

new: From Versailles via Paris to Moscow Part 1



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Strategic Options and Perspectives of the German Empire with a View to National Power Policy (Part 1)

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At first glance, the strategic-political analysis of the framework conditions for the international systems as well as for all the interrelations of the dynamic “Concert of Europe” between the two world wars¹⁾ unveils a seeming paradox with a view to the “dark continent”²⁾ in the “age of extremes”³⁾: Notwithstanding the German Empire’s defeat in the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles,⁴⁾ by which the central European country’s political and military power was curtailed, the very same country was able to achieve a dominant position in terms of power politics between the “Eiffel Tower” and the “Kremlin” within a little more than 20 years. This position went beyond the scope of the objective that the German Empire, which had been proclaimed in 1871 with pompous political imagery in the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, had aimed at in a far less ambitious attempt⁵⁾. Therefore, against the backdrop of the (dis)continuities in the Empire’s foreign policies, it will be demonstrated how it was able, despite varying domestic and foreign political, ideational and ideological orientations and benefitting from divergent security-political approaches in a dynamic environment, to gain its hoped for and feared continental leading position. In addition, there is the question to what extent the military planning followed the strategic options of national power politics or rather developed a dysfunctional dynamics by blanking out the interaction of political, (armament-related) economic and military aspects on the substrategic and operative level. The danger of dysfunction only seemed real if new strategic framework conditions were mentally as little accepted as a merely serving function of the military; if strategic issues of “space” were reduced to the operative factor “terrain”, if war-historical “lessons learned” concepts were minimalised into positive experiences; and if the superiority of the own command and control principles were taken as the basic constant.

The Empire and Strategy

Before 1914, the German Empire in the centre of the continent was seen by Europeans a (half) hegemonial power and vigorous nation state that, with the foundation of the Reich, revolutionised international relations as much as the French Revolution had. Where there had been a power-political vacuum during centuries in the form of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and the German Confederation, neighbouring states started witnessing, in 1871, the emergence of a strongly populated military and economic monolith, bursting with vigour and self-assurance. This German Empire was superior to any other power in Europe; no other continental European state constituted by itself a serious power-political challenge. This strategic advantage, however, was tarnished by a double shortcoming: Having evolved “encircled”⁶⁾ by the three major powers France, Russia and Austria-Hungary, the German nation state was too weak to successfully resist an alliance formed by all other states. As the saturated lesser German Empire the new state had to integrate itself wisely into the European framework.⁷⁾

When the Bismarckera of saturation was put aside after the accession of Wilhelm II, its “ambition to be a world power”⁸⁾ started to increase. From 1896, an imperialistic policy⁹⁾ was officially pursued. With an appearance on the international political stage that was perceived as aggressive in Europe, accompanied by economic efficiency and consciousness of its role as an emerging power with a future ahead, the German Empire grew to be a security-political challenge through a consequent development of its naval forces¹⁰⁾ but also through the Bagdad railway project¹¹⁾. Against the backdrop of a whole conglomerate of being a “late nation”¹²⁾, of “naive self-admiration”¹³⁾, of concentrating on a narrowed-down, purely “military” view of political and social life as well as of accepting violent conflict solutions, the “reach at world power”¹⁴⁾ is an example of how strategically disoriented the complex foreign, security and defence policy of the Empire really was, which as a “nervous major power”¹⁵⁾ wanted too much too early and too fast. Even years before the start of the First World War the potential strategic frontlines were hardened: firstly, because of the Entente Cordiale between France and Great Britain (1904) as well as the “Triple-Entente” including czarist Russia (1907) and, secondly, because of the Dual Alliance of Germany and Austria.

The Prussian-German General Staff as the military product of Bismarck’s “cauchemar des coalitions”¹⁶⁾ had, since the foundation of the Empire, been entirely focused on the central position¹⁷⁾ between the hereditary enemy France and czarist Russia. The military plans of the Chief of the General Staff, Alfred Graf von Schlieffen, intended the dissolution of the imminent war on two fronts into two wars on one front following each other – at first, victory over France was supposed to be gained after the 42nd day of mobilisation; subsequently, the armed forces were meant to turn against Russia, for which a longer mobilisation phase was “allowed”. In this context, Schlieffen attributed a negligible battle value to the British expedition forces and completely neglected the political importance of the planned violation of Belgian neutrality. The modified Schlieffen Plan¹⁸⁾, which tried to untie the Gordian knot against the backdrop of the crisis in July 1914, constituted the political and military catalyst that turned the First World War into the “primal catastrophe” of the 20th century.¹⁹⁾

After the failed implementation of the modified Schlieffen Plan under the military responsibility of Colonel General Moltke the Younger (1st General Staff) at the Marne River in September 1914 at the beginning of the war²⁰⁾ and the attempt of the 2nd General Staff under Lieutenant General Erich von Falkenhayn in 1916 at Verdun – as the topos of industrial warfare to bleed France white²¹⁾ –, the 3rd General Staff under Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and Infantry General Erich Ludendorff²²⁾ undertook to systematically concentrate all the German Empire's personnel, technical and material resources in the framework of the "Hindenburg Programme"²³⁾ in order to overcome the dysfunctional organisation of political and military polycracy and its juxtaposition and opposition and to make warfare more efficient. Above all, the dwindling resources demanded a new strategic basic decision.

With the decision to re-enter the unconditional submarine war, which was taken on 9 January 1917 at the Great Headquarters in the presence of the Emperor and the Chancellor – who explicitly opposed it – the General Staff consciously played "va banque". By employing submarines, which, in comparison to army operations, required hardly any personnel and material, the support for Great Britain and France from overseas was hoped to be discontinued so pressure could be taken off the western front. The downside of the military strategic logic was the political consequence of this step. After the U.S.A. had entered into the war in April 1917, the German Empire led a war (with a foreseeable end) against almost all the great powers in the world.

The last chance was an utterly unforeseeable line of action taken by the General Staff. Sending the Russian revolutionary Lenin, who was living in exile in Switzerland, to Russia after a socialist-communist revolution was supposed to remove the czarist Empire from among the enemies.²⁴⁾ This was where the profound common strategic interests of the General Staff and Lenin met: According to their individual estimate of the situation, both needed peace at the German-Russian Front: Lenin for the implementation of his revolutionary objectives, and the German General Staff for making dozens of divisions available. In this way, the expected personal and material superiority of the U.S.A. in the west was supposed to be subverted by a German victory. The troops left in the east advanced into Russia, which was going under in the turmoil of the revolution, thus creating a gigantic East Empire within the German Reich.²⁵⁾

This East Empire formed a basis, even later, for ideological and military patterns of perception and action both on the side of the National Socialists and the generals of Reichswehr and Wehrmacht.²⁶⁾

On 21 March 1918, the General Staff started the last "strategic" offensive on the western front. When the U.S.A.'s superiority became effective, early German successes were replaced by several desperate operative failures, until, on 8 August 1918, it came to the "black day of the German Army", as Ludendorff called it. With this day, at the latest, the General Staff had lost initiative to the enemy. The Central Powers' irreparable loss of resources was matched by an increase of capabilities on the side of the allies. Ultimately, the German Empire with its only power-politically important "strategic" partner Austria-Hungary was defeated by the Allies. The unwavering naval supremacy of the Allies guaranteed (almost unimpeded) access to raw materials and the transport of personnel and material. Global conflicts are won by naval powers, or naval alliances, respectively.

The Signature of the Epoch after the First World War

In essence, already during the First World War, a change of paradigm for the new security policy came about in the year 1917, with the emergence of two effective and history-charged doctrines of salvation with a global claim. The "liberal peace model" approach, tailored to the vital interests of the U.S.A. and its president Woodrow Wilson, comprising free economy, liberal society and self-determination, was diametrically opposed by the idioms class, socialism/communism, International, Lenin's ideology and its "socialist peace model".²⁷⁾

The Soviet leaders were fully aware that their ideological revolution had power-political implications – it, too, was comparable to the impact of the French Revolution. While the global approach of the two new major ideological protagonists of international networking stemmed from their immanent world view, Great Britain, France and the German Empire as the "old" European powers remained to be the representatives of the "classical" balance-of-power politics or, respectively, of half-hegemonial thinking and thus clung to the traditional reception and action patterns – every state was a potential ally and a potential opponent or enemy at the same time.

Moreover, the complexity of the new picture of the situation grew because, apart from the new ideological frontlines, there were also the ones between the factual and perceived winners and losers. Great Britain fought against its beginning global political agony, which created fronts against the U.S.A. – the British Admiralty did not completely rule out a confrontation with the U.S.A. ²⁸⁾ while France owed its nominal position as a victorious power to the U.S.A. Having lost the war under the name of Russian Empire, the Soviet "pariah" evoked hopes and fears alike; Austro-Germany as a remnant of the half Slavic Habsburg Monarchy had forfeited its status as a European power. The old Europe found itself on top or, respectively, in front of a regulatory heap of shards. Particularly Central Europe resembled a power-political "mass of debris" of Finland, which had broken free in 1917 during the October Revolution – from the Baltic States, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to the Adriatic Sea.²⁹⁾ In eastern France the whole continent was going through a phase of permanent political and social, foreign and security-political, military and power-strategic revolution. „*The cardinal illusion might have been to found a stable international order with profoundly unstable states.*"³⁰⁾

Heterogeneous national objectives were mixed into this overall melange. When the fragmentation of the German Empire could not be forced through in the course of the negotiations in Versailles, France pursued the realisation of the old, allegedly natural, Rhine border. At the same time, an alternative was sought for the lost alliance option with Russia: Consequently, alliances with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were on the diplomatic agenda, since remaining Austro-Germany had a strong affinity with the German Empire. An intended union with the German Empire was prohibited by the Allies in the system of the Paris suburb contracts.³¹⁾

Not only from the French viewpoint would the efforts of the First World War have been dysfunctional, had a greater German Empire arisen power-politically strong from this struggle. While France was a revision power of the Versailles contract, since the latter did not constitute a "Carthaginian peace" that rendered the German Empire defenceless, Great Britain successively, but for other reasons, withdrew from the Versailles philosophy. In March 1919, Hungary was proclaimed a Soviet Republic and in the late summer of 1920 the Red Army was standing before Warsaw in the Polish-Soviet War – bolshevism seemed to be invading Central Europe from the east and cover it with the germs of revolution. It was thus necessary to stabilise the German Empire as part of a "silent alliance" and, if need be, to transform it into a bulwark against communism/bolshevism. From a historical perspective it seemed to be more reasonable, from the British point of view, to again pass the role of the "continental opponent" to the German Empire, like it used to do to the Prussians, and to hope that it would be able to withstand both Soviet and French hegemonial aspirations.

The Power-Political Situation of the German Empire

The German Empire's major concern, as Versailles could not be prevented, was the dissolution of the political, territorial and military "chains of Versailles" – the "revision syndrome"³²⁾ entrenched the entire foreign, economic, finance and military policy of the Weimar Republic. The power-political situation of the German Empire, however, developed positively with regard to the changed overall situation, in spite of the lost war and the conditions imposed by the Versailles Treaty. In the east the threat from the Russian Empire had disappeared. Thus, the "central position" as military-strategic sword of Damocles ceased to be applicable. The German Empire was relieved of the ever looming two-front war against the two second-strongest continental states. The weakened power-political factor "Austria", too, had collapsed.

As a consequence, there no longer existed any vital power-political challenge in the southeast of the Empire. Moreover, in place of the old multi-ethnic empires a belt of small states emerged from the broken-up Habsburg Empire. Not one among these aforementioned newly formed states was able to pose a serious security-political threat to the German Empire, which had survived in its essence – in spite or because of Wilson's imperative to build nation states and the resulting ethnic minority problems and the break-up of large economic, trade and customs areas, but also because of their weaker level of industrialisation.

The factors that had strained the relations between the Empire and Great Britain before the First World War – the colonies as a strategic Achilles' heel and the navy as "Germania on the seas" – had vanished. The former colonies were placed under the mandate of the League of Nations; the fleet had sunk itself in Scapa Flow. Thus, from the British perspective, the German Empire was, in the long run, going to be reduced to the status of a genuinely continental power that did not pose a danger to Great Britain.

After its troops had been redeployed and the country had refrained from participating in the League of Nations initiated by President Wilson, the U.S.A., which had finally decided the outcome of the First World War, was de facto no longer present on the European continent. The German Empire merely played a role as an economic junior partner and, respectively, as a source of reparation payments supposed to pay Great Britain's and France's war debts.

Thus, France remained the sole potential opponent. It was, however, weakened because of its absolute and relative war losses to the German Empire. In addition, the First World War had left enormous destruction in the northeast of France and without the Russian Empire France did not have a strong ally against Germany any more.

This short outline of the new strategic situation after the First World War illuminates the German foreign policy's extended realm of influence, when analysed under power-political viewpoints. In this context, however, two limitations become evident at first. Firstly, until the mid 1920s there was no economic basis for it; and, secondly, from a politico-theoretical perspective the (new) Weimar Republic with its democratic constitution – not to forget the Versailles Treaty with its manifold military restrictions, like allowing only 100,000 army and 15,000 navy personnel and forbidding an air force, as well as the demilitarised zone 50 kilometres east of the Rhine – was not able to return to its great-power policy, like during its imperial times.³³⁾

Options of Reorientation

This policy was, indeed, aimed at by the Chief of the General Staff, Hans von Seeckt. His "lever" was the newly formed Poland, about whose importance, particularly against the backdrop of the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, he wrote: *"The current Polish state is a creation of the Entente. It is meant to replace the former Russian pressure on the German eastern front (...) If Poland breaks down, the entire construction of the Versailles Treaty will falter."*³⁴⁾ For Seeckt it was downright logical to cooperate with the Red Army in order to thwart the political provisions of armaments control under the "shameful dictate" of Versailles and train the integration of forbidden weapon systems and services, which could not be monitored by the Inter-Allied Control Commission established in the Soviet Union.³⁵⁾ In the end, however under completely different presumptions than later in the Third Reich, he intended to implement his conviction to eliminate the Polish state – "Poloniam esse delendam" – with military instruments. However, Seeckt's approach to guarantee the prerequisite for freedom of action in foreign policy by focussing on military power proved insubstantial because military options were (for the time being) not realistic.

By contrast, by changing the method, Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann (1923-29) developed a completely different perspective for regaining the German position as a major power in the framework of "democratic" foreign policy: By way of economic prosperity he wanted, in accord with the policy of the Western powers, to create the prerequisite for taking the chances to regain the Empire's lost eastern territories via a successive revision policy and a compromise with France.

The example of the Locarno Conference of 1925 makes his strategic approach appear like through a magnifying glass. After the catastrophic crisis in 1923, "Locarno" aimed at creating a new phase of international stability and thus the prerequisite for the payment of reparations, in exchange for which the German Empire was given a guarantee for its western border by Great Britain, the accession to the League of Nations including a seat in its security council and, with it, *cum grano salis*, its acceptance as a European major power.³⁷⁾

Thus, it seemed to be only a matter of time before, in a peaceful environment, the German Empire would turn into a predominant European power, for which another space might emerge through its foreign policy in the (south)east of the continent, since the Soviet Union had nothing to offer for the states to its west. In the west, France's offensive anti-German foreign policy had become a matter of history with the Treaty of Locarno. After the Rhine line had become a mere illusion, France concentrated on a defensive attitude in its security policy, which finally also became apparent in the construction of the Maignot-line.³⁸⁾ With this, the psychological-political importance of the security pacts with Poland and Czechoslovakia was undermined – an army that digs oneself in a bunker system has mentally switched to defence; and offensive operations that might have become necessary on the basis of a French mutual assistance pact during a German-Polish or a German-Czech conflict did not seem to entail a threatening or deterring effect. The most advantageous foreign-political scenario for the German Empire since its foundation was, after the Weimar Republic³⁹⁾ had failed for reasons on the domestic front, later exploited by the Third Reich.

Operative thinking from Moltke the Elder to Seeckt

With the foundation of the German Empire in 1871 the geostrategic situation in Europe changed considerably. While leading politicians like Benjamin Disraeli⁴⁰⁾ viewed the balance of power in Europe as a destroyed one, the central position of Germany was rated as a threat by the Empire itself, since, as the only one of the five major powers, it bordered on three potential war opponents: France in the west, Austria-Hungary in the southeast and Russia in the east. While Bismarck and his successors were trying to avert a possible war on two or even more fronts by establishing alliances such as the Dual Alliance with Austria, the General Staff in Berlin was preparing for a war on two fronts.⁴¹⁾ For the mostly Prussian general staff officers warfare on several fronts was no new experience. Their ancestors had simultaneously fought in the Thirty Years' War and under Frederick the Great against a number of European powers, when they were outnumbered. They themselves had successfully waged a war on two fronts in the German War of 1866. For a potential war on two fronts against France and Russia the General Staff felt prepared, although Germany was inferior regarding materiel and personnel. It was convinced that a victorious war on two fronts could be fought against Russia and France, even against the odds of being inferior in terms of materiel and personnel, because there was the country's central position with the resulting advantage of the inner frontline in combination with the establishment of a qualitatively high-class army as well as superior leadership. For the General Staff, the decisive factor was operative leadership, which had already been successful during the so-called "unification wars".⁴²⁾

The father of operative leadership was the Chief of the General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke the Elder. In view of the mass armies that emerged at the beginning of the 19th century, he had explored new paths and had combined several already existing ideas with the new technological innovations of his time, telegraph and railway. For him, the operation played the crucial role. He saw it as movement which, thanks to the partition of the own armed forces into armies that operated independently but were led by the General Staff, had to manoeuvre at high speeds. The units acting separately were to be united during the battle at the outermost frontline in order to circle and defeat the enemy forces. Manoeuvre meant the opportunity to bypass the mass army's enhanced firepower, which supported the opponent during the battle. In order to reach this goal, the manoeuvres had to be directed and executed fast, making use of the surprise factor. For Moltke, operative thinking meant a system based on manoeuvre, tailored to the situation and leading to a fast success.⁴³⁾

Although Moltke subordinated operation to strategy and did not treat it as a self-sufficient category between tactics and strategy instead using the two terms interchangeably, "operation" was incorporated into the language of the General Staff in the 1870s. Its de facto incorporation into the vocabulary of the General Staff, however, took place no earlier than under Field Marshal Alfred Graf von Schlieffen. Under his leadership, the General Staff's concept for a war on two fronts against Russia and France, which almost inevitably resulted from Germany's central geographic position, emerged. Assuming that Germany would not be able to win a long war because of its inferiority regarding material and personal resources, Schlieffen excogitated an operative solution for a strategic problem. He planned to outrun the enemy's mobilisation of resources by a fast victory. The "great man of few words", as his general staff officers used to call him, condensed Moltke's decisive parameters manoeuvre, attack, morale, will, speed, initiative, effort, envelopment, surprise and destruction into one single, swift act comprising tactics, operation and military strategy.

In accordance with the technologisation and rationalisation tendencies of his time he tried to do everything to prevent anything unpredictable or irrational by calculated operations command and control. For this purpose, he forced operative thinking into a monolithic block by concentrating the thinking and acting of the General Staff⁴⁴⁾, which had been enlarged into the central operative planning and leadership body since Moltke the Elder, on one enormous envelopment. With it the enemy was to be dictated the law of action and a "destructive victory" to be secured even after a defeat. However, he ignored the lessons learned from the Franco-German War: That a people's war would confront regular armies with bigger problems; make fast operative victories more difficult; prolong the war to an indefinite time span; and that even excellent operative warfare did not guarantee a fast end of the war. Altogether, the General Staff rarely thought military problems through on a strategic-political level, but merely on an operative strategic one. Under Schlieffen, as the result of the selective evaluation and learning process, it concentrated only on operations that would lead to victory in spite of a numerical inferiority. The outcome was the memorandum of 1905, which was given to his successor, Colonel General Helmuth von Moltke the Younger as a "testament".⁴⁵⁾

This memorandum for a war against France, which went down in history as the "Schlieffen Plan", was built upon the principles for a war on two fronts against Russia and France and had been developed by Schlieffen in the course of many years.

1. Renouncing a defensive and reactive type of warfare and moving towards offensive and initiative.
2. Using the "inner line" to split the two-front war into two wars on one front that are to be fought successively.
3. Building main efforts with an offensive in the west and delay in the east.
4. A fast annihilation battle with a strong right wing after enveloping the French fortifications and successful marching through Luxembourgian, Dutch and Belgian territory.
5. Using the railway, after the victory, to transport victorious units to the eastern front in order to defeat the only delayed enemy.⁴⁶⁾

Based on the conviction that Germany would not be able to win a lengthy war of attrition, this constituted the operational plan for a supposedly short war. The development of operative thinking was thus largely finalised by the end of the First World War. The central factors initiative, movement and envelopment had evolved over decades in a discourse inside and outside the General Staff and had become common property and an alleged recipe for victory. The changes to the plan made by Schlieffen's successor, Colonel General Helmuth von Moltke the Younger - reinforcement of the left wing to establish a protection against a French offensive in Alsace-Lorraine and no march through the Netherlands, since he regarded this state as Germany's economic trachea in case of a war and did not entirely exclude a war - couldn't alter that fact.

In 1914 the operative planning by the General Staff led to a fiasco after only a few weeks. Enveloping the right wing failed. Neither a single nor a double envelopment, even less a final annihilation battle worked out. The repeatedly glorified victory at Tannenberg can not belie that operative thinking did not stand the test. Thus, the "Cannae of the East" admittedly constituted an operative victory, but at the same time a defeat, as the General Staff feared a catastrophe to happen in East Prussia and deployed reinforcements from the western to the eastern front, which were missing in France on the Marne as the war progressed.⁵⁰⁾

With the defeat in the west in 1914 the military and political leadership had to accept that Schlieffen's solution for the Empire's strategic dilemma had failed. The General Staff had not succeeded in outrunning the enemy states' superior potential and, by using the inner frontline and dissolving the war on two fronts into two successive fast, offensive operations each with respective regional superiority. At the same time, the trench warfare at the western front brought the frontal breakthrough, which had hardly been considered at all before the war, into the focus of operative thinking.

The First World War thus disclosed, as early as after a few weeks, the decisive weakness of German operative thinking. The German Army lacked the operative mobility needed for implementing the theoretical planning in practice. The General Staff had underestimated the interdependence between time pressure on the operative-strategic echelon and the necessary mobility of the troops for the execution of operations and therefore misjudged that mobility was the decisive factor of operations. In order to wage a quick and mobile war under time pressure and in large areas armed forces that are to annihilate an enemy under pressure of time has to be equipped not only with well-trained and well-equipped units in order to be victorious against the enemy while being inferior, but it has to be mobile as well. However, the German Army did not have such units. The attack speed was determined by the infantrymen's march step and the artillery's mobility. The enveloping of orderly retreating units was thus almost impossible. The German units therefore did not succeed in crushing the enemy by winning an offensive envelopment battle during the First World War, neither on the western nor on the eastern front, where the offensives went astray in the depth of the Russian territory. From a logistic and transport-technical view operations planning was, due to the Empire's central position, merely geared towards warfare close to the own border.

While, in the east, the World War revealed the strategic limits, it disclosed the boundaries of tactical and operative thinking in the west. The war mercilessly brought to light the huge gap between what the German Army was able to perform after thorough and realistic calculation and the demands posed to it in reality. Theory and reality in German military and political leadership were not in line, neither before nor after the war. Not even an appeal to will could change that.

In spite of the illustrated weaknesses, one has to note that the German Army made great achievements in the border area of tactics and operation. For instance, the battle at Tannenberg had to be won, first of all. The 1915 Offensive in Russia and the Rumanian Campaign in 1916 constitute examples of successful operative leadership in view of German capacities. In the frame of the available possibilities the General Staff showed great ability for innovation in certain fields, for example in the development of new tactical techniques for defence and attack.

The defeat of 1918 confirmed the General Staff's conviction that Germany was not able to win a lengthy war of attrition. Trying to compensate the disparities of resources by tactical-operative innovations had failed. To acknowledge this realisation would consequently have meant to give up a military-based power policy. That, however, lay outside the conceptual attitude of the German military élite. For the officers, raised and socialised apolitically, the development of a modern concept of strategy with the primacy of politics as the basis for warfare was unimaginable. Unswervingly, they stuck with politics-free operations.

Despite the defeat, it was out of the question for the general staff officers that German operative thinking constituted the correct leadership concept. It was not the concept that was considered to be flawed, but rather its inconsequent execution coupled with leadership mistakes, becoming evident, for example, at the dilution of the Schlieffen Plan. Therefore, the selective analysis of experiences during the war, which started immediately after it, inevitably led to the confirmation of the basic principles on mobile operational warfare that had been valid before the war.

While the Reichswehr largely refused a realistic cause study on an operative-strategic level, it evaluated the tactical war experiences professionally and purposefully. This way of partial learning did not only enter tactical, but also operative conceptual thinking within the leadership of the Empire's Army. The continuous line of balancing out inferiority by tactical and operative mobility is obvious.⁵³⁾

In reality the Reichswehr, hopelessly inferior to the potential enemy because of the obligations of the Versailles Treaty, acted on a realistic-tactical, and, at the same time, on a utopian-operative-strategic level under its head ColGen Hans von Seeckt. While the tactical innovations with the further development of combined weapons warfare strongly influenced the Army's tactics for many years, the restoration of operative thinking in the era Seeckt led to frustration and to a crisis of operative thinking. Against the backdrop of the obvious military inferiority of the Empire, officers like Col Joachim von Stülpnagel called for a realistic estimate of the situation. Stülpnagel spoke out against the classical operational war in Schlieffen's tradition and postulated instead the embedding of the people's war with irregular units as a general societal war into operative warfare. This radicalisation of warfare, which became reality in many fields during the Second World War, stood in contrast with Seeckt's traditional operative ideas and his conviction that it was the Army, and not the people, who waged war. Seeckt's operative doctrine to end a war as fast as a „blitz“ with a small, mobile and high-technology professional army, before the military and general societal enemy potentials were able to unfold, was in the end the radicalisation of Schlieffen's classical operative concept turned into starting operations, the speed of which was no longer surmountable.

Finally, neither Stülpnagel's nor Seeckt's operative concepts regarding Germany's strategic situation could, for varying reasons, be implemented. The process initiated by the Empire's Defence Minister Wilhelm Groener (1928-32) to synchronize operative planning with German foreign policy and the Empire's actual strategic situation was backed by merely some parts of the Army's top echelon. Deeply engrossed in classical operative thinking, the majority of the officers developed only a limited understanding for a general societal warfare leading beyond the operative-military and they rejected the subordination of the military and its planning under the primacy of general policy.

At the beginning of the 1930s, even though defence and delaying action were allowed more space than before 1914, the Empire's Army's operative thinking again circled around the – on the operative level – classical surprise, effort, envelopment, destruction, inner line, combat in an inferior position, and the art of commanding, coupled with the belief in fast battle decisions in order to outmanoeuvre the enemy's potentials, were the cornerstones of this kind of thinking. In addition, the breakthrough as a prerequisite for a successful envelopment, which had been highly controversial at the time of the Empire, moved more and more into the centre of operative interest. Slowly, the breakthrough in connection with a subsequent operative envelopment was understood as one continuous operation. The combat assets required for this form of operative thinking, like tanks or aircraft, were however not at the Empire's Army's disposal because of the conditions imposed by the Versailles Treaty. This status was to change only a few years later. (*be continued*)

Notes:

¹⁾ Cf. instead of many others: the overviews by Gottfried Niedhardt: *Internationale Beziehungen 1917-1947*, Paderborn 1989 and Horst Möller: *Europa zwischen den Weltkriegen*, München 1998 (=Oldenbourg Grundriss der Geschichte, 21) as well as Walter L. Bernecker: *Europa zwischen den Weltkriegen 1914-1945*, Stuttgart 2002 (=Handbuch der Geschichte Europas, 9).

²⁾ Cf. Mark Mazower: *Der dunkle Kontinent. Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2000.

³⁾ Cf. Eric Hobsbawm: *Das Zeitalter der Extreme*, München 1995.

⁴⁾ Cf. Reichsgesetzblatt [Imperial Law Gazette] (Nr. 140) Jahrgang 1919: Gesetz über den Friedensschluß zwischen Deutschland und den alliierten und assoziierten Mächten, p. 687ff.

⁵⁾ Cf. principally Klaus Hildebrand: *Das vergangene Reich. Deutsche Außenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler*, 2. ed., Darmstadt 1996.

- 6) David P. Calleo: *The German Problem Reconsidered. Germany and the World order, 1870 to the Present*, Cambridge 1978, p. 208.
- 7) Cf. Klaus Hildebrand: *Deutsche Außenpolitik 1871-1918*, 2. ed. München 1994.
- 8) Cf. Klaus Wernecke: *Der Wille zur Weltgeltung. Außenpolitik und Öffentlichkeit im Kaiserreich am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Düsseldorf 1970.
- 9) The term was coined by Max Weber in his inaugural lecture in 1895; cf. Max Weber: *Gesammelte politische Schriften*. Edited by J. Winckelmann, 2. ed. Tübingen 1958, p. 23.
- 10) Cf. Michael Epkenhans: *Die wilhelminische Flottenrüstung 1908-1914. Weltmachtstreben, industrieller Fortschritt, soziale Integration*, München 1991 (=Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte, 32).
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- 12) Cf. Helmuth Plessner: *Die verspätete Nation. Über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes*, 5th ed. Frankfurt/M. 1994.
- 13) Friedrich Meinecke: *Die deutsche Katastrophe. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, 3rd ed. Wiesbaden 1947, p. 25.
- 14) Cf. Fritz Fischer: *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18*, Düsseldorf 1967.
- 15) Cf. Volker Ullrich: *Die nervöse Großmacht 1871-1918. Aufstieg und Untergang des deutschen Kaiserreiches*, Frankfurt/M. 1997 and Joachim Radkau, *Das Zeitalter der Nervosität. Deutschland zwischen Bismarck und Hitler*, München 1998.
- 16) Cf. Otto Fürst von Bismarck: *Gedanken und Erinnerungen*, Volks- Ausgabe vol. 2, Stuttgart/Berlin 1909, p. 253.
- 17) Cf. Gerhard P. Groß: *Der „Raum“ als operationsgeschichtliche Kategorie im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*. In: Jörg Echternkamp, Wolfgang Schmidt, Thomas Vogel (ed.): *Perspektiven der Militärgeschichte. Raum, Gewalt und Repräsentation in historischer Forschung und Bildung*, München 2010 (=Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte, 67), pp. 115-140.
- 18) Cf. Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, Gerhard P. Groß (ed.): *Der Schlieffenplan. Analysen und Dokumente*, Paderborn 2006 (=Zeitalter der Weltkriege, 2).
- 19) George F. Kennan: *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order. Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890*, Princeton 1979, p. 3.
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- 21) Cf. Holger Afflerbach: *Falkenhayn. Politisches Denken und Handeln im Kaiserreich*, München 1994.
- 22) Cf. Manfred Messerschmidt, in a compact form: *Das preußische Militärwesen*. In: Wolfgang Neugebauer (ed.): *Handbuch der Preußischen Geschichte* vol. III: *Vom Kaiserreich zum 20. Jahrhundert und Große Themen der Geschichte Preußens*, Berlin 2001, p. 319-546, here pp. 480-490.
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- 25) Cf. Hildebrand: *Das vergangene Reich*, pp. 363-372.
- 26) Cf. Andreas Hillgruber: *Das Russland-Bild der führenden deutschen Militärs vor Beginn des Angriffs auf die Sowjetunion*. In: Hans-Erich Volkmann (ed.): *Das Russland-Bild im Dritten Reich*, Köln u.a. 1994, pp. 125-140.
- 27) Cf. Niedhardt: *Internationale Beziehungen*, pp. 11-29.
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- 29) Cf. Hildebrand: *Das vergangene Reich*, p. 408.
- 30) Möller: *Europa zwischen den Kriegen*, p. 18.
- 31) Article 88 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye of 10 Sept 1919, printed in the *State Law Gazette* 303/1920.
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- 38) Cf. Frédéric Guelton: Das Problem der mechanisierten Kriegführung in Frankreich 1917 bis 1940. In: Gerhard P. Groß (ed.): Führungsdenken in europäischen und nordamerikanischen Streitkräften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Hamburg, Berlin, Bonn 2001 (=Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte, 19), pp. 191-208, here p. 199.
- 39) Cf. generally Andreas Wirsching: Die Weimarer Republik. Politik und Gesellschaft, 2. extended edition. München 2008 (=Enzyklopädie Deutscher Geschichte, 58).
- 40) Vgl. William Flavelle Monypenny, George Earle Buckle: The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, Vol. II 1860-1881, 2. ed. London 1929, p. 473.
- 41) On the spatial problems cf. Groß: „Raum“ als operationsgeschichtliche Kategorie. In: Echternkamp (ed.): Perspektiven, pp. 115-140.
- 42) On the development of operative thinking in the German Army, cf. Gerhard P. Groß: Von Moltke bis Heusinger. Die Entwicklung des operativen Denkens im deutschen Heer, Paderborn u.a. 2012 (=Zeitalter der Weltkrieg, 9).
- 43) „Der Charakter der heutigen Kriegführung ist bezeichnet durch das Streben nach großer und schneller Entscheidung... Alles drängt auf rasche Beendigung des Krieges.“ [“The character of warfare today stands out for its ambition to make great and fast decisions... Everyone presses for a fast end to the war.”] Moltkes Militärische Werke II, 2, Verordnungen, p. 173.
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- 45) On the latest research, cf. Ehlert/Epkenhans/Groß: Schlieffenplan. In this volume there are printed, for the first time, the newly found manuscripts of the orders for deployment by the General Staff from 1893/94 to 1914/15.
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- 48) Cf. Stig Förster: Der deutsche Generalstab und die Illusion des kurzen Krieges, 1871-1914. Metakritik eines Mythos. In: Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen 54 (1995), pp.61-95, Annika Mombauer: Helmuth von Moltke and the origins of the First World War, Cambridge 2001 and: Der Moltkeplan. Modifikation des Schlieffenplans bei gleichen Zielen? In: Ehlert/Epkenhans/Groß: Schlieffenplan, pp. 79-99.
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- 51) On the development of German tactics, cf. Gerhard P. Groß: Das Dogma der Beweglichkeit. Überlegungen zur Genese der deutschen Heerestaktik im Zeitalter der Weltkriege. In: Erster Weltkrieg Zweiter Weltkrieg. Ein Vergleich. Krieg, Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung in Deutschland, hrsg. im Auftrag des Militärgeschichtlichen Forschungsamtes von Bruno Thoß und Hans-Erich Volkmann, Paderborn u.a. 2002, pp.143-166.
- 52) Cf. Groß: Dogma der Beweglichkeit, pp.147-153.
- 53) Cf. Groß: Dogma der Beweglichkeit, pp.153-156.
- 54) Cf. Wilhelm Deist: Die Reichswehr und der Krieg der Zukunft. In: MGM 45(1989) 1, pp.81-92, Michael Geyer: Aufrüstung oder Sicherheit. Die Reichswehr in der Krise der Machtpolitik 1924-1936, Wiesbaden 1980 (=Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz, 91), pp.84-97 as well as Gil-li Vardi: Joachim von Stülpnagel's Military Thought and Planning. In: War and History, 2 (2010), pp.193-216.
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