. Boulanger’s decision to elevate Sandherr to such a position indicated the General’s understanding of the importance of this new profession.

A second indication of Boulanger’s preoccupation with intelligence became evident early on in his tenure, with an obvious concern about secrecy within the army. The paranoid notion that spies were responsible for France’s ills was common currency in the decades following the Franco-Prussian War, with the unexpected loss explained by the presence of hundreds of thousands of German spies on French soil in the years prior, a tale that clearly embellished fact

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6 Jung was one of the individuals who had strongly advocated for a professional intelligence service within the army in the early 1870s. He had also undertaken a major reconnaissance mission for the army in Spain in 1881, and was known among military circles and in the press for his emphasis on the behind-the-scenes work of military planning. See his personal file, 1K 732, SHD.

7 Intelligence collecting by military forces began in earnest in North Africa with the establishment of the bureaux arabes in Algeria in 1844. Sandherr spent a few years as an officer in the colonies before being appointed by the War Minister to head an intelligence mission in Tunisia in 1881-1882. Keeping tabs on Italian nationals and the local Tunisian population, the mission entailed espionage, counterespionage, and other means of intelligence gathering, and helped to prepare the way for the establishment of a French protectorate in Tunisia. See Sandherr’s notes from the mission, 1K 171, SHD.
with fiction. Instead of letting what historian Michael Miller has referred to as “weedy legends” fade into obscurity, however, Boulanger assured that they come into full relief. In several notes to his officers, the War Minister expressed his fear that army documents, even “those designated as confidential,” might fall into the hands of representatives of foreign powers, responding with calls for strict confidentiality within the army, and threatening to hold officers responsible for any leaks or indiscretions caused by those serving under them.

One of Boulanger’s first acts as War Minister to counter intelligence leaks on a national scale was to put in place France’s first ever law against espionage, giving the act of spying during peacetime a legal definition for the first time in French history. Prior to the passing of this law, no formal legislation existed to counter espionage during peacetime, to the consternation of many within the army, and without. In March of 1886, just months after taking his position in government, Boulanger therefore submitted a proposal to the Senate to create a new law targeting espionage in France. In the weeks surrounding the law’s proposal, the potential legislation gained strong support from the press and from politicians, and both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies passed the Law of 18 April 1886 on defense and national security with unanimous approval.

The espionage law served to define the kinds of information and means of dissemination deemed illegal, and moreover, allowed Boulanger to expand the place of the army, and specifically the Statistical Section, into matters handled by

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8 The story went that William Stieber, Chancellor Bismarck’s man in Paris, had directed a network of spies who supposedly gauged the physical landscape along France’s eastern borders by posing as artists along the Rhine River, and measured the moral strength of the nation by becoming friendly with locals in small, provincial towns. See Pascal Krop, Les Secrets de l’espionnage français de 1870 à nos jours (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 1993), and also Stieber’s own memoir, The Chancellor’s Spy: the Revelations of the Chief of Bismarck’s Secret Service (New York: Grove Press, 1980).
10 “They should be made to understand,” Boulanger noted, “that they have a moral obligation to keep secret certain of the communications made to them, even after they have returned to their homes.” Boulanger promised a serious investigation to follow the disappearance of any document or sign that information had escaped the army’s grasp. “Note Ministerielle” from General Boulanger, 19 February 1886, 1M 2197, SHD.
11 See letter from General Baron Berge, commander of the 16th Corps d’Armée to the War Minister dated 16 September 1885, 1M 2197, SHD.
12 Along with Boulanger, the respective ministers of Justice and the Marine, in accordance with the Conseil d’État, approved the proposal, and presented it to the Chambre under the name of President Jules Grévy.
13 Journal officiel. Chambre. Débats parlementaires, session of 15 April 1886, 796 ff. By decree of 18 June 1886, the espionage law was declared applicable in Algeria, and by decree of 19 February 1894, it was made applicable to all of the colonies.
the Ministries of Justice, Interior, and Foreign Affairs. Within months after passing the new legislation, Boulanger charged two new groups with “the pursuit and arrest of spies,” the gendarmerie, and a service of his creation, the *service des renseignements territoriaux*, or regional intelligence services. These groups were charged with both gathering intelligence and watching suspect individuals, and would report back to the Statistical Section within the War Ministry. Such a mission, Boulanger stressed, was “of the essence,” calling upon the gendarmes to “render their valuable services in the execution of a law that is of such great importance to national defense.”

Following this, early in 1887, Boulanger requested that his colleague in the Ministry of the Interior extend surveillance activities to departmental prefectures. In compliance, the Interior Minister informed prefects across France of Boulanger’s regional intelligence services, and described means for watching and documenting foreigners passing through France. The circular requested the prefects’ cooperation with the military authorities, and provided details for documenting visitors to hotels in their area. In terms of hierarchy, departmental prefects were instructed to facilitate these army agents in their task. The conformity demanded by Boulanger in each region of France in regard to the surveillance of spies can be viewed as an important step in his attempts to centralize power within the military’s administration.

In terms of intervention into civilian justice, Boulanger began the practice of appointing army representatives to assist in espionage trials, either by gathering information, serving as expert witnesses, or intervening on the ground. Lastly, Boulanger extended his paranoid threat of espionage to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by instructing military attachés to direct all communications directly to him, while keeping them hidden from the relevant ambassador. Further, his concern with the protection of information was so great, that he had the Section watching foreign ambassadors and attachés at the embassies in Paris like a hawk. A German ambassador, recalling this paranoid

14 “Instruction très confidentielle sur l’application de la loi de 18 Avril 1886 relative a la surveillance de la Gendarmerie,” dated 9 December 1886. 7N 11, SHD.
15 See letter from General Boulanger dated 7 January 1887, F 12851, Archives Nationales de France (AN), Paris.
16 Letter from the Minister of the Interior to the prefects, dated 9 February 1887, SHD 1M 2197, as well as letter from the Minister of the Interior to the prefects dated 20 January 1887, 1M 870, Archives départementales des Alpes-Maritimes (AM), Nice, France.
17 Letter from General Boulanger dated 10 October 1886 in the case against a German man named Christian Sandler, arrested in Brest. Colonel Sandherr, the Statistical Section’s head, was known to search the belongings of the accused for convicting pieces. BB 6080, AN.
18 See letters of January 1886 and 18 March 1886, 7N 664, SHD.
and restrictive atmosphere, likened working in the embassy during the Boulanger years to being in a fortress during wartime.19

Boulanger’s vigilance in keeping the country safe from spies took on a particularly xenophobic tinge. Whereas the text of the new legislation did not distinguish between French civilians and foreigners, Boulanger’s directive to the gendarmerie warned that, “in sum, the military spy is an individual, most often of foreign nationality.” Boulanger stressed the surveillance of foreigners on French territory, a project that culminated in the creation in early 1887 of national lists, known as Carnet A, which would locate foreigners of military age living in France, and Carnet B, targeting French or foreign nationals, suspected of possible espionage, to be rounded up in the event of future mobilization.20 Police and gendarmes quickly began to fill the Carnet B with names of foreigners or Frenchmen considered threatening, from Louis Stocker, a Bavarian whose visit to an army fort and receipt of letters from Berlin rendered him suspicious, to 18 year-old Eugene Metzmacker, placed on the Carnet B after being overheard singing songs of German patriotism.21 In addition to watching foreigners themselves, the army encouraged widespread public participation in its surveillance activities by stressing the benefits of denunciations of suspects by vigilant citizens.22 Under the auspices of defense of country and fatherland, the army thus encouraged the recognition of national difference, and the association of outsiders with ‘enemies of the State.’23

It was thus in such a fashion that General Boulanger, as Minister of War, built up the counterespionage system under the Third Republic. In a country

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19 “At the embassy, we lived as if in a fortress and in wartime, despite being at peace. Under Boulanger, who had intentionally put in place and directed French espionage, it was even worse than it is today.” Maurice Baumont, Aux Sources de l’Affaire: l’Affaire Dreyfus d’après les archives diplomatiques (Paris: Productions de Paris, 1959), 278.
21 Metzmacker was placed on the Carnet B on 28 November 1892. He was then watched in strict detail without authorities finding any other reason to suspect him of espionage, and was therefore removed from the list when it seemed that he was joining the French army. This anecdote serves as proof of unnecessary paranoia, and of the contemporary ‘spy fever,’ with the use of espionage as an excuse to fight back against perceived attacks on French integrity. 2I 323, SHD. For Stocker, see 7N 674, SHD.
22 Boulanger writes in the 9 December 1886 “Instructions to the Gendarmerie”: “Finally, a denunciation or accusation could powerfully contribute to sounding the alarm and following the track of serious clues.” Indeed, denunciation letters from identified and anonymous citizens to the military and police denouncing acquaintances and neighbors as spies grew in number in the years following 1886. 7N 11, SHD. For denunciation letters, see BA 1332-1334, Archives de la Préfecture de Police (APP), Paris.
23 Mitchell asserts that it was with the Carnet B that, “the roots of the Dreyfus affair were firmly planted within the French army.” Mitchell, “Xenophobic Style,” 421.
steeped in xenophobia, and already willing to place part of the blame for its ills on spies, the public and the nation were fully behind the General’s projects to repress espionage. Less obvious, however, would be support for the French army maintaining spies of its own. To many Frenchmen, the character of the spy ran contrary to their notion of the honorable gentleman, and military authorities noted that the French did not have the taste for espionage.24 Yet, as many were to acknowledge, if such a deed were to take place for the good of the nation, one could then apply the Machiavellian dictum of the ends justifying the means.25

As Minister of War, Boulanger showed himself to be favorable to the use of secret agents and secret methodology to advance France’s strategic position. Upon Colonel Vincent’s request, Boulanger agreed to essentially triple the budget for the Statistical Section, such that in 1886 funding for the Section increased more than it had and more than it would for the remainder of the pre-War years.26 With Boulanger’s blessing, Colonel Vincent used these secret funds to pay agents and to purchase important documents.27 Agents working for the Section under Boulanger’s watch included employees of the various foreign embassies in Paris, aristocrats with important connections, miscellaneous adventurers, and agents of the French police. Probably the most famous of the latter was Guillaume Schnaebelé, whose capture brought France and Germany to the brink of war in April 1887, and subsequently brought the end to Boulanger’s reign as Minister of War. His case is also illustrative of the power of revenge in sanctioning an otherwise questionable practice such as espionage.

Guillaume Schnaebelé, an Alsatian-born Frenchman, was employed by the French state as a commissaire spéciale along the French-German border

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24 General Jules Lewal, one of the main advocates for the development of a French espionage service in the nineteenth century noted that, “In spite of its evident utility, espionage in France is used very little or not at all. We don’t have the taste for it. … The chivalrous character of our nation is not well disposed to work of this kind, which is presented as something traitorous and disloyal.” Lewal, cited in Krop, Secrets, 14.
25 One example is in the following quote from Colonel Fix: “If I have promised someone not to use either a lie or a ruse to discover his secret, it would dishonor me to do so. But if I have not promised anything to my enemy, who I want dead and who tries to kill me, I can use a ruse or a lie to unearth his secrets. I will not be dishonored for that, to the contrary, as instead of acting in a personal interest, I have acted in the general interest; my action is commanded by an authority higher than mine and responsible; it is for the patrie that I risk my life.” Colonel Fix, Le Service dans les états-majors (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1891), 559.
26 While the amount of secret funds and the percentage of these funds within the army’s budget rose consistently in the years following 1870, it took its greatest leap, and was at its highest point while Boulanger headed the War Ministry. Laurent, Politiques d’Ombre, 480-1.
27 Ibid., 481-5, 516.
when the Deuxième Bureau recruited him to conduct reconnaissance. As early as 1880, he became part of an espionage ring operating within the annexed territories, and had established an extensive network of his own agents and informers working along the Alsatian border. The Schnaebelé “Affair” began on 20 April 1887 when in response to an invitation from his counterpart in Germany, Schnaebelé crossed the frontier into the no man’s land, where the German police arrested him as a French spy. The French government protested the circumstances under which Schnaebelé had been arrested, and following some diplomatic wrangling and international pressure, Bismarck personally released Schnaebelé after the latter spent ten days in prison in Leipzig. However, while Schnaebelé did not end up going to trial as originally scheduled, three other men – named Klein, Erhart and Grebert – who had worked alongside Schnaebelé, did face the German justice system around the same time.

The rhetoric surrounding these affairs filled national and international newspapers for months, with many giving support to Boulanger for trying to improve the chances of the French army through knowledge of the enemy. These discussions illuminate two important ideas that can be further tied to Boulanger and help us understand perceptions of him: first, the notion that to spy for country could be considered honorable, viewed as equivalent to fighting for country as a soldier, and second, that in the name of revenge, espionage was to be not just tolerated, but encouraged.

The connection between spies and revenge had been established in the French mentality regarding previous conflicts. Books and newspapers that discussed Bismarck’s use of spies during the Franco-Prussian War often noted that the motive for Bismarck to have waged war against France in the first place was to seek revenge for the Prussian defeat at Iéna by Napoleon’s forces. In a spy novel published in 1874 by Alphonse Brot, the Prussian spies begin their plotting in 1866, with the specific intent of seeking revenge for this very defeat. Revenge is an incredibly powerful emotion, such that scholars have suggested that it played an even more important part in the advent of the First World War than did economics or politics. In the case of Schnaebelé and the other agents, the idea of revenge – represented most visually in the person of General Boulanger – facilitated an acceptance of the job of gathering intelligence on Germany.

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28 F7 12572, AN.
29 F7 12572, AN.
30 See François Loyal, Le Dossier de la revanche, l’espionnage allemand en France (Paris: A. Savine, 1887), and “Aveux Allemands,” Le Siècle, August 1888, F7 12644-45, AN.
31 Paul Bleton, La Cristallisation de l’ombre: les Origines Oubliées du Roman d’espionnage sous la IIIe République (Limoges: PULIM, 2011), 38-40. Bleton refers to Brot’s book as one “in which lies the origin of the spy novel.”
The notion that the captured French spies on trial in Leipzig were seeking to avenge the lost provinces came from both France and Germany. German opinion stressed the fact that Schnaebelé and his agents should not be considered as individuals working for their own benefit, but as representatives of a sovereign state, naming Vincent and Boulanger by name as authorities directing espionage activities. In France, however, instead of being demonized, Schnaebelé and his cohorts were portrayed as national heroes. The newspaper Revanche referred to Schnaebelé as a “devoted servant, [a] tried and tested patriot,” and the French press took the side of the accused at Leipzig, asking, “Is this fidelity a crime?”

The newspaper the Intransigeant printed an excerpt of Klein’s interrogation wherein he proclaimed, “I am a French spy... I am French! I am a French soldier!” Nonetheless, these men had, of course, been gathering intelligence that could be used to exact revenge in the event that France and Germany would once again go to war. Over the years, Schnaebelé and his agents handed over precious information to Paris detailing progress on German rail construction in Alsace-Lorraine, locations of forts, advancements in gunpowder, and more. Thus, in defending Schnaebelé, the press and certain politicians were also defending France’s right to collect such intelligence, as well as the War Minister who was associated with him.

In sum, the Schnaebelé Affair had mixed results for Boulanger. In the tense days between Schnaebelé’s arrest and release, the War Minister was not a party to the negotiations taking place at the highest levels of French government, and President Grévy had wisely rejected Boulanger’s proposal for mobilization of French troops at the outset of the affair. Further, Boulanger’s bellicose attitude in the face of Germany was such that France’s leaders sought to remove him from a position of power. Thus, on 17 May, just weeks after the conclusion of the Schnaebelé Affair, President Grévy replaced the Goblet government with one led by Maurice Rouvier, who appointed Théophile Ferron to replace Boulanger as Minister of War.

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33 The German lawyer Treplin made a distinction between these cases and prior trials, the latter being concerned with “individuals who gathered intelligence at their own initiative, in the interest of France.” Reported by the Journal d’Alsace, July 1887. F7 12572, AN.
34 “Un Abjection,” Revanche, 4 May 1887. F7 12572, AN.
35 Le Petit Parisien, 17 June 1887. F7 12572, AN.
36 Intransigeant, 9 July 1887. F7 12572, AN.
37 F7 12641, AN. See also several reports from Schnaebelé in 2R 10, Archives départementales de la Meurthe-et-Moselle (MM), Nancy, France.
38 The Radical deputy Camille Pelletan explained that it was no secret that countries are wary of each other and that all try to spy on each other, but complained of Germany’s decision to charge the practice of espionage – an action that he refers to as métier – as a crime of high treason. La Depeche, 1 May 1887. F7 12572, AN.
39 Irvine, Boulanger Affair, 37.
While his fall from the War Ministry meant the end of Boulanger's career as leader of the French army, it also meant the beginning of his more notorious existence as politician. Several historians have traced Boulanger's path from sweetheart of the Radical left to figurehead of the Third Republic's extreme right, agreeing that one of the factors that made Boulanger so attractive to the conservatives was his vocal patriotism and appeal to the populace with ideas such as his desire for revenge. There can be little question that the Schnaebelé Affair contributed to the creation of this image, noting, as did historian William Irvine, that public opinion attributed Schnaebelé's release “entirely to the dashing minister of war who could make the German empire tremble.”

However, it is well established that histories can be misleading, and while contemporary press accounts and subsequent analyses have indeed connected the names of Boulanger and Schnaebelé, the reality is somewhat different. Boulanger has long been credited with instituting the practice of using border guards like Schnaebelé as spies, yet the archives show that the latter had been working for Vincent and the Statistical Section since at least 1880. Further, the 18 April 1886 espionage law, for which Boulanger has similarly gotten all the credit as the individual who submitted the law and pushed to see it passed, was actually conceived of not by le Général Revanche, but by his predecessor, General Campenon, a fact that remains buried in the army’s files. Why then has Boulanger’s legend in this regard become greater still than the contributions that he had made intentionally?

Boulanger's impact on the development of French intelligence – both real, and hyperbolic – stemmed from two major preoccupations: paranoia of invasion and the desire for revenge. Spies fit perfectly into the narrative of international

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41 Irvine, Boulanger Affair, 37.
42 See notes in file F 12641, AN. Under the direction of the Sûreté Générale, a number of police commissioners had for years been given the responsibility of observing relations along the Alsatian border. In the early 1880s, the War Ministry became more involved with the transport of information across borders, and began to communicate directly with the police commissioners, with the intelligence bureau, headed by Colonel Vincent, facilitating this interaction. Réné Goblet, “Souvenirs de ma vie politique: l’affaire Schnaebelé” in Revue politique et parlementaire, 1894, 180. Those crediting Boulanger with instituting this practice include Frederic Seager, The Boulanger Affair: Political Crossroad of France 1886-1889, 60, and William Irvine, who notes that “Schnaebelé had in fact been engaged in espionage, at the express request of Boulanger.” Irvine, Boulanger Affair, 37.
43 IM 2197, SHD. Note that in an article, “L’Espionnage” in Le Figaro, 11 March 1886, the reporter Gaston Calmette criticizes the government for not acting on espionage earlier and praises Boulanger for being the one to do so.
competition that these preoccupations fostered. To alleviate his paranoid fears of infiltration, Boulanger translated his awareness of intelligence into the development of a large counterespionage apparatus, through the passing of the espionage law, the creation of regional intelligence services within the army, and the institution of the Carnet B. Such actions appealed to a public looking for scapegoats, and Boulanger’s paranoia of spies was reflected by the popular press and in individuals writing denunciation letters, two avenues for paranoia that would grow in the years following 1886. Even after his departure from the War Ministry, popular opinion remembered the General fondly, criticizing the weaknesses of the courts for failing to convict accused spies, giving the impression that under Boulanger, such lenience would never have been tolerated. Further, the army took on a more central role than ever in looking for spies, particularly the small intelligence service. A major result of this project was thus the transformation of the army’s service de renseignements, the Statistical Section, from a small office originally charged to gather information on foreign armies to a body with considerable autonomy to undertake counterespionage. It was this service, and its freedom over investigations that “knew no limits,” that would lead to the outrages of the Dreyfus Affair.

Boulanger’s project for the expansion of counterespionage and espionage was facilitated by the acceptance of the rhetoric of revenge for the defeat of the Franco-Prussian War. Though the notion of revenge is hardly new, the examples above call upon the idea to introduce a connection between the growth of an intelligence industry and to mark a shift in the acceptance of the practice of espionage to help France enact retribution. The end of the nineteenth century was the period when France sought not only to reclaim its provinces, but also its honor, which citizens felt had been besmirched by the embarrassing defeat of 1870. In acting to be prepared and ready for a future war, the use of individuals like Schnaebelé as spies marked the beginning both of a period of action to

44 After the successful conviction of the spy Fritz Kilian in 1888, newspapers complained when other spies were let off and commented about the Germans being “overjoyed with the revocation of Boulanger, author and promoter of the Espionage Law.” See, La Cocarde dated 3 November 1888. BB18 6080, AN.
45 Bach, L’Armée de Dreyfus, 498.
46 As with paranoia, the idea of using spies for revenge saw its genesis under the Boulanger regime, and would be repeated by the press, and by scholars such as Robert Detourbet, who commented that “it is on us to imitate them, on us to respond to their arms by using their arms.” Robert Detourbet, L’Espionnage et la Trahison: Étude de droit français et de législation comparée (Paris: L. Larose, 1897), 67.
reclaim French stature and one that would propel Boulanger’s political career. With its defeat to Prussia, the army had played a major role in the collective loss of self-respect, and therefore was ready to play its part in restoring honor to France. Spies were thus beginning to be viewed as patriotic, as evident in military scholar James Violle’s discussion of military espionage, wherein he noted that, “the devotion of this type of spy can be viewed as heroism.” Such patriotism, which allowed even the lowest profession to be viewed as honorable, or at least necessary, was the same patriotism that drew a nation to Georges Boulanger.

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48 Seager notes that, “by his new popularity, Boulanger decided to fill the role assigned to him as the savior of national honor.” Seager, 54.