

Abstract: From Versailles via Paris to Moscow

Strategic options and perspectives of the German Reich in the mirror of national power politics (part 2)

Eberhard Birk/Gerhard P. Groß

Like the German Empire, the "Third Reich" was an empire of war: The time from the 30th of January 1933 until the beginning of the Second World War was determined by war preparations. In this connection two ideological "basic laws" in particular played an important part: Firstly, there was the matter of - supposed - lessons learned from the "stab-in-the-back legend". Secondly, everything was supposed to serve the establishment of a totalitarian-authoritarian state on the basis of Nazi ideology, the recovering of a superpower-position for the German Reich by breaking the Versailles Treaty, the rearmament of the armed forces, the preparation of a war "for conquering new lebensraum in the East and its ruthless Germanisation", as Hitler frankly put it in his first speech as Chancellor of the Reich for the assembled leading figures of the Reichswehr on 3rd February 1933. Thus, Hitler and the German generals had a "partial identity of objectives" at their disposal, which were starting points for an aggressive and warmongering foreign and military policy of the "Third Reich". The idea that "the revolution" at the end of the First World War had attacked the triumphantly fighting army from behind consequently prompted the National Socialists to produce the domestically and propagandistically charged "people's community", which would support both Fuehrer and Wehrmacht faithfully even in unfavourable course of war - inner war preparation. The struggle for autarchy served as a link to outer war preparation - foreign policy and military strategic action during the following years until 1939. In order not to depend on raw material deliveries from overseas, which had led to all manner of gigantic logistic problems in the German Reich during the First World War, caused by the remote blockade of the British Navy, an "Eastern Empire", which actually became effective for a short time due to the thrust of 1918 into the collapsing Russian Empire, and mentally as a potential future chance, was supposed to contribute to the economic and strategic autarchy of the German Reich. The German strategic doctrine represented the military attempt, the strategic dilemma, to achieve continental hegemony without having sufficient economic, military and political bases of influence. At the root of all this was the misinterpretation of Germany's real potential of strength by the military and political elite. German strategic thinking had always involved high risks jeopardizing the existence of the Reich and was certainly no victory remedy, but in the end only a stopgap solution - a doctrine for "the war of the poor", who desired a "space in the sun" all the same.

