

The road to ideological war: Germany, 1918-1945

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In Prussia and Imperial Germany, strategy – the use of armed force to maintain or change the external status quo and to preserve internal stability – was the domain of the military. Neither civilian executives after Bismarck nor Germany's parliament, the Reichstag, influenced strategic planning or decision-making.¹ The military monopolized even the historical interpretation of strategic decisions and vehemently defended that privilege against encroachment by academic historians such as Hans Delbrück.² In Imperial Germany, it was Helmuth von Moltke, Alfred von Schlieffen, Alfred von Tirpitz, and Erich Ludendorff who dominated strategic thought. Thereafter the industrialization of warfare and defeat in 1918 undermined the military control of national strategy that had stood in such sharp contrast to developments in France, Britain, and the United States. A long and often indirect process ultimately brought political control over strategy even in Germany.³

- ¹ See the article by H. H. Herwig, "Strategic Uncertainties of a Nation-State: Prussia-Germany 1871-1891," in the present volume, pp. 242-77.
- ² Arden Buchholz, *Hans Delbrück and the German Military Establishment: War Images in Conflict* (Iowa City, IA., 1985), pp. 19-51; Gordon A. Craig, "Delbrück: the Military Historian," in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 326-53; Andreas Hillgruber, "Hans Delbrück," in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ed., *Deutsche Historiker*, Vol. 4 (Göttingen, 1972), pp. 40-52.
- ³ See especially the stimulating article by Michael Geyer, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare, 1914-1945," in Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, pp. 527-97. Geyer's interpretation and that of the present article differ in the weight they attribute to essential factors; used together they give the reader a more complete picture; Dennis E. Showalter, "German Grand Strategy: A Contradiction in Terms?" in *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 48 (1990), pp. 65-102, provides a superb summary of the strategic considerations in Prussia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; however, the effects of industrialization and ideology in the conduct of wars in the twentieth century are barely mentioned. For a differing interpretation, see also Manfred Messerschmidt, "German Military Effectiveness between 1919 and 1939," in Allan R. Milllett and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness*, Vol. 2, *The Interwar Period* (Boston, 1988), pp. 223-37; Jürgen Förster, "The Dynamics of *Volksgemeinschaft*: The Effectiveness of the German

Yet none of Germany's military or political leaders – from Ludendorff to Blomberg and from Bethmann Hollweg to Hitler – based their policies on rational strategic calculations. On the contrary, they rejected calculation and followed principles of their own, with startling and often disastrous consequences for Germany and the world.

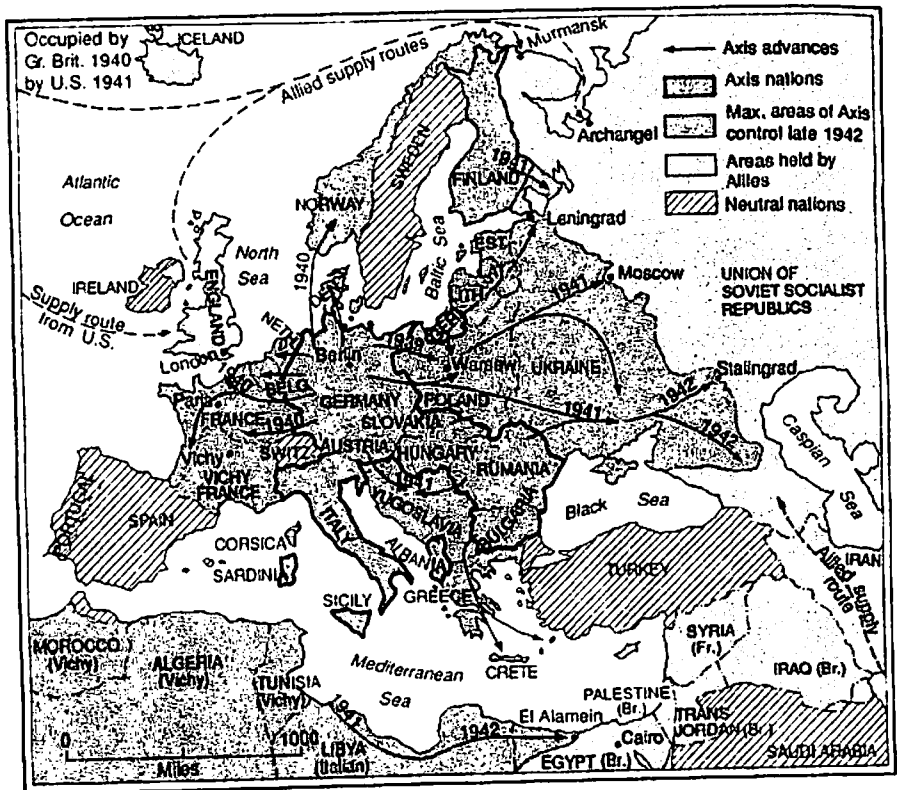
THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEFEAT

Ludendorff's replacement, after Wilhelm II at last dismissed the Quartermaster General on 26 October 1918, was an officer with proven organizational talents in areas far beyond the purely military. From the beginning General Wilhelm Groener realized that he had become trustee of a bankrupt firm, a task in which he could win no laurels.⁴ When he assumed his duties, negotiations with the Allies left no doubt that the Germans faced a disastrous political and military defeat. They had lost the "semi-hegemony" in Europe that Bismarck had achieved, while at home the "upheaval that will transform everything," predicted by Bethmann Hollweg in July 1914, seemed imminent.⁵ Portions of the German armies fighting in the west had reacted with a "disguised strike" to Ludendorff's grandiose miscalculation of spring 1918, his attempt to force a strategic turn in the war through mere tactics and operations in order to preserve the traditional German power structure.⁶ War and collapse had thoroughly disrupted order and obedience while destroying the homogeneity of the army's heart, its officer corps.

The situation required action, not far-reaching plans. Groener's policies, based on an assessment of Germany's position, took existing realities into account. That was remarkable if only because Groener's predecessors – Ludendorff, Falkenhayn, Moltke the younger, and Schlieffen – had neither understood such realities sufficiently nor mustered the courage to act on them.⁷ But the pressure imposed by an unusual situation forced Groener to

Military Establishment in the Second World War," in *ibid.*, Vol. 3, *The Second World War*, (Boston, 1988), pp. 191–99.

- ⁴ On Groener see Wilhelm Groener, *Lebenserinnerungen*, Friedrich Freiherr Hiller von Gaertringen, ed. (Göttingen, 1957), and his printed diary entries and memoranda from Kiev between 26 February 1918 and 25 October 1918, in Winfried Baumgart, ed., *Von Brest-Litovsk zur deutschen Novemberrevolution: Aus den Tagebüchern, Briefen und Aufzeichnungen von Alfons Paquet, Wilhelm Groener und Albert Hopman, März bis November 1918* (Göttingen, 1971). See also Friedrich Freiherr Hiller von Gaertringen, "Groener," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Vol. 7 (Berlin, 1966), pp. 111–14.
- ⁵ Kurt Riezler, *Tagebücher, Aufsätze, Dokumente*, Karl Dietrich Erdmann, ed. (Göttingen, 1972), p. 183 (7 July 1914).
- ⁶ Wilhelm Deist, "Der militärische Zusammenbruch des Kaiserreichs. Zur Realität der 'Dolchstoßlegende,'" in Ursula Büttner, ed., *Das Unrechtsregime*, Vol. 1 (Hamburg, 1986), pp. 101–29. Cf. also Herwig, "Strategic Uncertainties," p. 276–77.
- ⁷ On Falkenhayn, see above all, K.-H. Janßen, *Der Kanzler und der General: Die Führungskrise um Bethmann Hollweg und Falkenhayn (1914–1916)*, (Göttingen, 1967); Ekkehart P. Guth, "Der Gegensatz zwischen dem Oberbefehlshaber Ost und dem Chef des



Map 12.1. World War II: German Offensives, 1939-1942. Source. Adapted from Michael J. Lyons, *World War II: A Short History* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989), 73.

make hard decisions. In addition to his clear sense of reality, Groener's aims permitted him to craft a strategy in defeat and revolution. Internally, he sought to maintain the armed forces as an instrument of stabilization; externally, his goal was to preserve Germany's territorial unity.

As Supreme Warlord, the discredited Emperor, Wilhelm II, presented a serious obstacle to both goals during the period of political and military disintegration. Groener solved this problem in a manner both dramatic and matter-of-fact: he forced Wilhelm to abdicate. The road to an understanding with the representatives of the new, still vulnerable political order in Germany was now open, and Groener was perhaps the only general officer

Generalstabes des Feldheeres 1914/15. Die Rolle des Majors v. Haefen im Spannungsfeld zwischen Hindenburg, Ludendorff und Falkenhayn," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 35 (1984), pp. 75-111.

capable of winning the trust of the leaders of the majority Social Democrats.⁸ When he assumed his duties as head of the War Office in November 1916, he had expressed the view that Germany could not win an industrialized war without the cooperation of the workers.⁹ He held to that view despite a conflict with Ludendorff that had led to Groener's relegation to field command in mid-1917.¹⁰ His November 1918 understanding with the majority Social Democrats, however weak it seemed at times, represented the first and decisive step toward maintaining the domestic political function of the armed forces. Despite the compromises Groener accepted during the revolutionary months, given the rapid disintegration of the old army and his own limited influence over the new Reichswehr, he provided the continuity between the military leadership of the Empire and that of the Republic while safeguarding the military's special position within the state.¹¹

The attitude toward the future of the Emperor that Groener took at German headquarters at Spa on 9 November 1918 further illuminated the political convictions that he maintained until his retirement in autumn 1919. Not only did he categorically reject the notion that Wilhelm II and the army should march on Berlin to suppress the revolution. He also opposed – as potentially fatal to German unity – the retention of the Emperor as King of Prussia. The central principle in Groener's strategic thought was the *Reichsgedanke*, the idea of Germany as a single entity, with all its political and emotional connotations. Groener played a decisive role in preventing separatist forces from gaining the upper hand during the unrest that followed defeat. He also successfully opposed those senior officers who argued that renewed resistance based on eastern Germany would improve the peace conditions. Groener forced his senior service opponents to acknowledge strategic reality both at home and abroad: Germany was beaten, and further fighting would worsen rather than improve its position. His contacts with Colonel Conger, an American officer, may have misled Groener about pros-

⁸ Gerhard W. Rakenius, *Wilhelm Groener als Erster Generalquartiermeister: Die Politik der Obersten Heeresleitung 1918/19* (Boppard, 1977), pp. 1–85. On Wilhelm II see John C. G. Röhl and Nicolaus Sombart, eds., *Kaiser Wilhelm II: New Interpretations* (Cambridge, 1982) and John C. G. Röhl, *Kaiser, Hof und Staat: Wilhelm II. und die deutsche Politik* (Munich, 1987).

⁹ See the report on the confidential session of the Bundesrat on 9 November 1916, in Wilhelm Deist, ed., *Militär und Innenpolitik im Weltkrieg 1914–1918*, Vol. 2 (Düsseldorf, 1970), Doc. 198, p. 513.

¹⁰ See Gerald D. Feldman, *Army, Industry and Labor in Germany 1914–1918* (Princeton, 1966), pp. 373–404. On 28 October 1918, Colonel-General von Einem, a former Prussian minister of war, wrote that Groener had been “anointed with a drop of socialist oil, very clever but with a worker's cap (Ballonmütze) in his traveling bag.” See Deist, ed., *Militär und Innenpolitik*, Vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 1346.

¹¹ See Rainer Wohlfeil, *Reichswehr und Republik (1918–1933)*, (Frankfurt/M., 1970), pp. 42–91 and 117–19; Francis L. Carsten, *Reichswehr und Politik 1918–1933*, 3d ed. (Cologne, 1966), pp. 13–56. In this connection, see also Ulrich Kluge, *Soldatenräte und Revolution: Studien zur Militärpolitik in Deutschland 1918/19* (Göttingen, 1975); Wolfram Wette, *Gustav Noske: Eine politische Biographie* (Düsseldorf, 1987).

pects of a lenient peace, but when the German government deliberated in June 1919 over whether to sign the Treaty of Versailles unconditionally, Groener advised the Reich President and the government with a sober sense of responsibility. Military resistance had no chance of success.¹² Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg's comment that "as a soldier" he would prefer "an honorable end to a shameful peace" illuminates the mentality of a military caste that attached little importance to the nation's vital interests.¹³ That caste never forgave Groener his break with their traditional notion of honor.

Between October 1918 and June 1919, Groener successfully opposed all adventurism at a time of military defeat, rebellion against order and obedience, and violent political upheaval. His was an immense strategic achievement in the face of the obdurate self-indulgence of his fellow officers. He based his decisions on sober, realistic military calculations and thereby preserved the political position of the military and the unity of Germany. Groener's strategic aims were those of a military officer. His determination to preserve the traditional leadership of the armed forces was in opposition to the aims of the revolutionary forces, although both groups sought to preserve German unity. In retrospect, Groener's success in achieving the latter aim was as desirable as his success with regard to the former was regrettable. From a historical perspective, however, they were intertwined.

The strategic consequences of the Treaty of Versailles – the territorial amputations in east and west and the resulting loss of economic resources – presented German political and military leaders with new and for the moment insoluble problems. In addition, Germany had to accept drastic restrictions on its sovereignty. Those restrictions, combined with a state of general exhaustion after four and a half years of war, placed an increasing drain on material, human, and spiritual resources. Mere survival required enormous sacrifices in all areas. The allies forced Germany to accept the economic exactions spelled out in the Treaty at a time when the domestic consolidation of the Weimar Republic was far from complete. In that way, the Treaty of Versailles made a significant contribution toward discrediting the new order.

The political, economic, and administrative leaders of Weimar confronted three overriding tasks: dealing with the economic consequences of war, coping with the political and economic effects of Versailles, and establishing a strong foundation for the Republic. All Weimar governments pursued the aim of revising the Treaty, although initially without success.¹⁴ Germany's

¹² See Rakenius, *Groener*, pp. 165–234. For Groener's memoranda and directives, see Heinz Hürten, ed., *Zwischen Revolution und Kapp-Putsch: Militär und Innenpolitik 1918–1920* (Düsseldorf, 1977), Docs. 15, 20, 32, 35, 53, 75.

¹³ Rakenius, *Groener*, pp. 218, 224.

¹⁴ For a general account, see Karl Erich Born, "Deutschland vom Ende der Monarchie bis zur Teilung," in Theodor Schieder, ed., *Handbuch der europäischen Geschichte*, Vol. 7, pt. 1 (Stuttgart, 1979), pp. 523–49; Karl Dietrich Erdmann, "Die Zeit der Weltkriege," in Bruno Gebhardt, *Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, Vol. 4 (Stuttgart, 1973); Hagen

situation did not permit a foreign policy with a military accent or the development of any strategy that included the use of armed forces.

In the first years of the Republic the armed forces – the Reichswehr – functioned merely as the necessary though not completely reliable instrument through which the Republic's leaders mastered domestic unrest.¹⁵ Apart from the "normal" problems of the demobilization of a wartime army of approximately 7 million men¹⁶ and its consolidation to the permitted peacetime strength of 100,000, the military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles¹⁷ precluded active participation of the armed forces in the development of strategy. The reduction of the army, the elimination of general conscription (the indispensable foundation of Prussian and German power in Europe), the prohibition of mobilization planning, the restrictions on modern weapons systems, and the exacting limitations on heavy weapons crippled the army as a military instrument. The same was true of the navy, severely shaken by mutiny in 1918. The treaty restrictions on the number and kinds of ships reduced it to a coastal defense force and placed in question its survival as an independent service. Comprehensive inter-Allied inspection and surveillance ensured German compliance with most Treaty provisions.¹⁸

These rigorous limitations on German military sovereignty condemned the Reichswehr to passivity when French troops occupied the Ruhr in 1923. A comparison with the 1925 peacetime strength of the armies of Germany's neighbors (France: 750,000 men; Poland: 300,000 men; Czechoslovakia: 150,000 men)¹⁹ clearly shows that the Reichswehr had little chance of defeating the ground forces of even one of these states, particularly under the handicap of the 50-kilometer-wide demilitarized zone east of the Rhine²⁰ and the prohibition against construction of new installations or the alteration of existing fortifications in other border areas.²¹ A decade after the outbreak of World War I, the Allies, especially France, seemed to have elimi-

Schulze, *Weimar Deutschland 1917–1933* (Berlin, 1982), and Wohlfeil, *Reichswehr und Republik*.

¹⁵ For a critical survey of literature on the history of the Reichswehr, see Michael Geyer, "Die Wehrmacht der Deutschen Republik ist die Reichswehr. Bemerkungen zur neueren Literatur," *Militärhistorische Mitteilungen*, 14 (1973), pp. 152–99.

¹⁶ See Wolfram Wette, "Die militärische Demobilisierung in Deutschland ab 1918/19 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der revolutionären Ostseestadt Kiel," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 12 (1986), Issue 1, pp. 63–80.

¹⁷ Specifically Part V, Articles 159 to 212 of the Treaty. See *Der Vertrag von Versailles*, 2nd ed., (1924) published by the German Foreign Ministry.

¹⁸ See Michael Salewski, *Entwaffnung und Militärkontrolle in Deutschland 1919–1927* (Oldenburg, Munich, 1966); Jürgen Heideking, "Vom Versailler Vertrag zur Genfer Abrüstungskonferenz. Das Scheitern der alliierten Militärkontrollpolitik gegenüber Deutschland nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg," *Militärhistorische Mitteilungen*, 28 (1980), pp. 48–68.

¹⁹ See Von Löbells *Jahresberichte über das Heer- und Kriegswesen*, von Oertzen, ed., 43 (1926), pp. 61, 95, 141.

²⁰ Articles 42 to 44 and 180 of the Treaty of Versailles. See note 17 above.

²¹ Article 196 of the Treaty of Versailles. See note 17 above.

nated any German military threat for the foreseeable future. But French military experts would have emphatically rejected that statement by pointing to the German demographic preponderance and the military potential of the German economy. That attitude was one more barrier to Franco-German understanding.

STRATEGY IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

Factors other than the Treaty provisions played a decisive role in the German military situation at the beginning of the 1920s. World War I had demonstrated that military force by itself could no longer decide war. The 1914-1918 conflict was the first industrialized war on European soil. Potential and actual mobilization of the material and spiritual resources of entire nations played a more important role than the operational decisions of army commanders. This change in the nature of warfare found its expression in the works of German military analysts attempting to foresee the requirements of future wars through assessment of World War I.²² Their thoughts, in numerous variations, formed the basis for future strategic planning.

German military writers in the interwar period often broke the discussion of future war down into three parts. They naturally devoted considerable attention to innovations in weapons technology.²³ Precisely because the Treaty of Versailles forbade German possession of poison gas, tanks, and military aircraft, theoretical interest in these weapons acquired a special significance. The new weapons appeared as instruments for solving the traumatic problems that positional warfare and the battles of matériel had raised in 1914-1918. Their use suggested a return to a war of movement and decisive battle. But all previous experience with innovations in weapons technology underlined the danger of overestimating individual factors in war. The theorists generally only saw the aircraft as capable of revolutionizing warfare, although some of Guilio Douhet's wilder notions met with skepticism.²⁴ Interestingly, the submarine, one of the most significant developments in weapons technology during World War I, received little attention.

Some military theorists, more concerned with emphasizing the importance of broad areas of national life in future wars, played down the importance of weaponry. Schlieffen's intimations had become reality in World War I: weap-

²² See Michael Geyer, "Die Landesverteidigung: Wehrstruktur am Ende der Weimarer Republik" (unpublished thesis, Freiburg, 1972), pp. 7-29; Wilhelm Deist, "Die Reichswehr und der Krieg der Zukunft," *Militärhistorische Mitteilungen*, 45 (1989), pp. 81-92.

²³ See especially, Max Schwarte, ed., *Kriegstechnik der Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1927), and idem, *Der Krieg der Zukunft* (Leipzig, 1931).

²⁴ See Hans Ritter, *Der Luftkrieg* (Berlin, Leipzig, 1926); idem, "Der Luftkrieg der Zukunft," *Militär-Wochenblatt*, 116 (1931-32), pp. 569-73; O. Grochler, "Probleme der Luftkriegstheorie zwischen dem Ersten und dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," *Zeitschrift für Militärgeschichte*, 9 (1970), pp. 406-19.

ons and their use were only one component of total war. Economic resources and the ability to mobilize them had become decisive factors with extremely complex political and military consequences.²⁵ In a memorandum on "The Importance of the Modern Economy for Strategy" written in the mid-1920s, Groener raised the provocative question of whether "the modern economy with its many problems," did not exert "an irresistible pressure for peace."²⁶ In 1930 retired Lieutenant General Max Schwarte soberly concluded that the industrialization of war had placed "the production of weapons by workers" on the same level with "the use of weapons" by soldiers.²⁷ These examples clearly show that military analysts had at least recognized the fundamental change in strategic conditions revealed in World War I.

German military pundits explored yet another new topic with even greater earnestness. Interest in and overestimation of the effects of Allied propaganda against Germany led to the claim that psychological warfare was as necessary as armed conflict and economic warfare.²⁸ But unlike Allied propaganda in World War I, which had aimed primarily at the enemy, German theorists argued that German propaganda should concentrate on the home front and front line. The intensity of this preoccupation in German military writing reflected the trauma of the revolution, which had confronted military leaders at all levels with the collapse of their authority. That shock, along with a growing realization of their dependence on the economy, had demonstrated to the military caste that political factors determined the conditions under which it exercised its profession.

In the view of military leaders, this fact constituted the real break with Prusso-German military tradition. Theoretical attempts to find a solution to this problem extended from an odd suggestion by Friedrich von Bernhardi to Kurt Hesse's future-oriented publication, *Der Feldherr Psychologos*. Bernhardi was strongly attached to the Wilhelmine tradition and proposed to maintain the morale of the fighting army by, "in a certain sense," isolating it "internally from the homeland."²⁹ Hesse hoped to solve all problems through the unlimited power of a charismatic leader, a "ruler of men's souls" able to guarantee the unity of the nation and the concentration of its will on one goal.³⁰ But in general military pundits supported the complete militarization of society in peacetime as a precondition for the effective conduct of war.

²⁵ See Adolf Caspary, *Wirtschafts-Strategie und Kriegführung* (Berlin, 1932).

²⁶ Dorothea Fensch und Olaf Groehler, "Imperialistische Ökonomie und militärische Strategie. Eine Denkschrift Wilhelm Groeners," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 19 (1971), pp. 1167-77, here p. 1175.

²⁷ Schwarte, *Krieg der Zukunft*, pp. 34-35.

²⁸ See Hans Thimme, *Weltkrieg ohne Waffen: Die Propaganda der Westmächte gegen Deutschland, ihre Wirkung und ihre Abwehr* (Stuttgart, 1932).

²⁹ Friedrich von Bernhardi, *Vom Kriege der Zukunft: Nach den Erfahrungen des Weltkrieges* (Berlin, 1920), p. 155.

³⁰ Kurt Hesse, *Der Feldherr Psychologos: Ein Suchen nach dem Führer der deutschen Zukunft* (Berlin, 1932), especially pp. 206-207. See also George Soldan, *Der Mensch und die Schlacht der Zukunft* (Oldenburg, 1925).

The seemingly inescapable necessity of preparing for war economically and technologically in peacetime mandated the militarization of the nation to supply the necessary material and human resources.

With the publication of Ludendorff's *Der totale Krieg* in 1935, discussion about preconditions and characteristics of a future war reached its high point and conclusion. Ludendorff's work, the product of his intense interest in the history of the Great War, presented his conclusions and lessons learned. Significantly, Ludendorff devoted considerable attention to the problem of motivating the armed forces and people.³¹ In his view, the "emotional unity of the nation" had become the decisive factor in war. Therefore everything had to be done to create and maintain that unity. Ludendorff proclaimed emphatically that the unity of the nation rested on its ethnic, racial unity – a "native religion" could and must support it. Although Ludendorff believed it vitally necessary to educate the nation thoroughly on the purpose and aims of a war, he left no doubt that propaganda, indoctrination, and education alone would not achieve unity. Preventive measures, similar to protective custody, had to be taken against "dissatisfied elements" that might endanger national unity. Ludendorff directly named the internal enemies of the militarized *Volksgemeinschaft* (the national racial community): the Jews, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Socialists.³² Ludendorff's notion of a military leader with dictatorial powers and a "defense staff" to prepare the united *Volk* community and lead it in a total war aimed at annihilation of the enemy was a final attempt in Germany to place strategy and the conduct of war under the sole authority of the military.³³

Apart from his demand for power to the military, Ludendorff, like other theorists before him, offered an extreme picture of an industrialized war requiring the nation's entire resources as well as comprehensive planning and preparation in peace: in effect, a militarized society. Such a view of war necessitated a broad concept of strategy, which one can define as "the integration of domestic and foreign policy, of military and psychological war planning and execution, of defense economy and armaments, by the top leadership of a state in order to carry out a comprehensive ideological and political plan."³⁴ That definition makes clear the profound change, the enormous expansion in the determining factors, which the concept of strategy had experienced since the nineteenth century. The launching and conduct of

³¹ Erich Ludendorff, *Der totale Krieg* (Munich, 1935), pp. 11–28.

³² Colonel-General Werner Freiherr von Fritsch, dismissed as commander in chief of the army in 1938, held similar views of the internal enemy. See Nicholas Reynolds, "Der Fritsch-Brief vom 11. Dezember 1938," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 28 (1980), pp. 358–71.

³³ See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "'Absoluter' und 'totaler' Krieg: Von Clausewitz zu Ludendorff," in Ursula von Gersdorff, ed., *Geschichte und Militärgeschichte: Wege der Forschung* (Frankfurt/M. 1974), pp. 273–311.

³⁴ Andreas Hillgruber, "Der Faktor Amerika in Hitlers Strategie 1938–1941," in Wolfgang Michalka, ed., *Nationalsozialistische Außenpolitik* (Darmstadt, 1978), pp. 493–525, here p. 493.

wars was no longer the exclusive prerogative of political and military leaders, and the population at large now figured centrally in military calculations. In the event of armed conflict, the changed nature of war would inevitably lead to a shift in the weight of political and military leadership, even in Germany. Ludendorff offered one extreme solution. Hitler provided the opposite. Both had the same objective.

In the Weimar Republic, the political and military consequences of Germany's defeat in World War I dominated planning for an uncertain future. A strategy in the sense demanded by Ludendorff was not possible during the first ten years of the Republic. The state sought above all an elusive domestic consolidation and stability; the revision of the Versailles Treaty represented the one common aim of all political forces in the Republic.³⁵ But though this aim determined the nature of Germany's foreign policy and the activity of its diplomats, a planned, coordinated strategy was impossible under existing conditions. Even the Reichswehr was not in a position to fulfill its responsibilities for national defense.

Despite this situation, German military leaders began in the mid-1920s to think systematically about the necessary preconditions, conditions, and consequences of a possible war. A survey of the early, hesitant attempts to develop a strategy capable of overcoming the existing situation highlights the importance of the first comprehensive strategic conception developed under Wilhelm Groener, returned to power as Reichswehr Minister from January 1928 to April 1932.

In the turbulent days of December 1918 a group of senior officers met at the General Staff building in Berlin to discuss Germany's prospects and future plans. Despite the early date, the two principal strategic concepts of the Reichswehr period emerged.³⁶ Kurt von Schleicher, then a major, argued vigorously for a three-phase program based on internal consolidation, economic recovery and, only then, "regaining power and influence abroad." Schleicher's views were those of Groener, who in memoranda throughout 1919 stressed repeatedly the priority of domestic policy.³⁷ Groener's program implied that the armed forces would again be in a position to perform their actual function only after the third phase, "after many years of hard work."

³⁵ See Peter Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik der Republik von Weimar* (Darmstadt, 1985); Michael Salewski, "Das Weimarer Revisionssyndrom," in "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte," supplement to the weekly newspaper *Das Parlament*, B 2, 1980; Gaines Post, Jr., *The Civil-Military Fabric of Weimar Foreign Policy* (Princeton, 1973); Michael Geyer, "The Dynamics of Military Revisionism in the Interwar Years, Military Politics between Rearmament and Diplomacy," in Wilhelm Deist, ed., *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (Leamington Spa, 1985), pp. 100-51.

³⁶ See the "Bericht des Hauptmanns v. Rabenau über Besprechungen von Generalstabs-offizieren über die politische Lage," printed in Hürten, ed., *Zwischen Revolution und Kapp-Putsch*, Doc. 11, pp. 30-31.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Docs. 32, 35, 53, 75, pp. 113-15, 121-25, 158-61, 193-97.

Schleicher's opponent, Major General Hans von Seeckt, described internal consolidation as something that could "be taken for granted." He was convinced that the aim of the state and the Reichswehr must be to make Germany "an acceptable alliance partner" once more. Only a strong international position could guarantee a solid foundation for reconstruction and economic recovery. Seeckt's remarks, like his use of the Tirpitz catch phrase about alliance partnership, showed that he remained a partisan of the Wilhelmine foreign policy that had ended in war against a "world of enemies" in July 1914.³⁸ In Seeckt's vision, the armed forces would exercise a decisive influence from the beginning. The programs of Schleicher and Seeckt, though based on different assessments of Germany's situation, were typical of the two generations of officers who led the Reichswehr in the following years.

In November 1919 Seeckt became head of the *Truppenamt*, the successor to the old general staff, and in June 1920 army commander. He thus had the chance to implement his program. Until his dismissal in October 1926, the domestic and foreign policy aims he had laid down in December 1918 clearly determined his actions. Reestablishing government authority and internal order proved to be a lengthy process, although the Reichswehr did finally emerge as the decisive power factor as Seeckt had wanted.³⁹ He strengthened the loose military contacts with the Soviet Union that the Reichswehr had established in 1920, despite the ideological chasm between the two states.⁴⁰ He believed that Germany could win the Soviet Union as an alliance partner and could resume its old role in European power politics with Soviet help. With that aim in mind, Seeckt coordinated his Soviet links at least in part with the policies of successive chancellors and of the Foreign Ministry.

Regardless of whether German-Soviet ties – from the Treaty of Rapallo (1922) to the Treaty of Berlin (1926) – enhanced Germany's overall position as Seeckt had expected, German-Soviet military cooperation in that period failed to produce the desired results. Cooperation at first involved only the participation of German firms, with state support, in building up the Soviet armaments industry. Seeckt hoped thereby to transfer abroad German production of arms such as aircraft and heavy artillery forbidden under Versailles, but was unsuccessful. Collaboration with the Red Army after the mid-1920s in testing modern weapons such as aircraft, tanks, and poison gas

³⁸ See the article by Holger H. Herwig, "Strategic Uncertainties," in the present volume, pp. 263–64.

³⁹ See in this connection, in addition to the standard works by Wohlfeil (*Reichswehr und Republik*) and Carsten (*Reichswehr und Politik*), the study by Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik, 1918–1920* (Boppard, 1969); Klaus-Jürgen Müller and Eckart Opitz, eds., *Militär und Militarismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1978); Heinz Hürten, *Reichswehr und Ausnahmezustand: Ein Beitrag zur Verfassungsproblematik der Weimarer Republik in ihrem ersten Jahrzehnt* (Opladen, 1977).

⁴⁰ See Carsten, *Reichswehr und Politik*, pp. 141–57; and especially Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Das Tor zur Weltmacht: Die Bedeutung der Sowjetunion für die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Rüstungspolitik zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Boppard, 1984).

at joint training centers established in the Soviet Union proved far more important. The knowledge gained proved of great value to Reichswehr, Wehrmacht – and Red Army.⁴¹ Seeckt accomplished the foreign policy objectives of his strategic plan only imperfectly, but he did preserve the internal political independence of the armed forces and demonstrated it energetically throughout the first years of the Republic.

Seeckt's efforts to achieve a semi-autonomous role for the military, a legacy of the Prussian army's position in Imperial Germany, also influenced his ideas about the conduct of future wars.⁴² In his view, a relatively small but highly mobile operational army equipped with modern weapons would play the decisive role in achieving victory. The mass army was only of secondary importance. This idea reintroduced the "renaissance of the classical [operational] art of warfare," that other military thinkers had discarded as a result of the battles of matériel of World War I.⁴³ With an operational army always available, such a plan offered the advantage of avoiding two main problems of modern warfare: the motivation of the population and the readjustment of industry. Such factors were irrelevant to Seeckt's preferred kind of warfare.

Although Seeckt was open to the use of modern weapons and assigned to air power a decisive role in the opening phase of war, his insistence that the military must enjoy sole responsibility for the conduct of warfare and his assumption of the continued primacy of actual combat show how deeply rooted in tradition his thinking remained. His attempt – based on the ideas that he had expressed in December 1918 – to create the strategic preconditions for revision of the Treaty of Versailles failed. The industrialization of warfare, which Seeckt ignored in its political as well as its military implications, was irreversible.

During the crisis years of the Republic, military and political realities rather than theories determined the thinking and actions of the officers of the *Truppenamt*. The dominant reality was the inability of the Reichswehr to fulfill its primary duty of defending Germany from attack. For military reasons alone, the Reichswehr was unable to respond to the French occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923.⁴⁴ The contradiction between the Reichswehr's claim to sole responsibility for national defense and its inability to fulfill that responsibility created an opening for the conception that Lieutenant Colonel Joachim von Stülpnagel presented in February 1924 to officers of the Reichswehr Ministry. His "Thoughts on the War of the Future" were significant because of their noteworthy realism about the military situation and their

⁴¹ See Michael Geyer, *Aufrüstung oder Sicherheit: Die Reichswehr in der Krise der Machtpolitik 1924–1936* (Wiesbaden, 1980), pp. 148–60.

⁴² See the comprehensive article by Heinz-Ludger Borgert, "Grundzüge der Landkriegführung von Schlieffen bis Guderian," in *Handbuch zur deutschen Militärgeschichte 1648–1939*, Vol. 5, pt. 9 (Munich, 1979), pp. 529–55.

⁴³ Hans Meier-Welcker, *Seeckt*, (Frankfurt/M., 1967), p. 636.

⁴⁴ Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 23–27, 76–82.

acknowledgment of factors that Seeckt had completely neglected.⁴⁵ The lecture was one of the first Reichswehr reactions to the changed nature of warfare.

The central issue for Stülpnagel was how Germany could fight its western and eastern neighbors, France and Poland. Stülpnagel first described the international situation, which was central to Germany's chances in view of the obvious inferiority of the Reichswehr. In Stülpnagel's opinion, benevolent British neutrality and active Soviet support were essential, but domestic factors were even more vital. World War I had shown that future wars would require "the use of the strength of the entire nation." And Stülpnagel drew an additional, more radical conclusion: the preparations of the state and of the armed forces could only achieve their aims if those aims ". . . harmonize[d] with the national will of the majority of the *Volk*." That was the only possible conclusion to draw from the trauma of 1918. Logically enough, Stülpnagel was ready to go to any length to ensure popular support. He considered a "complete change" in domestic politics necessary, and recommended the "elimination of the abnormal parliamentary conditions" and the "incitement of hatred against the foreign enemy" along with corresponding measures in the schools and universities. Above all, he supported introduction of general, obligatory national labor service and a determined struggle against the "[Socialist] International and pacifism, against everything un-German."⁴⁶ Stülpnagel's "war of liberation" required the transformation of the Republic into an ultramilitaristic nationalist regime.

In view of the Reichswehr's inferiority, Stülpnagel developed the idea of a "national war"-in-depth in the border areas. The Reichswehr must obstruct, disrupt, and halt the French and Polish advance, and contest areas already occupied. The aim of this defensive phase, to be achieved through mobility, was to weaken and unnerve the attacking enemy in order to give the German army time to strengthen itself and then defeat the enemy decisively.⁴⁷ In Stülpnagel's view, the conduct of the "national war" required a coordinated approach; the preparatory measures he desired would require the cooperation of many institutions of the civilian executive.

Stülpnagel's ideas, marked by a radicalization of warfare, also imputed to the French a "long prepared, sadistic plan" to intimidate the German civilian population by brutal measures, and argued that "national hatred should be raised to a fever pitch" and "must not shrink from using all forms of sabotage, murder, and poison."⁴⁸ On the whole, Stülpnagel knew that starting

⁴⁵ For the manuscript of the lecture "Gedanken über den Krieg der Zukunft" see Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA) N 5/10. An extract appears in Heinz Hürten, ed., *Das Krisenjahr 1923: Militär und Innenpolitik 1922-1924* (Düsseldorf, 1980), Doc. 184, pp. 266-72.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁴⁷ BA-MA N 5/10, pp. 18-22.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 39.

such a war would only be a "heroic gesture" for the foreseeable future.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, he believed that preparations would require five years or so rather than ten. Even then the situation would be "desperate," but means had to be found that, "born of desperation," would prove so powerful that they would "guarantee us either victory or destruction together with the enemy."⁵⁰

The contrast between Stülpnagel's ideas and Seeckt's "renaissance of the classical [operational] art of war" is striking. Stülpnagel's realism found its expression in his assessment of Germany's situation and in his analysis of domestic and international preconditions for a "war of liberation." That realism made him weaken or even abandon Seeckt's demand for military autonomy in the conduct of war. Without the close cooperation of the civilian authorities, a "war of liberation" would be impossible; in the following years Stülpnagel was one of the most active supporters of such collaboration. His lecture also devoted considerable attention to the functions of the air arm and the navy.⁵¹ But Stülpnagel's realism had limits where the aims of the supposedly inevitable war were concerned.

He remained uninterested in limited political or military objectives: the only choice was all or nothing, total victory or the "heroic gesture" and "destruction together with the enemy." His war plan contained no genuine strategic calculation; despite its realistic elements it remained a desperate attempt to escape a situation perceived as unbearable. Stülpnagel's combination of realistic assessment and irrational aims was no accident; it was a tendency with a future in the German armed forces.

Retired Vice Admiral Wolfgang Wegener's ideas on naval warfare offered a comparable synthesis of realism and unreason. He had concerned himself with the theoretical side of naval warfare since 1915, and published his views under the title "The Naval Strategy of the World War" in 1929.⁵² Wegener's realism consisted of a dispassionate analysis of Germany's naval situation and suggestions for improving it based on the experience of the High Seas Fleet in World War I. It was relevant to the current situation not only because of Wegener's suggestions for the future, but primarily because of his devastating criticism of Tirpitz's theory of decisive battle in the North Sea. Wegener described the prewar German fleet, the showpiece of German imperialism, as a coastal defense fleet. He could not have found a more caustic term. His main aim was to demonstrate that a fleet alone, however powerful it might be, could not win the struggle for naval supremacy at the intersection points of world trade. In his view, sea power rested on two principal factors:

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18, 36-38.

⁵² In 1941, a second edition of the book was published. See Wolfgang Wegener, *The Naval Strategy of the World War*, translated with introduction and notes by Holger H. Herwig (Annapolis, Maryland, 1989).

a fleet and – a new, equally important consideration – geographic position.

Wegener's criticism of the axioms of the Imperial German navy touched a raw nerve in Admiral Erich Raeder and the navy high command. From their point of view any discussion about the function of the fleet could only harm the navy.⁵³ Limiting naval activities to the Baltic and its approaches was incompatible with the navy's self-image. Naval warfare in the North Sea or the Atlantic, however, could only involve Britain and the Royal Navy, the victor over the German fleet in World War I. At the beginning of the 1930s, however, conflict with Britain was scarcely in Germany's interest.

Raeder therefore reacted to Wegener's book by seeking to smother controversy⁵⁴; Wegener's constructive suggestions seemed even more dangerous than his criticisms. Wegener had pointed out that Germany enjoyed no secure access to the Atlantic, the main world trade route. From this fact he deduced the need for a German window on the Atlantic as a prerequisite for a future naval war. He demanded that the Reich establish bases on the French Atlantic coast (Brest), on the Danish and Norwegian coasts, and even in the Shetlands, the Faeroe Islands and Iceland, in order to control the North Atlantic trade routes.⁵⁵ Wegener's criticisms of the Imperial German fleet in the First World War were realistic and his military arguments for obtaining far-flung naval bases convincing. But the political and military implications of his program remained unclear and unaccompanied by corresponding rational strategic goals.

Wegener's book appeared at a time when a faction in the Defense Ministry had gained the upper hand and had begun to lay the foundations for creation of the first comprehensive strategic program in the history of the German state. This development accompanied the renewed ascendancy of Groener, now returned to power as Reichswehr Minister, and of his deputy Schleicher. They had learned in World War I that force was only one aspect of war. Germany could not fight an industrialized war without a solid domestic political base and careful consideration of economic factors. Military analysts had also reached similar conclusions and had popularized them. And the Defense Ministry itself had closely studied the problems of national defense since spring 1924; Groener and Schleicher simply drew the logical strategic conclusions from the ideas developed there.⁵⁶

⁵³ On the political and military development of the navy, see Jost Düllfer, *Weimar, Hitler und die Marine: Reichspolitik und Flottenbau 1920-1939* (Düsseldorf, 1972); Werner Rahn, *Reichsmarine und Landesverteidigung 1919-1928: Konzeption und Führung der Marine in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 1976); Gerhard Schreiber, *Revisionismus und Weltmachtstreben: Marineführung und deutsch-italienische Beziehungen 1919/1944* (Stuttgart, 1978).

⁵⁴ See Düllfer, *Weimar*, pp. 187-88; Wegener, *Naval Strategy*, pp. xxxvii-xxxix.

⁵⁵ See Wegener, *Naval Strategy*, pp. 186-98.

⁵⁶ This change in Reichswehr policy from Seeckt to Groener is one of the two main themes in the definitive study by Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 19-236.

Those conclusions, based on a realistic assessment of Germany's position and a determination to create the preconditions for an adequate national defense, impelled a "Fronde" of officers around Stülpnagel to argue for close civil-military cooperation. The dismissal of Seeckt and the appointment of Lieutenant General Wilhelm Heye as chief of the army in October 1926 removed an important obstacle to new strategic input. The Reichswehr's initiatives now concentrated on three main points. Cooperation with the Foreign Ministry intensified, above all with an eye to the defense of German interests at the coming disarmament conference.⁵⁷ At home, civil-military cooperation in national defense needed to be widened and strengthened, especially in the organization of border guards and local defense units. The attitude of the Social Democratic government of Prussia was the most important factor in this area.⁵⁸ Finally, the national military-industrial base required improvement.

The Defense Ministry proved most successful in the armaments sector, and the government kept itself informed about the size of the secret weapons stocks and the illegal armament programs.⁵⁹ Clandestine contacts with industry intensified, thanks in part to the withdrawal of the Interallied Military Control Commission at the end of January 1927.⁶⁰ More important, the ministry began to work out a modest middle-term armaments program while Groener, who became Reichswehr Minister in January 1928, obtained financing for armaments expenditures.⁶¹ The government took the initial step in a basic reorientation of Germany's military policy with an appropriation for a first four-year armaments program in October 1928.

But opposition to this policy by members of the ministry and, above all, of the Reichswehr, grew as time passed.⁶² The policy of Groener and his Ministerial Office contradicted both Prusso-German tradition and Reichswehr policies under Seeckt. The Reichswehr leaders had accepted in principle – though with qualifications – the political leadership's authority to issue directives and supervise the military, even in a republic headed by a Social Democrat. But it proved difficult to explain the reasons for Groener's support of the Republic and the necessity of limiting the Reichswehr's autonomy to an

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 119–88. See also the memorandum "Die Abrüstungsfrage nach realpolitischen Gesichtspunkten betrachtet," which Stülpnagel sent to the Foreign Ministry (Legation Councilor von Bülow) on 6 March 1926, printed in ADAP, Series B, 1925–1933, Vol. 1, pt. 1 (Göttingen, 1966), Doc. 144, pp. 341–50.

⁵⁸ See Carsten, *Reichswehr*, pp. 287–96, 337–39.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 282–90.

⁶⁰ Ernst Hansen, *Reichswehr und Industrie* (Boppard, 1978).

⁶¹ Michael Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 198–201; idem, "Das Zweite Rüstungsprogramm (1930–1934)," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 17 (1975), pp. 125–72.

⁶² Examples of the growing criticism can be found in Carsten, *Reichswehr*, pp. 326–36 and in Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 141–48. See also the study by Edward W. Bennett, *German Rearmament and the West* (Princeton, 1979).

officer corps repeatedly strengthened over the years in its attachment to its traditions.⁶³

Groener's draft strategic concept, "The Tasks of the Wehrmacht," sent to the chiefs of the army and navy as a directive in April 1930, represented the high point of the Reichswehr's reorientation.⁶⁴ The first, promising steps had been taken in previous years to improve national defense capability. Now Groener wanted to establish binding principles to cover the employment of the armed forces. His directive began with two sentences that were self-evident yet incompatible with the traditional self-image of the Reichswehr. The first sentence read: "The tasks given the armed forces by the responsible political leadership constitute the basis for their build-up and use." One may doubt that this principle led to immediate changes, but even the Defense Minister's clear statement of the Reichswehr's position and function was a novelty. Even more radical was Groener's observation that "definite prospects of success" were the precondition for the military use of the Reichswehr. That amounted to a rejection of the widespread belief that a two-front war with Poland and France was the most likely conflict Germany faced⁶⁵ and restated Groener's conviction, already expressed in the fall of 1928, that Germany must reject from the outset "even the idea of a big war."⁶⁶

In accordance with these premises, Groener considered use of the Reichswehr to be justified only in self-defense or to exploit a "favorable political situation." But he qualified even that statement. The Reichswehr, for example, should act in self-defense only in the event of "illegal border violations (by criminal gangs)" if the army of the state concerned refused to help. In the event of "normal" attacks by enemy armed forces, the Reichswehr should only fight if the enemy were "strongly tied down elsewhere," or if resistance would serve to prevent a *fait accompli* or unleash "the intervention of other powers or of international bodies." Equally rigorous restrictions governed the employment of the Reichswehr in a "favorable political situation." Use following "a decision of its own leaders," the last of the five possibilities Groener described, would only be possible in a "favorable international constellation." Even under those circumstances the decision to engage the Reichswehr required "definite prospects of success." In preparing his directive, Groener gave the two self-defense scenarios the code names "Korfanty" (leader of the Polish irregulars in the postwar fighting over Upper Silesia) and

⁶³ On the Reichswehr officer corps, see the articles by Heinz Hürten (*Reichsheer*) and Michael Salewski (*Reichs- und Kriegsmarine*), in Hanns Hubert Hofmann, ed., *Das deutsche Offizierkorps 1860-1960* (Boppard, 1980), pp. 211-45; the literature mentioned by Hürten; and Keith W. Bird, *Weimar, the German Naval Officer Corps, and the Rise of National Socialism* (Amsterdam, 1977).

⁶⁴ BA-MA M 16/34072. A handwritten draft can be found in the papers of Bredow, BA-MA N 97/9. See also Post, *Civil-Military Fabric*, pp. 231-37; Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 213-18.

⁶⁵ See in this regard the spring 1929 conflict between the chief of the Truppenamt, Blomberg, and Groener and his chief of the Ministerial Office, Schleicher: Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 191-95, 207-13.

⁶⁶ Memorandum of October 1928, BA-MA N 46/147.

“Pilsudski” (Poland’s generalissimo) – a sign that in his view, Poland was the immediate threat.⁶⁷

Groener did not, however, confine himself to a general description of the political factors determining possible employment of the Reichswehr. He drew the logical military conclusions and analyzed the matériel and readiness requirements of each contingency in detail, with special emphasis on logistics and on the ability of German industry to deliver the necessary equipment.

Indicative of Germany’s current position and typical of the views of Groener and his immediate subordinates was his frank admission that “the responsible Reich government might, under certain circumstances,” have to refrain from using the Reichswehr. Groener’s directive also envisaged preparatory planning for communications, evacuations, and demolitions in the border areas in the event that Germany chose not to fight.

Groener regarded war between states as an instrument of policy, but only within the framework of an international system – in contrast to Stülpnagel and Wegener. He completely rejected both Stülpnagel’s “heroic” war of national liberation and the notion of total war with its supposedly inherent peacetime requirements. In placing its emphasis on Germany’s eastern borders, Groener’s directive reflected the policy of revision by stealth that had evolved since Gustav Stresemann had signed the Treaty of Locarno and had taken Germany into the League of Nations. Military planning for national defense was now subordinate to the directives of the political leadership. Equally important was Groener’s attempt to overcome the persistent rivalry of the two independent armed services; his directive set missions for both army and navy within the framework of a joint national strategy.⁶⁸ Groener, aware that directives alone would not change traditional forms of behavior, had nevertheless taken the first step toward integrating armaments policy and operational planning.

The period between autumn 1926 and autumn 1930 represents an almost unique moment in German strategic history: both state and armed forces had a strategy. The aim of revising Versailles and regaining unrestricted military sovereignty transcended all ideological, political, economic, and social divisions. It was merely the choice of methods for pursuing revision that generated bitter political conflict. After Seeckt’s departure, the Reichswehr adjusted to the government’s policy of revision by stealth, not because Reichswehr leaders had become convinced supporters of the Republic but because they recognized that accomplishing the Reichswehr’s missions required the cooperation of the state. Thus the Reichswehr leadership developed a modest yet integrated armament program and flexible operational planning that fit the requirements of government policy. Groener’s

⁶⁷ Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 214–17 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 219–24.

"Tasks of the Wehrmacht" represented the high point of that development.

But these promising first steps remained only an episode. Advocates of Groener's approach came under increasing pressure thanks to the worsening domestic and international situation and the negligible results achieved.⁶⁹ Attempts to revise the military provisions of Versailles at the preparatory disarmament conference failed in December 1930: the conference's draft convention expressly sanctioned existing armament limitation treaties, including the Treaty of Versailles. An understanding with France, despite Groener's shift of German military activity and planning to the eastern border, seemed out of reach. The preparatory disarmament conference appeared to preclude international acceptance even of the modest German buildup on which the Reichswehr had planned.⁷⁰

Domestically, the Reichswehr failed to reach an agreement with the government of Prussia on the organization of the border guards and local defense units. At the same time, pressure grew on the Reichswehr leadership to exploit the manpower of the nationalist paramilitary organizations.⁷¹ The Reichstag elections of 14 September 1930, in which the National Socialists enormously increased their share of the vote, played a decisive role in increasing the strain on Groener. Domestic polarization made the political line of the Reichswehr – itself determined by cabinets operating under presidential decrees – increasingly difficult to explain to the officer corps.

Finally, the world depression with its drastic effects on state finances threatened the Reichswehr's buildup, although Groener and Schleicher did succeed in protecting the centerpiece of their policy from serious damage.⁷² After engineering Groener's fall in mid-May 1932, Schleicher attempted single-handedly, first as Reichswehr Minister and later as chancellor, to create the domestic and international conditions for carrying out his predecessor's military policy, which he had helped to design. The Geneva Five Power Declaration of 11 December 1932 did offer Schleicher international recognition in principle of Germany's "equality of rights" to armaments. The declaration represented an important partial revision of the military provisions of the Versailles Treaty, but it was far from the international acceptance of the manpower and matériel buildup of the Reichswehr that Schleicher desired. His manifold attempts to secure broad domestic political support for his policy remained unsuccessful.⁷³ The armed forces once again proved too narrow a base for developing and carrying out national policy. The resignation of Schleicher and his cabinet at the end of January 1933 marked the

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 141–48. See also idem, "Dynamics," pp. 100–51.

⁷⁰ Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 243–55.

⁷¹ Carsten, *Reichswehr*, pp. 392–400.

⁷² Geyer, "Rüstungsprogramm," pp. 132–34, 152–56.

⁷³ Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 271–97; Carsten, *Reichswehr*, pp. 418–43; Axel Schildt, *Militärdiktatur mit Massenbasis? Die Querfrontkonzeption der Reichswehrführung um General von Schleicher am Ende der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt/M., 1981).

definitive failure of the strategy of reestablishing German great-power status within the framework of collective security.

REARMAMENT AND THE MILITARY: THE ECLIPSE OF STRATEGY

No one who considers the years following the National Socialist "seizure of power" (*Machtergreifung*) from a strategic perspective can doubt that the "top leadership" (*Führungsspitze*) of Germany was identical with the person of Adolf Hitler. The fact that President Paul von Hindenburg remained in office until his death in mid-1934 or that competing centers of power continued to exist in Germany did not change this situation. All such centers remained subordinated to the charismatic Führer until 1945.⁷⁴ As head of the National Socialist Party and movement, Hitler determined the guidelines of policy and thus of strategy. The leaders of the Reichswehr and the Wehrmacht never questioned his fundamental claim to a monopoly of power. Although historians often speak of an "entente" or even of an "alliance of the [old] elites" with the new leaders, such statements do not call into question Hitler's undisputed claim to political authority as Führer of his movement and chancellor.⁷⁵ The "partial identity of aims" of the military leadership and National Socialist regime flowed from agreement at many levels on basic issues of foreign and domestic policy. Conflicts between the regime and its military organizations stemmed primarily from the doggedly defended claims of the military leaders to comprehensive organizational authority in areas directly related to national defense.⁷⁶

The *Machtergreifung*, therefore, confirmed the primacy of the political leadership in questions of strategy, in sharp contrast to the earlier Wilhelmine tradition. For military leaders, however, the conditions of strategic subordination to the political leadership had improved considerably since Groener's time as defense minister. The general aim of German foreign policy – reestablishing unrestricted military sovereignty and Germany's position as a great power in Europe – remained the same as under the Republic, but Germany now presented its demands with far greater emphasis and more effective publicity. The change in methods was decisive, especially in military policy. The appointment of an active duty officer, General Werner von Blom-

⁷⁴ On the hotly debated subject of the structure of the National Socialist regime, see Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker, eds., *The "Führer State": Myth and Reality, Studies on the Structure and Politics of the Third Reich*, introduction by Wolfgang J. Mommsen (Stuttgart, 1981); Hans-Ulrich Thamer, *Verführung und Gewalt: Deutschland 1933–1945* (Berlin, 1986), pp. 338–83; Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London, 1985).

⁷⁵ See Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Armee, Politik und Gesellschaft in Deutschland 1933–1945* (Paderborn, 1979), especially pp. 30–33; Fritz Fischer, *Bündnis der Eliten: Zur Kontinuität der Machtstrukturen in Deutschland 1871–1945* (Düsseldorf, 1979).

⁷⁶ See Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat. Zeit der Indoktrination* (Hamburg, 1969); Müller, *Armee*, pp. 33–38.

berg, as Reichswehr Minister, and his installation before the rest of Hitler's cabinet on 30 January 1933 seemed a positive sign for the future development of the Reichswehr. Blomberg, a member of the German delegation to the Geneva Disarmament Conference, was thereafter the driving force behind the change in German disarmament policy.⁷⁷

Prepared by Blomberg, Hitler's decision at the beginning of October to withdraw from the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference abandoned an essential element of Groener's strategic conception, the claim that Germany could defend itself under existing circumstances only through the support of international institutions and the assistance of other great powers. Hitler's decision represented the first step toward a policy, pursued consistently in the following years, of extricating Germany from the post-1918 collective security system and of regaining unrestricted military sovereignty by breaking with both Versailles and Locarno. Hitler's policy mirrored the hopes, wishes, and demands of those military leaders prepared to accept the dangers involved in achieving what they supposed to be a shared aim – the reestablishment of Germany's position as a great power. And the ever-greater dangers that their efforts summoned up served as justification for the constant acceleration of rearmament.⁷⁸

In his frequently quoted address to Reichswehr leaders on 3 February 1933, Hitler announced how he intended to create the domestic preconditions for his future strategy.⁷⁹ He thus freed the military from a problem that, as they had long realized, they themselves could not solve. Already at the first cabinet meeting on 30 January, Blomberg had renounced the traditional but detested military role in preserving domestic order.⁸⁰ Now Hitler described the Reichswehr as "the most important institution of the state" and announced a "tighter, authoritarian leadership" as a prerequisite for "regaining political power," which he called the sole objective of his policy. This "reversal" aimed at promoting a general "remilitarization" of the nation and at "strengthen[ing] the readiness to serve in the armed forces and defend the country" by all available means.

⁷⁷ Wilhelm Deist, "The Rearmament of the Wehrmacht," in Wilhelm Deist, et al., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 1, *The Build-up of German Aggression* (London, 1990), pp. 401–403, and Manfred Messerschmidt, "Foreign Policy and Preparation for War," *ibid.*, pp. 581–86.

⁷⁸ See Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 325–63; Müller, *Armee*, pp. 73–91; *idem*, *General Ludwig Beck: Studien und Dokumente zur politisch-militärischen Vorstellungswelt und Tätigkeit des Generalstabschefs des deutschen Heeres 1933–1938* (Boppard, 1980), pp. 142–225.

⁷⁹ Thilo Vogelsang, "Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichswehr 1930–1933," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 2 (1954), pp. 397–436, here pp. 434–36.

⁸⁰ Carsten, *Reichswehr*, pp. 447–48; Wolfgang Sauer, "Die Mobilmachung der Gewalt," in Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, and Gerhard Schulz, *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung: Studien zur Errichtung des totalitären Herrschaftssystems in Deutschland 1933/34* (Frankfurt/M., 1974), pp. 41 ff; Günter Wollstein, *Vom Weimarer Revisionismus zu Hitler: Das Deutsche Reich und die Großmächte in der Anfangsphase der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft in Deutschland* (Bonn, 1973), pp. 23–25.

The National Socialist regime, with the active assistance of the Wehrmacht, proceeded to execute this "remilitarization" of the nation with unprecedented intensity. Although conflicts of authority developed between the military and the National Socialist movement in both state and party arenas, the Wehrmacht never doubted the necessity of the domestic political measures that Hitler had announced.⁸¹ Logically enough, the officer corps and its highest ranking representatives refrained from criticizing the concentration camp system that held 26,000 people by July 1933. The Wehrmacht did not even object seriously to the murder of Generals Schleicher and Bredow in 1934.⁸² In the military view, strongly influenced by the experiences of World War I, basic criticism of the forms, methods, and content of Hitler's remilitarization could only jeopardize the essential conditions for practicing the military profession.

Hitler acted decisively both at home and abroad in pursuit of his strategy. But initially he left to the military the manpower buildup and rearmament of the Wehrmacht, the main prerequisite for conquest. That step had serious strategic consequences, though the results impressed contemporaries and historians alike. For example, within six and a half years, the 115,000 man Reichswehr grew into a modern Wehrmacht with a peacetime strength of 1.1 million men and a wartime strength of 4.5 million.⁸³ Such statistics long concealed the shortcomings of the rapid rearmament process.

In spring 1933, a few weeks after Blomberg took office, the head of the *Truppenamt*, General Wilhelm Adam, described the military situation of Germany as hopeless in the event of armed conflict.⁸⁴ The armed forces could stop a Polish advance toward Berlin, but a shortage of ammunition meant that Germany could only resist for a limited time. That sobering reality marked the starting point of a rearmament process directed by the military. The milestones of this process for the army – the December Program of 1933 and the rearmament program of August 1936 – remained the basis for all related measures.⁸⁵ The December Program of 1933 called for a threefold increase in the *Reichsheer* to twenty-one divisions by March 1938.

The purely military objective of the program was clear: the twenty-one division army should enable Germany to conduct "a defensive war on several fronts with some prospects of success."⁸⁶ This meant the abandonment of Groener's policy, which had tied any use of the Reichswehr to "definite

⁸¹ See, in addition to Messerschmidt, *Wehrmacht*, Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Das Heer und Hitler: Armee und nationalsozialistisches Regime 1933-1940*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1988).

⁸² See Hans Buchheim, et al., *Anatomy of the SS-State*, Vol. 2 (London, 1968), p. 25 (31 July 1933). On the reaction to the Röhm Affair see Müller, *Heer*, pp. 125-33.

⁸³ Bernhard R. Kroener, et al., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 5, pt. 1, *Organisation und Mobilisierung des deutschen Machtbereichs* (Stuttgart, 1988), p. 731.

⁸⁴ Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 405-408.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 413-16, 437-56.

⁸⁶ The memorandum of the *Truppenamt* of 14 December 1933, is printed in Hans-Jürgen Rautenberg, "Drei Dokumente zur Planung eines 300.000 Mann-Friedensheeres aus dem Dezember 1933," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 22 (1977), pp. 115-17.

prospects of success," in favor of a far riskier military policy. As head of the *Truppenamt* in 1929, Blomberg had failed to prevail against Groener's more cautious course.⁸⁷ But now it was Blomberg who shaped military policy, with the complete support of the new head of the *Truppenamt*, Lieutenant General Ludwig Beck. The Wehrmacht leadership's determination to defend Germany solely through military might achieved by massive rearmament – against rather than within the existing system of collective security – helped lead Germany swiftly into harm's way. But recognition of danger led not to caution, but to ever-greater readiness to assume new and greater risks.

This increasing international tension was obvious to Hitler and his generals; it led to a constant stream of concepts, drafts, and plans from the military leadership for further acceleration of rearmament through measures such as the reintroduction of universal conscription in 1935 and the occupation of the Rhineland in 1936. The military planning that preceded and accompanied Hitler's foreign policy coups offers further evidence of rearmament's centrality in German strategy. In 1935–36, discussions within the army general staff about "increasing the fighting power of the army" led to a complete reorganization of the ground forces. That development in turn determined the nature of the rearmament program of August 1936, which remained in effect until 1939.⁸⁸ The phrase "increasing the fighting power of the army" necessarily covered the question of how and to what extent to incorporate armored units into the army's structure. In a basic memorandum of 30 December 1935, Beck revealed himself as an advocate of the operational use of armored divisions. But he also suggested that the army had not abandoned its aim of being able to conduct a European war on several fronts. The new weapons system would permit "strategic defense," which in Beck's view could only be successful if conducted "in the form of an attack." "Strategic defense" through armored forces opened the road to a revival of the classical operational art of Schlieffen and Moltke the elder.⁸⁹

The rearmament program of August 1936 envisaged the creation of thirty-six infantry divisions (of which only four were completely motorized), three armored divisions, three light divisions, one mountain division, and a cavalry brigade. The planned peacetime army would have a strength of 830,000 men; the wartime army, 4,620,000 men. Compared with the original strength of the Reichswehr and even with the twenty-one division December Program of 1933, these figures represented a staggering increase in military power over an astonishingly short period. The Wehrmacht's great leap forward would raise the already heightened anxieties of Germany's neighbors and place the German economy under severe pressure – a prospect that the officers planning the program in summer 1936 clearly understood.

⁸⁷ See Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 191–95, 207–13.

⁸⁸ Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 431–37.

⁸⁹ The memorandum of 30 December 1935, is printed in Müller, *Beck*, pp. 469–77.

The chief of the General Army Office, Major General Fritz Fromm, explained to the army's commander-in-chief, Colonel General Werner Freiherr von Fritsch, that the program would make extraordinary demands on Germany's already depleted reserves of raw materials and foreign exchange. Fromm had no illusions: the program was justifiable only if the German leadership had the "firm intention" to use the Wehrmacht at a "certain, already determined point." Fritsch simply ignored the issue that Fromm had raised and approved the program in December 1936.⁹⁰ But Fromm's forebodings were justified. Shortages led to raw materials quotas in 1937; by spring 1939, equipment for the wartime army had fallen well below planned figures.

These economic difficulties played an important role in the decisions to move against Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938.⁹¹ Foreign exchange and strategic raw materials seized in the resulting annexations in turn significantly improved the outfitting of the Wehrmacht for war. This was a paradoxical development: since 1933 an army ready for a European war on several fronts had been the aim of German rearmament; now only the actual use of that army would permit the swift continuation of rearmament. The most serious weakness in the buildup of the army was precisely the failure to match rearmament targets to economic realities; the result was a series of severe bottlenecks after 1936.⁹²

Nor was the army the only source of major demands on the economy: the Luftwaffe and navy also had decisive voices in the rearming of the Wehrmacht. An impressive group of competent and influential individuals directed the Luftwaffe buildup from its beginning until 1936.⁹³ Reich Aviation Minister Hermann Göring, seldom concerned with the details of armaments in the first years, relied on a capable and enthusiastic staff – especially his state secretary, General Erhard Milch. Göring's staff used their master's political influence and their own close connections with industry skillfully; they helped rescue the especially hard-hit aircraft industry from the world depression and swiftly laid the foundation for a Luftwaffe build-up and expansion. They promoted rapid expansion of capacity and pressed for

⁹⁰ Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 440–47.

⁹¹ Hans-Erich Volkmann, "The National Socialist Economy in Preparation of War," in *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 1, *The Build-up of German Aggression* (London, 1990), pp. 323–36.

⁹² See *ibid.*, pp. 353–72; Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 451–56. On the problems that rearmament caused the officer corps, see *ibid.*, pp. 425–29, 439–40.

⁹³ On the buildup of the Luftwaffe, see *ibid.*, pp. 480–504; Edward L. Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe: The Reich Air Ministry and the German Aircraft Industry, 1919–1939* (Lincoln, 1976); David Irving, *The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe: The Life of Luftwaffe Marshal Erhard Milch* (London, 1973); Richard James Overy, "The German Pre-war Aircraft Production Plans: November 1936–April 1939," *English Historical Review*, 90 (1975), pp. 778–97; Williamson Murray, *Strategy for Defeat: The Luftwaffe 1933–1945* (Washington, 1983); Horst Boog, *Die deutsche Luftwaffenführung 1935–1945: Führungsprobleme, Spitzengliederung, Generalstabsausbildung* (Stuttgart, 1981).

rationalization of production, while accepting that the first production models could not incorporate the latest aviation technology.

The new service branch nevertheless fulfilled its foreign policy function. The German government gradually confirmed the existence of the Luftwaffe only after February 1935, but long before that Germany could hardly hide the Luftwaffe buildup, which caused increasing anxiety among neighbors such as Britain. At the end of July 1934, the British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, stated in the House of Commons that Britain could no longer defend itself at the cliffs of Dover, but only on the banks of the Rhine. That confession suggested that the infant Luftwaffe was providing an umbrella of deterrence during the initial buildup of the army.⁹⁴

In its second phase, from 1936 to 1939, the expansion of the Luftwaffe encountered difficulties. Apart from the general bottlenecks in the defense economy and Göring's increasing and often erratic interventions, especially in personnel appointments, the Luftwaffe encountered increasing problems in controlling technological development and industrial planning. Reequipping with new models such as the He 111, Do 17, and Ju 86 bombers took much longer than originally planned, and was not complete until 1937. By then the Aviation Ministry was already planning a second phase of reequipment that would start in 1939 and end in 1940. The He 111 and the Do 17 would give way to the Ju 88 fast bomber, developed after 1936 and undergoing flight tests by summer 1937. Planning for this second phase took place at a time when Britain, the state most disturbed by the buildup of the Luftwaffe, had become a potential enemy. Yet in their previous armaments planning, neither Luftwaffe nor navy had assumed British hostility. The Ju 88 became a victim of this change of course in military policy. The aircraft required innumerable changes and modifications to make it suitable for an air war against Britain, and thus caused delays in the entire reequipment program. Despite the best efforts of the Luftwaffe and industry, the Ju 88 was not available on time, and Germany fought the air war against Britain largely with the He 111 and the Do 17. Technological factors, particularly the development of aircraft engines and the complexities of development, testing, and production, finally imposed limits on the rapid arming of the Luftwaffe.⁹⁵ These limits did not change significantly during the war despite technological progress in individual sectors.

Britain's new status as a potential enemy also decisively influenced the navy's armament planning.⁹⁶ Since the failure of the Tirpitz Plan, the Ger-

⁹⁴ See Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 484-85; Messerschmidt, "Foreign Policy," pp. 599-601.

⁹⁵ See also Horst Boog, "Luftwaffe und Technik 1935-1945," *Truppenpraxis*, 31 (1987), pp. 65-73.

⁹⁶ On naval rearmament, see Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 457-80; Dülffer, *Weimar*, pp. 370-512; Michael Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung, 1935-1945*, Vol. 1 (1935-1941), (Frankfurt/M., 1979); idem, "Marineleitung und politische Führung 1931-1935," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 10 (1971), pp. 113-58; Carl-Axel Gemzell, *Organization*,

man navy had regarded discussion of a new confrontation with Britain as taboo. Wegener had been aware of this inhibition, but his example also shows that naval officers frequently ignored it. The dream of Germany as a world sea power remained very much alive within the *Kriegsmarine*.

Hitler made new funds available for ship construction, and "parity" with France became the navy's initial aim. For Admiral Erich Raeder, the navy's commander-in-chief, the support of the new chancellor for his service seemed vital. Hitler had, after all, denounced German naval policy under Wilhelm II in *Mein Kampf* for adding to Germany's enemies without accomplishing a useful strategic purpose. Raeder, through his personal contacts with Hitler, was astonishingly successful, for Hitler found the demand for parity with France plausible. But the extent to which British sea power continued to be the decisive measure of the German navy became evident when the naval leadership linked that "parity" with the strength of the Royal Navy. The German construction program of early summer 1934 made parity equivalent to 50 percent of British strength.⁹⁷ Such a fleet would serve to prevent the French from entering the Baltic in wartime and could disrupt French sea links in the Atlantic and perhaps even the Mediterranean, areas vitally important to Britain. In notes for a conversation with Hitler on 27 June 1934, Raeder summarized the consequences of his construction plans in one prophetic line: "Development of the fleet, later perhaps against England."⁹⁸

German navy leaders interpreted the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 18 July 1935, which permitted a further expansion of the German navy, as merely a "provisional" fixing of the two powers' relative naval strength. But this cautious and concealed turn against Britain did not impel the naval staff to examine the likely shape of an Anglo-German conflict. The persistent lack of clarity of political aims gave German naval rearmament a peculiarly uncertain character. In addition, the long lead time characteristic of shipbuilding made naval force planning dangerously inflexible amid the rapidly changing political and military conditions of the Third Reich. Moreover, limited capacity, insufficient recent experience in building warships, and the bottlenecks in the economy after 1935 prevented German shipyards from meeting the navy's construction targets. Not surprisingly, in September 1939 the German navy lacked the ships needed to fulfill the hopes placed in naval rearmament.

The culmination of naval armament planning, the gargantuan "Z-Plan" of January 1939, developed under Hitler's strong urging following his own turn

Conflict and Innovation: A Study of German Naval Strategic Planning, 1888-1940 (Lund, 1973).

⁹⁷ See Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 460-62.

⁹⁸ Salewski, "Marineleitung," pp. 156-57.

against Britain after 1937.⁹⁹ The "Z-Plan" expressed to the fullest the naval officer corps' fantasy of making Germany a world sea power. But the navy could only realize that dream against Britain, and therefore required above all else ships for an Atlantic naval war. The navy's situation by 1939 was similar in its consequences to that of the Luftwaffe: reorientation against Britain came too late to give Germany the forces necessary to fight with full effectiveness at the outbreak of war.

This survey has shown that German rearmament encountered economic difficulties from 1936-37 on, in part because each of the three services planned and implemented rearmament according to its own methods, priorities, and aims. Hitler's approach abandoned Groener's goal of comprehensive armaments planning; in the area of rearmament, the unity of the Wehrmacht had become an illusion. From 1936-37 on, bottlenecks led to raw material quotas that further aggravated competition among the services.¹⁰⁰ From this competition, in existence from the beginning, the rearmament programs developed a momentum that even Hitler could not ignore in his policy decisions. Even within each service, coordination of rearmament programs with the plant capacities and technological skills of the manufacturers was often lacking. The inevitable financial constraints, the constant struggle for foreign exchange and raw materials, and the absence of comprehensive planning made German rearmament chaotic as well as unprecedented in pace and scale.¹⁰¹

Several additional factors help explain the bizarre fact that no strategic plan governed this gigantic process. Although the second four-year armaments plan designed under Weimar had already begun by 1933, all three services entered the Third Reich deeply conscious of their weaknesses.¹⁰² They sought above all else to overcome this condition as soon as possible; the menacing situation they perceived was not conducive to cool-headed strategic or force planning. Moreover, in spite of his supposedly great authority, Blomberg, the Reich Minister of War and commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht, achieved only modest success in imposing policy on the commanders-in-chief of the army, navy, and Luftwaffe. This was especially true in the armaments sector, where Göring's¹⁰³ and Raeder's¹⁰⁴ special relationship with Hitler blocked any effort to develop a comprehensive program for the Wehrmacht as a whole.

The development of the Office of Defense Economy and Weapons Affairs

⁹⁹ Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 472-80.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 505-508.

¹⁰¹ Michael Geyer, "Rüstungsbeschleunigung und Inflation: Zur Inflationsdenkschrift des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht vom November 1938," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 30 (1981), pp. 121-86.

¹⁰² As reflected in the memorandum of the chief of the *Truppenamt*, General Wilhelm Adam, in spring 1933. See Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 405-408.

¹⁰³ See especially Irving, *Rise and Fall*.

¹⁰⁴ Salewski, "Marineleitung," *passim*.

in the War Ministry represents an excellent example of the decentralized, uncoordinated style of German rearmament.¹⁰⁵ Blomberg was not expected to issue binding directives for rearmament based on a coordinated strategic plan; such directives could come only from Hitler himself. Though it can be shown that individual armaments programs went to Hitler for approval, no evidence before summer 1936 indicates that the "Führer and Reich Chancellor" concerned himself with the issue of overall rearmament.¹⁰⁶ Nor were his directives of 1936 and 1938-39 the result of consultations in a lengthy decision-making process; they read as ideological appeals justifying his maximum demands on the individual services.¹⁰⁷ German rearmament from 1933 to 1939 was thus not a masterpiece of strategic organization, but rather a process set in motion by each of the services acting on its own, hindered by bureaucracy, with undefined aims and often chaotic execution. The military establishment, hardly affected by or interested in rearmament's political, economic, and social implications, never came to grips with its consequences for the Wehrmacht or nation.

The Wehrmacht's internal disunity was likewise evident in strategic planning. On 24 June 1937 Blomberg issued a "Directive for the Uniform War Preparations of the Wehrmacht."¹⁰⁸ The directive lay in the tradition of Groener's directive of 16 April 1930, but it showed how much had changed. For Blomberg, France and Czechoslovakia were the Wehrmacht's principal enemies. In the event that Britain, Poland, and Lithuania joined the hostile coalition, the situation for Germany would be, in Blomberg's view, "hopeless." He added that Germany's "political leaders" would do everything possible "to keep England and Poland" neutral. In his directive, Blomberg understood the "war preparations of the Wehrmacht" exclusively in an operational sense, and made no mention of the armaments requirements for the multifront war envisaged in Europe or of the problems the war economy would face during mobilization. The essence of the directive was "purely instrumental, technical thinking."¹⁰⁹

On 5 November 1937, Hitler conferred with the Foreign Minister and the commanders-in-chief of the Wehrmacht and of the services. As documented in the Hossbach Protocol, Blomberg's expectations about the intentions of the political leadership met with disappointment¹¹⁰; Blomberg's dismissal followed. The chief of the army general staff, Beck, who had warned of the

¹⁰⁵ Georg Thomas, *Geschichte der deutschen Wehr- und Rüstungswirtschaft (1918-1943/45)*, Wolfgang Birkenfeld, ed., (Boppard, 1966), pp. 62-79.

¹⁰⁶ Several examples can be found in Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 462-65, 490.

¹⁰⁷ For example, the October Program of the Luftwaffe of 1938: Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 500-501.

¹⁰⁸ IMT, Vol. 34, p. 734. See the comprehensive interpretation by Müller, *Beck*, pp. 239-47; Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 528-30.

¹⁰⁹ Müller, *Heer*, p. 237.

¹¹⁰ See the most recent study by Jonathan Wright and Paul Stafford, "Hitler, Britain and the Hossbach Memorandum," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 42 (1987), pp. 77-123; Messerschmidt, "Foreign Policy," pp. 636-39.

military consequences of Hitler's goals, was the next to face – in March 1938 – Hitler's determination to decide the timing and shape of military action personally. In summer 1938 Beck sought to reclaim the voice in strategic matters that the Wehrmacht had surrendered since 1933. He failed.¹¹¹ Blomberg's June 1937 directive was the last "for the uniform war preparations of the Wehrmacht," despite later attempts to promote one by Wilhelm Keitel, Hitler's principal military assistant after the dictator had made himself commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht.¹¹² Hitler believed that he could do without a concrete strategic orientation for the armed forces.

Between 1933 and 1939 the Wehrmacht and its leaders in no way conformed to Ludendorff's concept of a military leader and "defense staff" (*Wehrstab*) who would direct and supervise preparation for war. The services' complete absorption in organizing a rearmament unprecedented in speed and scale, their traditional inability to transcend the rivalries that separated them, and the reassuring belief that the political leadership had a firm grip on all issues related to the conduct of war except "strictly military" ones, led to the domination of "purely instrumental, technical thinking" and to an exclusive focus on operational art. The Wehrmacht and its leaders neither generated nor sought strategic ideas.

HITLER'S STRATEGY

A few days after becoming chancellor, Hitler partially disclosed his political aims and the strategic conceptions that they entailed in an address to the Reichswehr's commanders.¹¹³ His announced aim of "regaining political power" was for the moment primarily a reference to domestic politics. But in his address to the Reichswehr leadership, it also meant the reestablishment of Germany's position as a European great power. And near the end of his address Hitler announced in unequivocal fashion that his aims went far beyond revision. After reestablishing Germany's great power position, the choice would be "perhaps to fight for new export openings, perhaps – and probably better – to conquer and ruthlessly Germanize new living space in the East." Here Hitler departed from the long-term policy objectives familiar to Reichswehr leaders. Hitler's remarks were also noteworthy for their clear linking of means and ends. Everything – from the suppression of domestic dissent, to overcoming the great depression, to the struggle against Versailles, to the buildup of the Wehrmacht – aimed at establishing Germany's position as the greatest European power and at using German power for conquest in the East. The beginnings of a strategic conception were unmistakable.

¹¹¹ See Müller, *Beck*, pp. 254–311.

¹¹² Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 531–37.

¹¹³ Vogelsang, "Neue Dokumente."

Intensive historical study of Hitler and the Third Reich has shown that the *Weltanschauung* that shaped Hitler's thoughts and actions as "Führer and Reich Chancellor" had assumed its final, programmatic form in the second half of the 1920s.¹¹⁴ Despite their heterogeneous quality, his speeches and writings from the 1920s, especially *Mein Kampf*, make clear that the social-Darwinist notion of the human "struggle for survival" and the pseudobiological concept of race formed the central, axiomatic basis of his *Weltanschauung*. His views were typical of one broad stream of contemporary thought in Germany from the end of the nineteenth century, a *Weltanschauung* that the experiences of the First World War seemed to have confirmed.¹¹⁵

It is impossible to overestimate the influence of this *Weltanschauung* on Hitler's political actions. One of its basic components, the unshakeable belief in the distinctive qualities and superiority of the so-called Nordic or Aryan race, involved a struggle to the death with world Jewry, whose putative aim was the "enslavement of productive, creative peoples." The "most bitter struggle" of this kind ever attempted was currently underway in Germany, and the task of the National Socialist movement was to apply "in the area of practical politics the knowledge and scientific insights of the race doctrine as well as the explanation of world history it provides."¹¹⁶

Here also Hitler expressed in an extreme form thoughts that preoccupied his contemporaries. From the perspective of his racist, social-Darwinist *Weltanschauung*, politics was "in reality the struggle for survival of a Volk."¹¹⁷ He did warn against war as a permanent condition: constant losses of the best specimens endangered the "race value" of a people. But he viewed the "peaceful struggle of economic competition" as "the most inhuman war" of all. The task of policy was always to "choose for its struggle the weapons in such a way that life in the highest sense" would be served. From this he concluded that no distinction existed between peace and war and that Germany should make no alliances without the thought of war.¹¹⁸

The task of German policy was simple: to conduct the struggle for *Lebensraum* ("living space") in the East. Only conquest could make good the mistakes of the past and preserve the "race value" of the German people. The nation should concentrate all efforts on the struggle for living space, which meant that domestic and foreign policy had to be interlocking and,

¹¹⁴ See above all Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung*, rev. ed. (Stuttgart, 1981).

¹¹⁵ See Hans-Günter Zmarzlik, "Der Sozialdarwinismus in Deutschland als geschichtliches Problem," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 11 (1963), pp. 246-73; the last chapter of Arno J. Mayer's book, *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (New York, 1981).

¹¹⁶ *Hitler's Secret Book*, with an introduction by Telford Taylor (New York, 1962), pp. 127, 220, 221. See also, Hamid Moghareh-Obed, "Rassenhygiene/Eugenik: Ideologisches Prädispositiv und Handlungsmotivation zum Genozid," in Wolfgang Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg: Grundzüge, Analysen, Forschungsbilanz* (Munich, 1989), pp. 798-813.

¹¹⁷ *Hitler's Secret Book*, pp. 46-52.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

above all, that the nation must prepare for war. Hitler demanded the "complete, thorough training and education of the nation for war." Only would Germany's future security be "almost guaranteed."¹¹⁹

This brief outline leaves no doubt that Hitler began preparing for war from his first day in office. In accordance with his long-term aims, his strategy these years was comprehensive and, despite a bewildering tactical versatility, purposeful and consistent. The domestic political measures of the regime – the almost total, organized militarization of the nation with the help of the National Socialist Party and its organizations – as well as the persecution and elimination of all groups and persons considered a danger to *Volk* unity fulfilled the domestic political conditions for conducting war that Stülpnagel and Ludendorff had described. From the beginning, this campaign consisted of relentless indoctrination, forcible "coordination" (*Gleichschaltung*) of state bureaucracies and private voluntary organizations, destruction of the rule of law, measures of "racial hygiene," and the persecution, dispossession, and expulsion of Germany's Jews. Yet the population, haunted by the immense and useless sacrifices of World War I, followed the regime into war with only "reluctant loyalty" in September 1939.¹²¹ That provided a warning that the leadership took seriously, and placed limits on the economic sacrifices it felt it could demand in the first phase of the war. Only the Wehrmacht's impressive victory over France gave the regime's propaganda the credibility needed to meet Hitler's demands for "inner unity."

Why did Hitler devote so little attention to planning a rearmament that would serve his aims better, and why did he fail to coordinate the diverse efforts of the three services? The apparent answer, judging from his "Secret Book" of 1928, is that he privileged psychological and ideological preparation for war over its material aspects.¹²² From a tactical and political point of view, Hitler probably welcomed the Reichswehr's complete absorption into the rearmament that he had made possible, and saw no reason to doubt the desire of the military leaders for swift and comprehensive rearmament. In the first years after 1933, he therefore limited himself in essence to urging the acceleration of rearmament. Nor did he change that approach in 1937, when rearmament had developed its full momentum. His attitude precluded comprehensive armaments planning for the German armed forces.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 69. See Rainer Zitelmann, "Zur Begründung des 'Lebensraum'-Motivs in der Weltanschauung," in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 551–67.

¹²⁰ See Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State* (New York, 1981); Thamer, "Verführung," pp. 446.

¹²¹ Wolfram Wette, "Ideology, Propaganda and Politics as Preconditions for the War of the Third Reich," in *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 1, *The Build-Up of German Aggression* (London, 1990), pp. 114–24; Wilhelm Deist, "Überlegungen 'widerwilligen Loyalität' der Deutschen bei Kriegsbeginn," in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 224–39.

¹²² *Hitler's Secret Book*, p. 69.

Road to ideological war

That lack of planning was all the more remarkable given the bottlenecks that slowed the pace of rearmament after 1935 at the latest and imposed drastic policy changes. For Hitler and his party, economic strains were all the more dangerous because economic success – in overcoming the great depression – had been indispensable to consolidating the regime. National Socialism's massive spending had stimulated the economy to such an extent that unemployment fell by 50 percent within two years.¹²³ But the economic upswing, intertwined with rearmament from the beginning, in turn summoned up long-term inflationary risks uncontrollable even through the financial sleight of hand of Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht. The regime virtually exhausted its foreign exchange reserves as early as 1935.¹²⁴ That in turn endangered the imports of raw materials vital for rearmament and of food essential to public contentment.

Hitler's reaction was both decisive and typical: he sought to mobilize the German economy with the Four Year Plan of September 1936.¹²⁵ His insistence on the exploitation of all mineral deposits within Germany, however uneconomic, and for the establishment or expansion of synthetic materials plants simply suspended economic law. In his August 1936 memorandum on the Four Year Plan, Hitler made clear that the function of all economic activity was preparation for war. At the end of the memorandum he flatly demanded that: "1) The German army must be ready for combat in four years. 2) The German economy must be ready for war in four years."¹²⁶ Such a program could only aggravate rather than relieve the bottlenecks and conceal inflation from which the economy now suffered; the result of Hitler's further acceleration of rearmament was the system of drastic raw materials quotas introduced in 1937.¹²⁷ In the end, only conquest could maintain the pace of rearmament.

Economic considerations thus played an important role in the decision to annex Austria and move against Czechoslovakia in 1938,¹²⁸ and the economic spoils from these actions temporarily relieved economic strain. Germany began the war in a precarious economic situation that resulted directly from the pace and scale of rearmament. Yet the structural weaknesses described did not prevent the Wehrmacht from fielding the most modern armed force in Europe at the outset of the war. In the final analysis, Hitler ignored bottlenecks and the threat of economic catastrophe in the short term in pursuit of his long-term solution to Germany's difficulties, the conquest of living space in the East. Seen in the light of his ideological premises, his

¹²³ Volkmann, "National Socialist Economy," p. 235.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 273-79.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 277-79; Wilhelm Treue, "Hitlers Denkschrift zum Vierjahresplan 1936," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 3 (1955), pp. 194-210.

¹²⁷ Deist, "Rearmament," pp. 449-54.

¹²⁸ Volkmann, "National Socialist Economy," pp. 323-36.

strategy had consistently and successfully integrated domestic, economic, and military policy.

What was the effect of this ideologically inspired policy of war preparation upon foreign policy, an area at least in theory dominated by cool calculation? In his February 1933 address to the Reichswehr's commanders, Hitler stressed that the buildup of the Wehrmacht would be the "most dangerous time." Foreign policy had to provide a diplomatic shield until Germany was strong.¹²⁹ Hitler and the Foreign Ministry succeeded in avoiding isolation by offering apparently advantageous bilateral deals to selected neighbors, and by propagating the misleading notion that the National Socialist regime was simply continuing the Weimar policy of revision with greater noise and emphasis. This policy of camouflage made possible the reintroduction of conscription in March 1935 and the remilitarization of the Rhineland a year later. That act marked the final break with the system of collective security created by the treaties of Versailles and Locarno; as before 1914, German security now rested solely on German might.

Hitler had assumed that Britain would tolerate his policy of German continental hegemony, which implied the defeat of France, if British interests overseas remained safe.¹³⁰ In that way he hoped to eliminate any threat in western Europe and then concentrate on the decisive phase of his political program, the war for *Lebensraum* in the East. At the Hossbach conference of 5 November 1937, he described Britain as a "hate-inspired antagonist" but also indicated that he did not expect British resistance to the absorption of Czechoslovakia.¹³¹ The feeble British and French reaction to the *Anschluss* apparently confirmed his assessment, for that coup in turn markedly improved Germany's strategic position against Czechoslovakia. He therefore decided on war, until frustrated by the cession of Czechoslovak border areas to Germany under the Munich Agreement. That surrender, however, was yet another confirmation of his assessment of British policy.¹³² Far into World War II, Hitler hoped for an Anglo-German bargain that would condone German continental hegemony. A wish elevated into dogma precluded realistic, rational calculation.

Britain's adverse reaction to Germany's occupation of Prague in March 1939 made clear how badly Hitler had misconstrued the principles underlying British acceptance of the *Anschluss* and the partition of Czechoslovakia. On 31 March, Chamberlain declared that Britain would help Poland if its independence appeared threatened. That guarantee meant that Hitler had failed in his attempt to use Poland as an instrument of his strategy.¹³³ He now determined to solve the "Polish question" by force, and set 1 September

¹²⁹ Messerschmidt, "Foreign Policy," pp. 581-89.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 594-604.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 636-39.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 663-72.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 692-96.

as the Wehrmacht's planning date for readiness to act. That deadline made still more acute the self-inflicted time pressure that rearmament and its economic consequences had imposed since 1937-38, while the political conditions for action against Poland visibly worsened.

The most striking consequence of Hitler's fixation on Poland was the increase in influence of the Soviet Union, Hitler's ultimate target. As expansion remained his unchanging goal and British resistance hardened, he felt compelled to free himself to strike Poland by concluding the nonaggression pact and secret protocol with Stalin. That bargain made him dependent on Soviet support yet failed to deter Britain and France from declaring war on Germany on 3 September 1939.¹³⁴

The reaction of the Western Powers represented Hitler's first serious strategic defeat. The war to conquer living space in the East – the core of his policy – had begun under a constellation of forces incompatible with his objectives. Only Germany's military and industrial might – applied for the moment against the Western Powers rather than against Soviet Russia – could now serve to correct this situation. The axioms of Hitler's ideology, not rational calculation, had determined strategy; the result corresponded neither to his ideological aims nor to rational economic or military goals.

WAR AND RUIN

Germany's strategic decisions during World War II initially centered on Europe. The strategic turning point came in December 1941 with the failure of the German attack on Moscow and Hitler's declaration of war on the United States.¹³⁵ Thereafter the military policies and tactics of Germany's enemies, along with the increasing determination of the National Socialist regime to maintain "inner unity" at the front and at home, explain the war's continuation for three and a half years amid losses in the millions on all sides.

The regime continued and intensified the manifold methods of influencing public opinion with propaganda it had tested in the years before 1939. After the still-vivid experience of "hunger-blockade" in the First World War, the regime sought to guarantee stability at home by providing a dependable food

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 707-17. See also Gottfried Niedhart, "Sitzkrieg versus Blitzkrieg: Das attentistische Konfliktverhalten Großbritanniens in der Krise des internationalen Systems am Vorabend und bei Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs," in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 49-56.

¹³⁵ Jürgen Förster, "Das Unternehmen 'Barbarossa' – eine historische Ortsbestimmung," in Horst Boog, et al., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 4, *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 1079-88; Enrico Syring, "Hitlers Kriegserklärung an Amerika vom 11. Dezember 1941," in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 683-96; Bernhard R. Kroener, "Der 'erfrorene Blitzkrieg'. Strategische Planungen der deutschen Führung gegen die Sowjetunion und die Ursachen ihres Scheiterns," in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 133-48; Bernd Wegner, "Hitlers Strategie zwischen Pearl Harbor und Stalingrad," in Horst Boog, et al., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 6, *Der globale Krieg* (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 97-100.

supply for the German population. The National Socialists foresaw and accepted the catastrophic consequences of their policy in the German-occupied areas, from which they also sought to extract food for the Wehrmacht.¹³⁶ The regime likewise sought to avoid demanding too many sacrifices from Germans in terms of wages, prices, and working conditions.

Yet only the war opened the way to creation of a militarized *Volksge-meinschaft* based on the ideology of the National Socialist rulers. The regime undertook ever more rigorous efforts to remove “un-German elements” (as Stülpnagel had put it) from the militarized *Volksge-meinschaft*. These efforts affected primarily Germans of Jewish religion or descent, whose isolation and deprivation of rights ended in deportation from Germany and physical annihilation in the ghettos and death camps of the East.¹³⁷ The elimination of “un-German” elements also affected handicapped and insane Germans, who were considered “unworthy of life” and eliminated through National Socialist “euthanasia” programs.¹³⁸ After the German attack on the Soviet Union and the ensuing radicalization of the conduct of the war, constant surveillance and terror struck pitilessly at deviations from the line dictated by regime propaganda. Within a perverted legal system, special courts, military courts, and drumhead courts martial dispatched tens of thousands of Germans with relentless efficiency and ever greater speed.¹³⁹ Hitler’s efforts to avoid a repetition of the trauma of 1918 were successful. Despite massive Allied bombing of German cities and an ever more hopeless military situation, the “inner unity” of the *Volksge-meinschaft* at home and at the front lasted to the bitter end.

Yet in the economy the shortcomings of the polycratic Führer-state were all too evident even before the war’s strategic turning point. It proved impossible to unite all the diverse groups, institutions, and special interests involved in the war economy in a common effort. The result was an incomplete economic mobilization – a “peacetime war economy” or “transition economy” – which ended only with Albert Speer’s appointment as armaments minister in February 1942. The Wehrmacht itself bore a major share of responsibility for this situation, thanks to the continued absence of a coordinated tri-service armament program and to the persistent illusion of military

¹³⁶ Hans Umbreit, “Auf dem Weg zur Kontinentalherrschaft,” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 5, pt. 1, *Organisation und Mobilisierung des deutschen Machtbereichs*, pp. 321–27; Rolf-Dieter Müller, “Die Konsequenzen der ‘Volksge-meinschaft’: Ernährung, Ausbeutung, Vernichtung,” in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 240–48.

¹³⁷ See Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago, 1961); Eberhard Jäckel and Jürgen Rohwer, eds., *Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Entschlußbildung und Verwirklichung* (Stuttgart, 1985); Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The Final Solution In History* (New York, 1988).

¹³⁸ Ernst Klee, “Euthanasie” im NS-Staat: Die “Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens” (Frankfurt/M., 1985); idem, *Dokumente zur “Euthanasie”* (Frankfurt/M., 1985).

¹³⁹ Manfred Messerschmidt and Fritz Wüllner, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz im Dienst des Nationalsozialismus* (Baden-Baden, 1987).

leaders that the economy would simply produce on command. Dr. Fritz Todt, appointed armaments minister in March 1940, failed to increase efficiency and production by imposing structures modeled on private industry. The incompatible interests of the regime's rapidly expanding economic bureaucracies and the general euphoria after victory over France made the required radical measures seem less than urgent.

The German leadership never achieved optimal control of war production, nor did it fulfill the requirements of a clearly defined strategy – which in any case did not exist. This inability to master the problems of economic mobilization meant that by summer 1941 Germany had already lost the “war of the factories” against Britain and America. As World War I had shown, that war was in the long run the decisive one.

Nor could Speer's astonishing successes in the final phase of the war reverse defeat.¹⁴⁰ His achievements resulted not only from a purposeful organizational structure, but also from the general radicalization of the war, which expanded to the home front after the defeat before Moscow in December 1941, and reached a high point in Goebbels' fanatical Sportpalast speech of 18 February 1943, “*Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?*” Radicalization also affected production; the regime adopted brutal measures to mobilize labor for the war economy. In May 1941, the German economy employed 1.7 million foreign laborers; by May 1944, the figure was 5.2 million in the *Grossdeutsches Reich*, entirely apart from the millions of prisoners of war. Despite the great differences in their formal status, all workers – including the Germans – felt constant pressure to increase production. Coercion ranged from the compulsory assignment of German workers to specific plants to slave labor and annihilation through work in the concentration camps.¹⁴¹ The system and its functionaries predictably expressed their race ideology in repulsive and criminal form by ranking slave laborers hierarchically, with Soviets and Jews at the bottom. In the final phase of the war, Allied bombing significantly accelerated Germany's exhaustion and economic paralysis.

On the battlefield, victory over Poland changed Germany's strategic situation only by making Hitler's partner and ideological archenemy, the Soviet Union, into Germany's immediate neighbor along a broad eastern border. In contrast, the spectacular successes in the north and in western Europe in spring 1940 decisively improved Germany's strategic situation. In the Scan-

¹⁴⁰ See the summary by the authors of *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 5, pt. 1, *Organisation und Mobilisierung des deutschen Machtbereichs* (Stuttgart, 1988), pp. 1003–16; Rolf-Dieter Müller, “Die Mobilisierung der Wirtschaft für den Krieg – eine Aufgabe der Armee? Wehrmacht und Wirtschaft 1933–1942,” in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 349–62.

¹⁴¹ See Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des ‘Ausländer-Einsatzes’ in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reichs* (Berlin, 1985); the articles by Christian Streit, Gerhard Schreiber, Rolf-Dieter Müller, and Falk Pingel, in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 747–97.

dinavian phase, Britain was the sole enemy. The navy was the originator of WESERÜBUNG, the bold operation against Denmark and Norway.¹⁴² Raeder, navy commander-in-chief, followed Wegener in his awareness of the strategic importance of the northern European flank to Germany's naval war against Britain. The army achieved operational triumph in the campaign against France using the plan of Lieutenant General Erich von Manstein, who won out against the World War I conceptions of the army high command only with Hitler's support.¹⁴³ By June 1940, Germany had conquered the positions that Wegener had identified as prerequisites for war against Britain: the Norwegian and French Atlantic coasts.

The new strategic position appeared to offer Germany a chance to eliminate the one remaining enemy still in the way of a war for living space in the East – Britain. Yet the Germans were unable to seize this chance because they lacked the necessary forces. WESERÜBUNG had so depleted the surface navy, and the seagoing submarine force was so small, that any attempt to isolate Britain by cutting its sea links was doomed to failure.¹⁴⁴ The German air offensive against Britain failed even more conspicuously. Had the Luftwaffe succeeded, a landing operation against Britain would still have been risky, but no such operation was possible without air superiority over the Channel.¹⁴⁵ Hitler's decision to postpone operation SEA LION on 14 September 1940 acknowledged a strategic defeat.

A few months earlier, in his euphoria over imminent victory in France, Hitler had assumed that he could "negotiate with Britain on the basis of a partition of the world."¹⁴⁶ That events did not fulfill that expectation showed the gap between the hubris of summer 1940 and Germany's actual strategic situation. The German leadership passed summer and fall 1940 examining a variety of strategic options, especially ones against Britain.¹⁴⁷ After Hitler's original hope of an understanding with Britain had collapsed, German leaders recognized that even a direct attack would not force the British to come to terms. Only two possibilities remained: the strategic defensive, to hold Germany's position on the continent against Britain and the United States, or to attack Britain indirectly by threatening its Empire and lines of communication. The Germans could not carry out either strategy

¹⁴² See Klaus A. Maier, et al., *Germany and the Second World War*, Vol. 2, *Germany's Initial Conquests in Europe* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 181–96.

¹⁴³ Hans Umbreit, "The Battle for Hegemony in Western Europe," in *ibid.*, pp. 238–54, 281–304.

¹⁴⁴ Bernd Stegemann, "The First Phase of the War at Sea up to the Spring of 1940," in *ibid.*, pp. 176–78, 218.

¹⁴⁵ Klaus A. Maier, "The Battle of Britain," in *ibid.*, pp. 374–407; *idem*, "Die Luftschlacht über England," in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 513–22.

¹⁴⁶ Gerhard Schreiber, "Die politische und militärische Entwicklung im Mittelmeerraum 1939/40," in Gerhard Schreiber et al., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 3, *Der Mittelmeerraum und Südosteuropa: Von der "non belligeranza" Italiens bis zum Kriegseintritt der Vereinigten Staaten* (Stuttgart, 1984), p. 166.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–222.

without the agreement and cooperation of Spain, Vichy France, and Germany's alliance partners Italy and Japan. Yet insistent negotiations and Hitler's October 1940 pilgrimage to meet Laval, Pétain, Franco, and Mussolini produced nothing of significance. Mussolini indeed took the occasion to inform Hitler of his imminent attack on Greece, which portended difficulties for an indirect strategy against Britain. The unyielding attitude of Britain and the pointed reserve of Spain, Vichy, and Italy confronted Hitler with a strategic situation that had serious implications in the long run, given the increasing support of the United States for Britain.

For German leaders, however, an alternative to the anti-British strategy had always existed. The army general staff had begun in late June and early July 1940 to study a possible attack on the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁸ On 21 July, in view of British intransigence, Hitler directed the commander-in-chief of the army to look into the "Russian problem." Brauchitsch was able to sketch immediately the details of the proposed operation. During a conference with senior Wehrmacht commanders on 31 July 1940, the German decision to turn East took a concrete, although not absolutely definitive form. Hitler's ideological aims, the struggle for living space in the East and against "Jewish Bolshevism," came to the fore once more and combined with the strategic necessity of creating an autarkic continental world power position against Britain and the United States. The decision of 31 July was a symbiosis of dogma and calculation.¹⁴⁹ It marked the beginning of comprehensive military preparations for the attack on the Soviet Union in the spring of 1941, and Hitler took the first steps to secure the northern and southern flanks of that operation.¹⁵⁰

In its military and economic preparations for this campaign, the German leadership grossly underestimated Soviet resources and abilities and just as grossly overestimated its own.¹⁵¹ The attack on the Soviet Union, operation BARBAROSSA, was actually the only German military effort in the Second World War planned as a Blitzkrieg campaign to be completed within limited time and with limited forces. In accordance with Hitler's aims, it was also planned as a racist war of annihilation.¹⁵² Military leaders, far from oppos-

¹⁴⁸ Ernst Klink, "Die militärische Konzeption des Krieges gegen die Sowjetunion," in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 4, *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 202-16.

¹⁴⁹ Jürgen Förster, "Hitlers Entscheidung für den Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion," in *ibid.*, p. 16. See also the definitive work by Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie: Politik und Kriegführung 1940/41*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1982).

¹⁵⁰ Förster, "Hitlers Entscheidung," pp. 13-18.

¹⁵¹ Bernhard R. Kroener, "Blitzkrieg oder totaler Krieg?" in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 5, pt. 1, *Organisation und Mobilisierung des deutschen Machtbereichs* (Stuttgart, 1988), pp. 990-1001; Rolf-Dieter Müller, "Von der Wirtschaftsallianz zum kolonialen Ausbeutungskrieg," in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 4, *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 113-89.

¹⁵² Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938-1942* (Stuttgart, 1982); Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die*

ing the ideological barbarization of warfare, supported and even promoted it. Germany's conduct of the war in the East served the racist aim of conquering living space for the "Aryan master race" and claimed as its victims not only Red Army troops and Soviet political officers, but millions of Soviet civilians, especially Jews, as well.

The devastating initial advance seemed to confirm the German leadership's optimistic assessment. The head of the army general staff, Colonel General Franz Halder, concluded as early as 3 July that the Wehrmacht had in essence achieved its main campaign objective.¹⁵³ But the situation rapidly deteriorated; it was soon clear that the war against the Soviet Union would not end in 1941. The beginning of the Soviet winter offensive on 5 December, in conjunction with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and Hitler's declaration of war on the United States on 11 December, caught Germany in a strategic vice between the Soviets and the Americans. The strategic initiative in all areas now passed to the Reich's enemies, who broke the German will to fight in three and a half more years of bitter struggle.

In 1942 German leaders tried to compensate for their loss of strategic freedom by operational successes aimed at Russia's vital oil fields and at Suez; thereafter, Allied pressure compelled them to concentrate on defending what they held. Despite further offensives on land and water, Germany failed to regain the strategic initiative.¹⁵⁴ Hitler's refusal even to consider a political settlement of the conflict, and his continued insistence on "all or nothing," made it impossible to develop a successful defensive strategy; in effect, Hitler forced the Wehrmacht to continue a war it could not win. War had become an end in itself.

As developments since November 1937 had shown, Hitler's ideological fixation on war and his racist war aims made the time factor increasingly important; he feared that old age or assassination might deflect him from accomplishing his "mission," and was increasingly conscious of Germany's

sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941-1945 (Stuttgart, 1978); Jürgen Förster, "Das Unternehmen 'Barbarossa' als Eroberungs- und Vernichtungskrieg," in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 4, *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 413-47; *ibid.*, pp. 1030-78; *idem*, "The German Army and the Ideological War against the Soviet Union," in Gerhard Hirschfeld, ed., *The Politics of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (London, 1986), pp. 15-29; Mayer, *Heavens*, chapters 7 and 8.

¹⁵³ Ernst Klink, "Die Operationsführung," in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 4, *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 486-87.

¹⁵⁴ Bernd Wegner, "Hitlers zweiter Feldzug gegen die Sowjetunion: Strategische Grundlagen und historische Bedeutung," in Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, pp. 652-66; Werner Rahn, "Der Atlantik in der strategischen Perspektive Hitlers und Roosevelts 1941," in *ibid.*, pp. 667-82; see also Horst Boog, et al., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 6, *Der globale Krieg. Die Ausweitung zum Weltkrieg und der Wechsel der Initiative, 1941-1943* (Stuttgart, 1990). On the operational and tactical aspects of the conduct of war, see Jürgen Förster, "The Dynamics of *Volksgemeinschaft*: The Effectiveness of the German Military Establishment in the Second World War," in Allan R. Milllett and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness*, Vol. 3, *The Second World War* (Boston, 1988), pp. 199-212.

shrinking lead in armaments. Self-imposed time pressure inhibited rational strategic calculation, which also suffered from the ideological distortion evident in his wishful misjudgment of Britain's tolerance for German continental hegemony and his gross underestimation of Soviet power. If the term "strategy" still had meaning under these conditions, amid the ever-present confusion of the polycratic Führer-state, three factors in Hitler's wartime policies further reduced its importance.

Scholars usually overlook the coalition aspects of Germany's war. Hitler's personal loyalty to Mussolini is well-known, but it did not extend to conceding Italy a voice in the conduct of the war.¹⁵⁵ The partners never agreed on fundamentals such as the relative strategic importance of the various theaters; for Germany, the Mediterranean and North Africa remained secondary, and Italian wishes usually received scant consideration. Hitler and his advisers treated Germany's other allies similarly. The negative effects of that policy in the final phase of the war were obvious – but German refusal to treat coalition partners fairly on the basis of mutual interests was unsurprising, given Hitler's *Weltanschauung*.

The racist core of National Socialist ideology, the resulting belief in German superiority, and the consequent aim of exterminating entire groups and so-called "inferior races" proved of decisive strategic importance in other ways as well. German racism and ruthless exploitation of the material and human resources of the occupied areas increasingly inclined their populations to resistance rather than collaboration – with disastrous consequences for Germany's conduct of the war.¹⁵⁶

Finally, Hitler's social-Darwinist conviction that "struggle in all its forms" determined the development of peoples further reduced the role of rationality in Germany's wartime policy. Although well aware that the strategic initiative had passed to his enemies, he rejected all peace feelers and remained determined to carry the war to a barbaric end.¹⁵⁷ Relentlessly consistent in his belief in the "right of the strongest," he sacrificed his own nation to that "law."¹⁵⁸ For someone with such a mentality, strategy was a concept from a bygone age.

¹⁵⁵ See the conclusion by Gerhard Schreiber and Detlef Vogel, in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 3, *Der Mittelmeerraum und Südosteuropa*, pp. 683–94.

¹⁵⁶ Umbreit, "Kontinentalherrschaft," in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 5, pt. 1, *Organisation und Mobilisierung des deutschen Machtbereichs* (Stuttgart, 1988), pp. 265–345; Christopher R. Browning, "Wehrmacht Reprisal Policy and the Mass Murder of Jews in Serbia," in *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 31 (1983), pp. 31–47.

¹⁵⁷ Bernd Martin, *Friedensinitiativen und Machtpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1942* (Düsseldorf, 1974); Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens: Deutsch-Sowjetische Geheimgespräche 1941–1945* (Berlin, 1986).

¹⁵⁸ On 21 January 1942, Hitler said: "On this as well I am ice-cold: if the German people is not prepared to fight for its survival, fine; let it vanish." Werner Jochmann, ed., *Adolf Hitler: Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944, Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich Heims* (Hamburg, 1980), p. 239; see also Hitler's scorched earth order of 19 March 1945, in *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*, Vol. 5, pt. 8, pp. 1580–81.

German strategic thought and action had changed radically on the road from Ludendorff to Hitler, the road from the dominance of the military specialist to the absolute priority of politics and ideology. Clausewitz had written that "the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions, and the most comprehensive."¹⁵⁹ Hitler was well aware of the kind of war on which he was embarking. But Germany's military leaders, except for the retired Beck, simply ignored that central strategic issue. For them, war remained limited to actual combat, and the political and strategic aspects of industrialized warfare were of very limited interest. Their operational virtuosity and supreme tactical skill merely helped prolong the German national apocalypse and the devastation of Europe.

¹⁵⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. and eds., rev. ed. (Princeton, 1984), pp. 88-89.