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Military Planning and National Policy: German Overtures to Two World Wars
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The celebrated dictum of Carl von Clausewitz that war is the continuation of policy has bred variants which, although not necessarily contradictory, approach the problem of war and peace rather differently. Social revolutionists, notably Lenin, like to switch emphasis by perceiving peace as a moderated form of conflict. Our concern here, the interplay between military planning and preparation for war with the form and con duct of national policy, has less to do with maxims than with actuality in human affairs.

The backgrounds of the two world wars of our century tell us much about this problem. They also indicate how greatly accidents of circumstance and personality may play a role in the course of events. This was notably true of Germany whose fate provides the central thread for the epoch of the two world conflicts. At some future time they may yet be known historically as "the German Wars." This is not to infer that, had Germany not existed as a nation, and, let us say, France and
Russia had been geographic neighbors, the first half of our century would have been an era of peace. Some of the factors that led to international stress would have been at work in any event. But the reality of Germany's existence largely determined the nature and sequence of affairs as they appeared to march inexorably toward disaster.

Military Planning and the Coming of World War I

Much is unusual or even unique about the German security and expansion problems during the Hohenzollern Empire. Germany's central position among powers weaker than herself bred among them an inclination to combine against or even encircle her. So central was this anxiety for Otto von Bismarck that he confessed to a sleep troubled by the nightmare of coalitions. German soldiers shared this concern and sense of professional responsibility.

After the 1870 triumph over France, there no longer were fears of any single adversary. To all intents and purposes, the only war one need apprehend would be with two or more opponents, most probably France and Russia. This implied both the hazards and advantages of fighting on geographically opposite fronts. Elementary military logic forbade any equal allocation of forces east and west. The only possible course was to stand defensively on one front and launch an all-out effort on the other. This demanded an early and decisive victory in the initial drive- a matter really of weeks- to make possible a quick shift to the originally defensive front.

We cannot dwell here on the course of development that followed this appreciation. Most vital was recognition that the construction of a massive French fortification system after 1875 made an 1870-type dash toward Paris illusionary. Relying heavily on Austria-Hungary as an ally, the elder Moltke opted without enthusiasm for a first offensive effort against the Russians. He had few illusions about achieving a quick decision in Russia's limitless space but gradually reconciled himself with the idea of occupying Poland and then moving to the negotiating table. But what if the Russians

should prefer to stick it out in an endless war of attrition? In a farewell address to the German Reichstag in 1888, Moltke showed how this weighed on his mind when he spoke of a next war lasting as long as seven years- perhaps even thirty!

Moltke's successor one-removed was Count Alfred von Schlieffen whose legendary figure has dominated German military thought to and beyond Ludendorff's offensive in 1918. His prestige, indeed, lasted into the thirties and World War II. American military thinkers thought so highly of him that his principal literary legacy, Cannae, was translated at Leavenworth and distributed at a nominal charge within the U.S. Army and to the academic community. Since the late forties his reputation has been somewhat dimmed, and among historical critics, he is now something of a controversial figure.

Schlieffen combined extraordinary intellect and persuasive powers
With a simplicity and lack of pretension which dominated his principal Associates and won him legions of disciples in the younger leadership corps. "Mehr sein als scheinen" (be more than you appear to be) was his principal motto. Single-mindedness that critics have at times labeled obsessiveness characterized his thinking on strategic problems, and the brilliance of his dialectic swept away opposition. He may be counted among the prophets of the indirect approach so much admired by Basil Liddell Hart. Insofar as planning was concerned, he was assuredly its outstanding military practitioner. The most famous product of his mind, of course, was the plan that has been inseparably linked with his name.

In 1938, when I interviewed nearly a hundred leading figures of the World War I era, the Schlieffen Plan and the eventuating Marne campaign were major topics of discussion. I spoke with five staff officers who had worked on the plan itself or been associated with its execution. The most notable figure among them was Wilhelm Groener who headed the field railways of the prewar army, later succeeded Ludendorff as Supreme Quartermaster General, and ended his career as Minister of Defense under the Weimar Republic. On the political implications of military plans and preparations, I consulted two wartime foreign office officials, Arthur Zimmermann and Richard von Kuhlmann, the secretary and principal man of confidence of Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg, Kurt Rietzler, the Bavarian Minister to Berlin, Count Lerchenfeld, and the German Crown Prince. The blocking of my road to the Emperor and Erich Ludendorff, who should have been my principal witnesses, was a great disappointment.1

Schlieffen, in contrast to the elder Moltke, lacked all faith in the capacity of modern society to endure the strains of protracted war. He further recognized the special vulnerabilities of Germany in any contest of attrition. Such convictions could only strengthen his resolve to stake all on an early and decisive victory. Given this single and apparently unalterable goal, most of the famous plan on which he commenced work in the mid-nineties undoubtedly conformed with the dictates of logic.2

Schlieffen shared fully the fear of many German military leaders of becoming mired in Russian space if the east-first concept should continue to prevail. A switch to the west, however, would only put one back where Moltke had started. Unless, of course, some way around the French fortifications could be discovered. This could only be accomplished by infringing on the territory of small western neighbors. Notably Belgium, once its narrow eastern gateway had been forced, offered flat space in which one could stretch out. Historically it was the favored east-west invasion route. The trouble lay in the

tight squeeze of the cramped German-Belgian frontier- a scant fifty miles as the crow flies. Of this a good portion is taken up by the difficult Ardennes. The passage toward Liege in the north features defiles that funnel east-west movement.

Schlieffen could see nothing for it but to include Luxembourg and that extension of the Dutch province of Limburg known as the Maastricht appendix. The railway bridges over the Meuse at Maastricht and Roermond were a particular attraction as they carried most of the traffic from
Germany.

As planning proceeded during the 1890s, Schlieffen gave scant attention to the obvious political implications. In 1899 he did inform Foreign Secretary and later Chancellor Bernhard von Bulow who as yet took a complacent view of things. If the Chief of Staff and such a strategic authority as Schlieffen thought this necessary, said Bulow, it was the duty of diplomacy to adjust to it. A year later another army communication on the subject to the Foreign Office elicited a reply in almost the same words from its principal motor, Counsellor Baron von Holstein.

The Emperor also was probably apprised about the same time. Certainly he knew things by 1904 when he sought to intimidate King
Leopold II of Belgium and let the cat out of the bag. Bulow himself seems to have had some second thoughts, for in the same year he ventured to argue with Schlieffen about going through Belgium. He recalled Bismarck saying that it went against plain common sense to add an extra enemy to an opposing lineup. Schlieffen insisted that Belgium would confine itself to protesting. In 1912 Foreign Secretary von Jagow did raise doubts about going through Belgium but was fobbed off by a memo from Moltke.

It is noteworthy and leaves one somewhat staggered that no one then or later seems to have urged the convocation of a crown council or lesser gathering of civil and military leaders to deal with a problem of such moment to the German fate. Bismarck, who had scant awe of the military, would assuredly have taken a hand. Yet no council dealing with war plans was convoked by his feebler successors before the ultimate crisis of July 1914.

At least equally strange is the failure of the last two prewar Chancellors, Bulow and Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, to attack the problem of armament necessary for a three-front war. For, though the
European scene might conceivably produce a future situation in which Britain would accommodate herself to a German march through Belgium, nothing remotely portending such a change was then in evidence.3

The second Helmut von Moltke, nephew of the first, owed a position he did not covet to William II's envisaging him as a kind of good luck piece; always mindful of his grandfather, he too wanted to be served by a Moltke. But this modest, rather retiring figure was plagued by lack of self-confidence, particularly in regard to any ability to act decisively at times of crisis. It was only with a heavy heart that he steeled himself to carry on with his predecessor's daring project. Despite somewhat limp efforts in recent years to rehabilitate him as a commander, he remains the chief whipping boy for the disaster of the Marne. Criticisms of Moltke's generalship focus about equally on his alterations in military dispositions in the period 1906-1914 and his conduct of operations in August-early September 1914.

One step for which Moltke is never faulted is elimination of the Netherlands from the sweep westward. In part this derived from Moltke being more sensitive politically than Schlieffen had been. Thus he reckoned the costs of having Britain as an enemy considerably higher. Adding the Netherlands to the list of victims of military necessity doubled the risk of having Britain to deal with. Belgium was enough to give him sleepless hours. "Many hounds are the hare's death" was an old German proverb his dismayed staff would hear him mutter in anxious moments. In fact, Moltke probably put as much thought as anyone in the civil government on how to keep out the British. It was he who first suggested what later became a feeble effort toward that end: a guarantee to Belgium of her sovereignty and boundaries if she permitted the march through.

Aside from hoping to reduce somewhat the certainty of British intervention, Moltke was influenced on the Netherlands by signs that the Dutch were alert to the threat. Extra track and railway sidings on the German side of the frontier screamed danger to them. They announced to all and sundry that they were prepared to protect their neutrality with arms. Perhaps most persuasive was their placement of mine chambers and heavy steel gates on the railway bridges at Maastricht and Roermond.

An additional factor in the decision to give up the dash through Limberg was the rebuilding after 1905 of the British Army into an expeditionary force. With the Netherlands in the war, the possible employment of these troops to threaten the flank and rear of the German rush westward had to be reckoned with. Finally, Moltke's second thought focused on what the Netherlands had to offer as a neutral: a windpipe through the anticipated British blockade by which Germany could draw food and raw materials.

Where Moltke really parted company with Schlieffen before the latter's death in 1913 was on the forces assigned to the east. In a swansong memorandum of 1912 Schlieffen had advocated the virtual denuding of that front, placing there no more than three divisions. In the end, Moltke allocated nine.

Though all of Moltke's eggs were thus no longer in the western basket, its capacity had been shrunk alarmingly by confining the passageway to Belgium and Luxembourg. It was a problem that gained in seriousness and complexity as the German Army grew larger. Though most of the extra troops were stationed farther south, the First and Second Armies, which had to force their way through a bottleneck at Liege, were also slightly beefed up. Well over half a million men were to be crowded together at this point.

Liege was one of the celebrated Brialmont's fortresses. It was surrounded on a fifty kilometer perimeter by twelve forts, great masses of concrete and steel, that guarded the vital crossing over the Meuse. The principal problem for the Germans was to get through before the Belgian field army could deploy in the spaces between the forts and erect field fortifications to block these passages.

There is a good deal of irony in the fact that Moltke, who lacked so much of the courage of Schlieffen's convictions on the larger aspects of the campaign, should here be obliged to embark on the greatest adventure of all. For if there was a military gamble in the Schlieffen Plan as it was in 1914, it assuredly lay in the coup de main projected for Liege. Five approaches led from the frontier through the spaces between the easternmost forts into the city itself. To exploit these, five brigades were stationed close to the border. Once a state of war existed, their function was to dash across the border and penetrate the ring of forts. The project faced stupendous risks: if the major railway tunnel and/or the

bridge over the Meuse were destroyed, the logistics of the German First and Second Armies would be fatally affected. Politically the consequences of the enterprise could be equally serious, for as will be seen, a straightjacket was put on diplomacy in July 1914.

Both Schlieffen and the younger Moltke considered from time to time being anticipated by the French in Belgium. Much was bound to be alluring for them in the thought of the French relieving them of the onus of violating Belgian neutrality. Both the elder Moltke and his successor, Count Waldersee, rather liked the idea militarily. From heavily fortified Alsace-Lorraine they might then attack the French in flank.

The French had thought much about the Belgian problem since the 1870s. A book written by Eugene Tenot (1882), at the instigation of Gen. Se`re` de Rivie`res, stressed that with the building of the French fortifications, Belgium was "henceforth inseparable from any rational German offensive plan."4 For the time being the problem was considered only from a defensive standpoint. But as the French Army expanded and the Russian alliance promised to divert large German forces, speculation about offensive opportunities grew. In 1911, when the replacement of Gen. Michel by Gen. Joffre as Chief of Staff unleashed a veritable mania for offensive action, the issue of moving through Belgium and Luxembourg came into the foreground. Joffre's importunities led to the convocation of the Superior Council of National Defense on January 9, 1912. The minutes of this meeting and other documents vital to our problem were released only in the early 1970s. They show that the only argument countering Joffre's plea was fear of damaging the military ties with Britain which just then were in process of being greatly expanded.5 Neither legal nor moral scruples concerning a violation of Belgian territory were mentioned. How little they counted may be adduced from the fact that Joffre was given the free hand on Luxembourg denied him on Belgium.

Vital to any discussion of the Schlieffen Plan in relation to the Empire's security problem is a search for logical alternatives. As Sir John Hackett has cogently formulated it, the soldier's duty is to come up with as many options for his government as it is willing to pay for. Neither Schlieffen nor the younger Moltke ever responded to this challenge. For them, as for all who try to second guess them, the stumbling block is that no one has yet advanced a tenable solution that fits the prescription of a swift and decisive victory. Also, no civilian leader appears ever to have taken issue with this approach of the two generals. Even the far-from-bellicose Bethmann went along with them on a German need for expansion (in his case colonial) as against Bismarck's famous delineation of Germany as a saturated state.

Of course the option which conforms with the wisdom of our current hindsight would have been a defensive posture, in effect a rejection of the total victory formula. Ironically, this might most nearly have met the generals' victory dream through, so-to-speak, the back door. In view of the superior strength of the defensive and the continually more lethal power of weaponry, not to speak of the compelling French craze for "attack, attack, attack," this assumption is not unreasonable.6 But in fairness to the generals, it should be noted that neither the civil government nor the nation would have understood such a course, should they have somehow summoned up sufficient spirit of self-denial to adopt it. It would certainly have been rejected by their military contemporaries in all the powers of Europe who were almost unanimously fostering the offensive spirit and doctrine. It should also be borne in mind that at this period the defensive carried with it the odor of a long war which everyone wanted to avoid.

One is on safer ground in charging Schlieffen and Moltke with never having given the defensive alternative a fair hearing. From the mid-nineties on, alternative options that contemplated defensive or limited war got short shrift. "When such alternatives were evaluated," says a recent study, "they were designed to fail, and they were held to a tougher standard than was the Schlieffen Plan."7

In some mitigation of the indictment that frequently is levied against the German military leaders of the period, one should not ignore the calculation that there is not too much to distinguish their approach to the problem from that of soldiers elsewhere. Even those captains who are prepared to recognize the primacy of policy both in peace and war seem instinctively to lean to the assumption that policy is best served by total military victory. There is little difference in their approach both in situations of prewar planning and in the conduct of war.8

The seekers of total victory though battles of annihilation tend, of course, to include among themselves the proponents of preventive wars. In the case of Germany, Schlieffen inclined to one during the First Morocco Crisis and Moltke had similar thoughts in the spring of 1914.9 It follows that military leaders are usually more inclined than their civilian counterparts to doubt in times of crisis the likelihood or possibility of a diplomatic solution. It is natural that this inclination should be the more pronounced when immediate sharp action appears required if war does eventuate.

Despite Schlieffen's one-sided approach to Germany's military problems, his sterner critics go overboard when they picture him as a gambler who staked the fate of Germany on a roll of the dice. It would be grossly unfair, for example, to compare him and his plan to Ludendorff and the sink-or-swim offensive of 1918. It should not be passed over, as is nearly always done, that he was fully determined to cut his losses if things did not turn out as he hoped and expected. In that event, he proposed an immediate peace overture before the grip of the armies was irrevocably set on each other's throats.

Inevitably, indictments drawn against the Schlieffen Plan stress the plain fact that in the end it did fail; in the view of the more severe critics it was bound to fail. All of these arguments underline logistics. Undoubtedly Schlieffen was remiss, some say slack, in this area. This is not the place for a full analysis, but it must be pointed out that the issue is not yet settled. The proof of any pudding, to be sure, is in the eating. The failure at the Marne is unquestioned, and the logistical situation undoubtedly played some part. But there is impressive evidence that the latter was by no means catastrophic.

Gen. Groener, who was in charge of railway communication, gave eloquent testimony on the strained but far from desperate state of affairs. As a disinterested party, the General Staff's later strategic specialist, Wilhelm Wetzell, was perhaps more impressive. The proof of the pudding, as he described it, lies not in the failure of the plan itself. He points out how the Schleswig-Holstein Army Corps, in his view the second or third best in the German Army, in recrossing the Marne and lining up against the French on the Ourcq, marched seventy-five miles in three days, and, in fighting with the relatively fresh French troops from Paris, had definitely the best of things. "Bone weary? Yes," said Wetzell in effect; "Exhausted to the point of prostration? Emphatically, no!"10

German soldiers did not have as much to say as one might have expected during the July crisis of 1914. There was occasional interference as when Moltke, terrified that Conrad von Hotzendorff would botch the Austro-Hungarian mobilization facing Russia, in effect urged him to ignore the advice Bethmann was giving the Vienna government.

But in critical ways prewar military plans and arrangements cut down the diplomats' elbow room. In this regard statesmen and soldiers equally should note the lesson of how rigidities of military planning may breed fatal political consequences. In question, particularly, is the project of the coup de main at Liege.

Although civilian authorities had long been au courant about the intended moves through Belgium, Luxembourg, and initially, the Netherlands, no one seems to have told them of Liege. Groener and more humbly placed officers who worked on the Schlieffen Plan and its implementation knew nothing of such a communication. Zimmermann, then deputy to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, was sure no such information had reached the Foreign Office. Kurt Rietzler who was privy to most of Bethmann's official secrets, testified to the consternation of his chief when the political implications of the project were brought home to him. The Crown Prince in his turn was sure that his father was unaware of it.

Yet in the crisis that led to war, the Liege coup de main may well have wrecked the last faint hope of peace. As the troops could move only after a state of war with someone existed, it had to be brought on as soon as war was virtually, though perhaps not quite, certain. That stage was reached when Tsar Nicholas decreed Russia's general mobilization. The other concerned powers would then follow almost automatically. But the key feature was that while France and Germany had a ten-day mobilization period, that of Russia was about twice as long. Once her own mobilization was completed, Germany would have to go to war. It would be near fatal to lose her time advantage over Russia. But for about ten days the diplomats could have had their final innings. Liege robbed Europe of these last ten days of grace during which by some miracle peace might yet have been preserved. One could hardly move into Belgium without previously being at war with France, and the 1914 situation demanded that this should follow war with Russia.

When was Bethmann apprised of this by Moltke? We do not know exactly, but it must have been sometime after his conversation with the British Ambassador, Sir Edward Goschen, on July 29. During this exchange Bethmann let the cat out of the bag on the intention to march through Belgium. Pure luck was on his side here, for in their preoccupation with their own problem, the British did not think of immediately warning Belgium. If they had done so, the Belgian government would certainly not have ordered the commander at Liege, General Leman, not to construct fieldworks between his forts because of German sensitiveness. The order was dispatched at midnight July 31 and would scarcely have been sent if Brussels had known what the Germans had in store for Belgium.

Moltke, however reluctantly, here called the tune, and the civilian authorities, represented by Bethmann, paid the piper. For many years he had to bear the historical burden of the strange German rush into war; it was declared on Russia at 6 P.M. on August 1, just one hour after the announcement of mobilization.

A further feature of rigidity in the diplomatic scene of July 1914 that was created by military planning concerned Russia. Despite nearly half a century of assumption that only a war on two fronts was possible, Schlieffen and the younger Moltke wished to play it safe and maintained standby plans for Russia and France singly. When Russia was preoccupied with Japan in 1905, Schlieffen would have liked to use the First Morocco Crisis to strike preventively at France. After 1909 Russia

made gigantic strides toward military recovery. Her army jumped from 750,000 to twice that in 1914 and was scheduled to reach two million by 1916. Troops were piling up in Poland raising German prospects for a quicker decision in the east. But a war game reviewing the Schlieffen Plan in 1912 showed that by the time one got to Minsk the French would be on the Rhine.11

Despite the growing Russian threat Moltke continued to think only in terms of a two-front war. In 1913 he actually cast aside contingency plans for war with Russia alone. This error of committing himself to a single assumption was brought home to him in the July crisis when William II, in a momentary fancy that France might stay neutral, proposed to mobilize against Russia alone. When Moltke in his consternation insisted that military dispositions would not permit so drastic a switch, he got the deeply wounding, "That is not the answer your uncle would have given me." 12

Not only did the German soldiers in 1914 find themselves in one sense or another the prisoners of their own too rigid plans. The French discovered the Belgians were putting up a far stiffer resistance than had been expected. On Joffre's staff there arose an impulse to alter dispositions and to strike northward into the flank of the massive German advance. Such inclinations were curbed by Joffre's adamant mental commitment to Plan 17 on which, incidentally, the civilian leadership had never been consulted. The same may be said of British generals who three years before the war promised the French to dispatch immediately an expeditionary corps, this too without consulting civilian authorities.

Since 1897 William II and his closest advisers had geared up
German foreign policy to a world embracing level that was marked by expansionistic coloring. The status quo posture that had characterized
Bismarck's policy after unification was left more and more behind. Such aims and moods were bound to be reflected in the military arena, so that some critics voice the claim that Germany's civilian leaders in the end got only what they had bargained for. The military chiefs are occasionally portrayed as having merely adapted themselves to the political aims of the Imperial Government or even as exercising restraint on a venturesome foreign policy. A grain of truth may be found in this: the military was more responsible than any other quarter in Germany for keeping down the size of the Army because of anxiety about the social composition of the officer corps, it dragged its feet on expansion and was dragged along by the government, public opinion, and the Reichstag.13

Jehuda Wallach, in a volume soon to be published in translation, brilliantly demonstrates how the Schlieffen Plan violated the dictum of Clausewitz, quoted at the start of this discussion, upholding the supremacy of the political imperative over military strategy. Policy and diplomacy became to a large extent the prisoners of military dispositions. But the civilian leadership of Germany in multifarious and, in the end, fatal ways, permitted itself to become the handmaiden of a self-imposed military necessity.

It may appear strange that nothing has been said here about the role of the German Navy in relation to policy and war preparation. It goes without saying that Grand Admiral von Tirpitz did much to exacerbate relations with Britain and that the growth of the German Navy, so ardently backed by William II, was the principal feature in the estrangement of the two countries. But it is noteworthy that Tirpitz, who perforce had to beat the drums on rivalry with Britain if naval expansion was to continue, straightway sang a different tune whenever war with Britain loomed. In every crisis from 1897 to July

1914 he lay back, protesting that the fleet was not ready. For him, as for the Emperor, it was largely an end in itself. After the war he addressed bitter reproaches to those who had permitted it to come about and destroy his life's work.

As for Bulow and Bethmann, they had little faith in the Navy as a genuine factor in the balance of power. But like the Army leaders who bitterly resented the gigantic slice the Navy cut out of the defense pie, they saw nothing for it but to humor the Emperor.

Dictator and Army in the Coming of World War II

The interwar political and military scenes in Germany (1871-1914; 1918-1939) diverge so diametrically that it is a challenge to discern parallel lines of development. The German Empire founded amidst the victory over France could boast such prestige and power that it stood militarily unrivaled by any single antagonist. Only coalitions could hope to deal with it with any prospect of victory or survival. Its military and external policies were governed by this stark fact.

In bitter contrast, the Germany slowly emerging after 1918 from the ashes of defeat was for a foreseeable time eliminated as a positive factor in European and world affairs. Its armed forces were restricted so severely that they had meaning only for internal order or, conceivably, domestic turnover. The condition and imbalance of the national economy discouraged hope in substantial military recovery even if the Versailles Treaty restrictions should be lifted or dramatically amended. Yet there always loomed in the background an unquestionable prospect for the restoration of Germany as a major power. The obvious potential of population, location, martial tradition, militarily trained manpower, and the conflicting policies of other states had a fixed place in the awareness of all concerned.

The relations of the Army with the political regimes which governed Germany in the twenties and thirties were in large part determined by its social composition. During the Empire, it has been noted, most of its leaders resisted expansion because of hesitation about accepting lower middle class officers and working class recruits. The rigorous contraction to a 100,000-man level imposed on Germany by the victorious Allies, though deeply resented, made possible reversing directions, sloughing off borderline elements among the socially suspect. By the time Hitler took office one-fourth of the officers and half the generals were noblemen; the rank and file could now be recruited entirely from reliable social strata, mostly country boys.

The republic for most members of the Reichswehr (armed forces) was the creature of defeat and revolution, and its leading party, the Social Democrats, was a collection of pacifists and internationalists. In effect the political and social horizons of soldiers of all ranks were likely to be limited. As Nazi influence grew in Germany, some split in the officer corps did develop between age groups. The older and higher in rank tended to regard Hitler and his ilk as vulgar upstarts; many also were deeply disturbed by the growing attack on traditional religion. All officers of whatever rank and age found appeal in the national and martial flavor of Nazi ideology, were delighted with the agitation for rearmament, and applauded demands for a vigorous foreign policy aimed at revising the Versailles Treaty.

Younger officers were intrigued by Nazi dynamism, were impressed by Hitler's knack for enlisting national enthusiasm, and found inspiration in the pleas for social

solidarity and comradeship. Their generals and colonels were regarded as somewhat stuffy, as too wedded to old ways, and somewhat behind the times. As yet this did not portend any rejection of prestigious leaders, all of them veterans from the First World War and most of them a highly positive selection among the survivors of that conflict. There is little doubt that in 1933 the vast majority of young officers would have obeyed any order from their superiors.

At that time it would have been at least conceivable that the Army could have been thrown into the scale against Hitler's assumption of power. Its Commander in Chief, Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, was bitterly anti-Nazi;14 if assured of sufficient support and at least the acquiescence of President von Hindenburg, he might well have acted. His Chief of Staff, the crusty Bavarian Wilhelm Adam, would certainly have gone along. In fact, there was sufficient apprehension among those whose maneuvers and deals made Hitler Chancellor that the new, compliant Defense Minister, Werner von Blomberg, was virtually smuggled into office from his post as disarmament negotiator at Geneva.

Hammerstein and Adam were so suspect to the parties who had brought in Hitler that within a year they were replaced by generals regarded as more amenable to working with the regime. Thus began a process that was to come to a climax only after the attempted coup of July 20, 1944: the systematic though intermittent weeding out of politically suspect or overly independent figures. It is all too often forgotten in looking at the collection of yes-men, careerists, just-soldier types (nur-Soldaten), and dyed-in-the-wool Nazis who made up much of the higher Generalitat in the final stage of the regime that they were no longer representative of what it had been in 1933.

There is much irony in the fact that Werner von Fritsch and Ludwig Beck, the men chosen to take the places of Hammerstein and Adam, were later to be counted among the chief military victims of the regime: Fritsch to become the target of the dirtiest of Nazi intrigues, Beck to emerge as the chief of the military conspiracy that grew largely from this episode.

The period 1933-l936 was one of comparative restraint in both domestic and external affairs. Hitler was not yet the uncompromising egomaniac who emerged in the war period. Circumstances also prohibited excessive risk taking. Though occasionally he dropped the mask sufficiently to hint at more extreme goals than those he publicly professed, the military were not alone in seeing therein flights of fancy that need not be taken too seriously.15

Except for a single reckless fling on Austria in July 1934,
Hitler's first three years demonstrated tolerable restraint and the enunciation of aims that would be faulted by few Germans. On Poland, the one area where popular feeling would have supported a relatively strong policy, Hitler astonished the world by a non-aggression pact that would have elicited a storm of outrage against anyone who was less a nationalist.

Certainly the Wehrmacht did not object to the clandestine rearmament of these years and to the repudiation of the Versailles restrictions in the spring of 1935. There was some regret in the Army on the petering out of collaboration with the Red Army by which the Germans had trained Soviet staff officers in return for permission to experiment and train with forbidden weapons on Soviet territory. But as one could now proceed more freely within the Reich itself, there was no lasting setback for the rearmament program. For professionals who for fourteen years had been forced to

exercise their craft strictly under wraps, the free hand Hitler gave them must have been felt as a deliverance.

How did Adolf Hitler view the Army and its leadership? At one time he had for them a respect that approached awe. Bridging the psychological gap between the private soldier and an army's chief is no easy task. But in Hitler's case this state of mind in time was translated into an inferiority complex that he seems to have resented. Perhaps his derogation and fault-finding with the generals were meant to compensate for this.

Probably he resented most the lack of commitment of the Army's leaders to the type of armament program and expansionist ideas he was pushing. He could not get over their lack of bellicosity. He once said that he had expected to find them straining at the leash like a butcher's dog. Instead he was continually forced to whip them on. In two 1931 conversations with Richard Breiting, a prominent newspaper editor, he launched into the kind of compulsive self-revelatory perorations that seem the best guideposts to his innermost thoughts. He dwelt bitterly on his lack of confidence in the Generalitat and expressed his intention to fight the big war he expected "with a new Army and a new General Staff."16

It is entirely conceivable that even then he had in mind the ideal of an army that was a military branch of the party. The generals would then simply join his other paladins, or conversely, the paladins would be made generals. In principle he can have found little wrong with Ernst Roehm's aspiration to elevate his Brown Shirts into the official defenders of the nation. It might indeed have been after his own heart if he had felt able as yet to dispense with the professionals and the Sturmabteilung (SA) had looked more like a manageable instrument. When he later transformed the Schutzstaffel (SS) into a branch of the armed forces, with the probable intention of going all the way after the war had been won, it accorded with the desired pattern.

Basically of course, the dictator and the military had irreconcilable positions on rearmament and expansion. It must suffice to enumerate here the more fundamental aspects of his outlook and intentions:

1. Hitler was unalterably wedded to a dream of vast eastern expansion such as was conceivable only on the basis of aggressive war.

2. More nebulous, but only slightly less fundamental, was the concept of a German hegemonial position vis-a'-vis the Eurasian land mass.

3. Given French and British acquiescence in German eastern expansion, he was prepared to leave them to vegetate, in power-political terms, in the West. At least until 1936 he had at the back of his mind the ideal of a working relationship with the British, for whose empire he had an enduring admiration. Of course if the western powers were obstreperous, he was prepared to shove them aside once and for all.

4. He suffered from the normal ultra-Fascist addiction to the idea that war is the ultimate test of a nation's vitality. Though willing enough to accept what he could get free in response to political or military pressures, to him such gains were only way stations to what would be in the end a trial of arms.

5. His time tables were vague and depended on circumstance. Though growing more impatient with the years, he was a complete opportunist as to means. He planned and expected to reach top striking power in the period 1943-1945.

6. Getting away with major power plays in the mid-thirties (repudiating the Versailles armaments restrictions and remilitarizing the Rhineland) and profiting hugely from Anglo-French preoccupations in the Mediterranean (Ethiopia and the Spanish Civil War), his growing confidence and impatience spurred his craving to move in bigger ways. They increased his inclination toward risk taking and made him push harder in armament and aggressive military planning.

7. Arguments on German economic vulnerabilities for a long and even for a short war left him rather cold. He counted on early blitzkrieg victories that would give him control of other nations' resources.

The leading figures in the Generalitat saw things differently on almost every point. None of them shared his racial fantasies or dreams of wholesale eastern expansion. They could not but agree with him on detesting the territorial provisions of the Treaty of Versailles but differed greatly, even among themselves, on the urgency and desirability of particular revisions. The composition of Czechoslovakia and Poland looked to them to be both acts of injustice and a serious check to reattainment of the power position to which they aspired for Germany. Probably most of them had little or no objection in principle to war as a justifiable instrument for the attainment of such ends.

Though like general staffs everywhere they perforce had in their files plans for every imaginable contingency, there was little disposition to focus on any of them for the immediate future. The dreary years of crushing military inferiority had bred a tendency to overrate the forces of other countries, notably France. They were keenly aware of their own continuing shortcomings, especially economic gaps and vulnerabilities. These, they figured, would detract seriously from the punch of offensive war and make the long-pull type unthinkable.

In its economic anxieties, the Generalitat was constantly prodded by Gen. Georg Thomas, its economic and armament specialist, as well as by Hjalmar Schacht, Minister of Economics and President of the Reichsbank, almost the only individual who regularly dared to speak up to Hitler.17 Schacht's alarm about Hitler's growing bellicosity first came to a head about 1936, the year in which he became what may be called a charter member of the anti-Hitler conspiracy. He and Thomas carried on a systematic agitation among Army and business leaders against arguments that a blitzkrieg might lead to a quick victory; in their view any next war was more likely to be another competition in exhaustion. Their record as prophets was to prove a somewhat mixed one. Many postwar interpretations of the German prewar economy have held that it coasted too much and could have made Germany far more formidable militarily had it been ready to produce at full steam.

Recent studies have raised doubts about this thesis, holding that, except for womanpower, production was much closer to capacity than here assumed.18

In some measure, economic considerations did play some sort of role in the army command's reluctance to force the pace of rearmament-a rare if not unique occurrence in

the history of modern states. Quite apart from costs, the Army command, notably Chief of Staff Beck, was uneasy about calling so many men to the colors. Beck was upset when Hitler, in denouncing the Versailles limitations, declared his intention immediately to build the Army up to 550,000 men in thirty-six divisions. His own proposal was to limit growth during the next two or three years to 300,000 men and to reach 500,000 only in the early forties. Here the quality standards of the professional dashed with those of the amateur for whom quantity was most impressive. Hitler, as so often, insisted on the almost limitless power of the human will, holding that the patriotic zeal of a Nazi combat leader was worth as much as training and experience.

The upshot was that both quality and quantity were allowed some innings. Beck had to yield on force goals but, backed by Fritsch and Blomberg, won on officer training. Hitler, needless to say, gave way with ill grace and kept nagging for speed.

There was a further hassle on the sequence in which age groups would be called up for service. Hitler, champing at the bit for maximum early readiness, wanted to start with World War I veterans who, he argued, would only need an intensive refresher course. Beck urged the wisdom of making haste slowly, holding that the soundest policy was to concentrate on basic training for the younger age groups. In largest part he had his way, adding materially to the score which Hitler was tallying up against him and the Army command generally.

Hitler's tone in such disputes became more strident as his domestic and international elbowroom widened and he felt the more ready to take chances. Issues were sharpened the more one got away from the first years; then there had been no purpose arguing about maximums when the minimums of a respectable military establishment still seemed far away. As long as there was a large pool of industrial and manpower resources to draw upon, each service had been allowed to launch its own rearmament program. Nothing like a coherent defense policy or systematic planning in the armament field had thus been allowed to develop. The services simply grabbed what they could get away with. Hitler contributed to the confusion by sudden and often inordinate demands. In 1938, for example, he proposed without preliminary warning a fivefold increase in air force frontline strength.

Toward the end of 1937 the Fuhrer's impatience and frustration approached a point where something had to give. He found intolerable a situation in which he felt his style in external affairs cramped.

Here lies his basic motivation in calling the historic Hossbach Conference on November 5.19 It was the sole occasion that something that looked like the empire's crown council was convoked during the Third Reich. But here was no real discussion. Hitler began a prolonged monologue with the flat statement that his mind was fixed on the matters at issue. This was followed by extensive comment from other participants and that was it! The meeting had been initiated by Blomberg to deal with disarmament problems and, especially, to put a spoke in the wheel of the careening Luftwaffe which grabbed any resource on which it could lay hands. Hitler broadened the subject enormously by relating armament decisions and military planning to broad national policy and by adding the Foreign Minister, Baron von Neurath, to the group.

The course of the meeting has been delineated in scores of studies on the period. It climaxed with Blomberg, Fritsch, and Neurath taking vehement issue with what Hitler had said. The Fuhrer, in effect, had demanded every imaginable speedup in armament

and had stated that 1938 might offer fruitful opportunities to do something about Austria and/or Czechoslovakia. He left no doubt about his intentions to wage aggressive war when the appropriate time came, in any event no later than 1943-1945.

To all intents and purposes the fate of the three footdraggers was now determined, and none survived the next three months of office.

Surprise is sometimes expressed that Hitler was so ready to part with Blomberg, especially as he now knuckled down and provided the ordered revision of Case Green, the basic plan for war with Czechoslovakia, giving it a flavor of urgency. Blomberg had done much to bring the Wehrmacht closer to the party and had rejected importunities of outraged generals to use his office as a moderating influence on Nazi excesses. On the debit side from Hitler's standpoint, Blomberg had frequently sided with the Army on armament questions or refrained from using his authority to bring it into line with the Fuhrer's wishes. At times of international tension he was always a brake, inducing Hitler to refer to him as a "hysterical old maid."20

That had been notably the case in 1936 when diplomats and soldiers had been united in opposing the projected gamble of the remilitarization of the Rhineland. Indeed their unanimous advice might have swayed Hitler if, unknown to them, he had not received a personal message from the French government that it was willing to yield on the basic issue if Germany did not injure French prestige or undermine the European treaty structure.21 Having learned that the French were ready to give way on substance, Hitler rightly decided that they would not go to war on a matter of form. In the end the dictator was able to make it appear that his intuition outweighed the united judgment of the services and the Foreign and Defense Ministries. It proved a ten-strike in the psychological game of intimidation that Hitler systematically pursued with the generals.

The removal of the three saboteurs in the so-called Blomberg-Fritsch crisis of January-February 1938 was only the central feature of the power play that can appropriately be called a coup d'etat. The ongoing crisis had revealed much about how major figures of the Generalitat stood in relation to their own leaders and to the regime generally. Hitler, therefore, determined to make as clean a sweep as possible of those who stood in his way; the consequent purge was the largest and most drastic of the Nazi period. Sixteen generals were retired or transferred, subservient figures like Generals Keitel and von Brauchitsch took over key positions, and, most portentous, Hitler abolished the War Ministry and put in its place an Armed Forces High Command (0KW) of which he was commander in chief. Dozens of other changes were made at critical spots of the Defense and Foreign Ministries and Army high command. The worshipful Col. Schmundt took the place of the ultra-independent Col. Hossbach as the Chancellor's Wehrmacht adjutant.

Hitler sailed full speed ahead to take over Austria in March and almost immediately shifted to pile pressures on Czechoslovakia concerning its German-speaking territories, usually called the Sudetenland. Only a summary statement can be made about the September crisis which bears that name and the conspiratorial activity that is associated with it.

The decapitation of the former Wehrmacht and Army leadership gave Hitler control of their command apparatus. But he had not yet seized the final bastion of resistance in the post of Chief of the General Staff occupied by Beck. For no one else had the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis been so much of an eye opener as for him. Beck was now the

key figure among those who joined hands to resist Hitler's drive toward war with Czechoslovakia. Any final doubts where the Fuhrer was heading were removed by himself in a high level meeting in the Reich Chancellery on May 23.

There was scant prospect of mobilizing the Generalitat against a conflict with that state alone. But the likelihood of attaching thereto a European war featuring French and British intervention was quite another thing.

Though to outward appearances the dictator's mastery of the military sector was now complete, what did not seem to occur to him was that, in slamming the door on protest and persuasion, he left those who were convinced that he was leading Germany to disaster only the resort of conspiracy. No other course is open when a tyrannical regime has reached its nadir by eradicating sources of restraint. In removing Fritsch, whom Beck and many others had regarded as a final refuge against tyranny, the only course left open was to purge the state by toppling the regime itself.

Beck was Germany's most prestigious soldier after the departure of Fritsch; in the summer of 1938 and thereafter to July 20, 1944, he was the center of military opposition. His conviction that the General Staff was "the conscience of the Army" gave him a sense of mission that guided his course at this critical juncture.22

What Beck planned in the first instance was a kind of general strike of the generals in which they would address an ultimatum on the war issue to Hitler. The climax of the campaign for the support of the
Generalitat came on August 4 when Beck presented the case to the assembled army and army group commanders by reading a memorandum he bad prepared for Hitler which argued that an attack on Czechoslovakia meant war with the western powers and disaster for German arms. In the end, with two exceptions (Busch and von Reichenau), the assembled commanders endorsed Beck's position and asked Brauchitsch to convey this to Hitler. But the Army's commander in chief, who was under heavy personal obligation to Hitler, contented himself with merely forwarding the memorandum to the Fuhrer through the army adjutant. This left Beck no choice but to resign, and he left office on August 28. Unfortunately, he obeyed Hitler's order to keep this quiet, and his departure was not announced until October.

There was, however, another arrow in Beck's quiver-a military coup if Hitler stuck to his war plans. Beck's successor, Franz Halder, was also in the conspiracy, so that the General Staff remained its official, though not its motor, center.23

Clear proof that Britain and France would actually go to war with
Germany in defense of Czechoslovakia was vital to launching a coup with any prospect of success. To assure this a string of messages had been addressed to London and Paris since spring which pleaded for clarification on this issue. They climaxed in the first days of September in meetings between the German charge' d'affaires Theo Kordt, and the British Foreign Minister, Lord Halifax, and between Beck himself and a French representative in a Basel hotel.24

As is only too well known London an d Paris could not be persuaded to act in the desired sense, and the process of appeasement continued on its fatal course. Twice, at what seemed encouraging moments in September, Halder pressed the button that summoned action for the following day, only to have to cancel each call when Britain swept the ground from under the conspirators by Chamberlain's trips to Germany.

Hitler, contrary to worldwide assumption, was more infuriated

Than enchanted by the Munich agreement. He bitterly resented
Anglo-French concessions that took the wind out of his diplomatic sails and forced him to hold his hand militarily with regard to Czechoslovakia. The military leadership in turn was bowled over by what looked like new proof of an uncanny instinct for what foreign opponents could be made to swallow. Thereafter it ceased to struggle against the drift to war.

Hitler savagely struck out at what he labeled the Beck complex: the thesis that the Army could legitimately object to or even exercise a veto on its employment for war.25 There was no one left in his military entourage to gainsay him; confidence and self-esteem had suffered too severely. A string of generals who had stood closest to Beck but had somehow survived the February purge went the same way. Small wonder that the shrunken Brauchitsch, and more and more Halder, were cowed.

When Hitler summoned army group and army commanders to Berchtesgaden on August 22, 1939, to reveal his coming attack on
Poland, he did not permit comment and none dared protest. Though army members did not wholly believe his claim that his deal with Stalin eliminated any chance of the western powers going to war with Germany, there was no getting around his extraordinary past record as a prophet in such matters. It is noteworthy, however, that until the guns began to shoot, the intimidated army leaders remained unconverted to Hitler's policy and continued to drag their feet as much as their cowed spirits would permit.

The relation of military planning and preparation to the
Development and conduct of national policy in Germany of the two prewar periods offers few parallels and almost inexhaustible contrasts. In fact, in the most basic problem areas, the determination of which was the cart and which the horse terminates in exactly opposite solutions. Before World War I military planning, except perhaps in some aspects of armament, seemed essentially independent of political guidance or decision. At the most critical juncture of all-the crisis of July 1914-plans devised without consultation or advisement of the civilian authorities proved a straightjacket for diplomacy.

In the thirties it was the political leadership which took the bit in its teeth and dragged along a reluctant Generalitat. The latter was always at least one step behind where the dictator wanted it to be, had no sympathy whatever for his larger foreign policy aims, and surrendered to him only after it had been repeatedly chastened and drained by successive purges of its most independent and politically and morally aware constituents.

Why such great contrasts and differences? The answer lies mainly
In completely altered military and political realities of the Third Reich but also in the dawn of the new age in which the role of political leaders assumed forms novel to our century. Notably, totalitarian really means total and permits no exceptions. A dictator with considerably less high flying ambitions of conquest than those of Adolf Hitler was bound to move in sooner or later on the military leadership. The unique situation of Germany with its heavy psychological burdens derived from a disastrous war and catastrophic peace tells much of the rest of the story. Looking at the problem from the standpoint of a democratic society, one can perhaps glean insights from the fate of Wilhelmian Germany. Except in broad human terms there seems little we can gain from that of Adolf Hitler.

1. The necessary intermediaries confessed to being fearful of the notorious indiscretion of both parties and of the touchy subjects that would have been among the topics of conversation. Especially the former G-2 of the Army High Command, Col. Walter Nicolai, clearly sought to protect Ludendorff from himself.

2. This is also the view of the most recent and excellent work on the guiding military doctrines of the 1914 belligerents: "Once the necessity of a rapid, decisive victory is accepted, Schlieffen's doctrine follows with inexorable logic." Jack Snyder, The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), p 132.

3. The state of British relations with France could be decisive here. In 1887, for example, The Evening Standard, the ministerial newspaper, at a time when British dissatisfactions with
France ran high, commented that if it came to a Franco-German war
Britain might not object to a German march through Belgium. In the meeting of the French Superior Council of National Defense in 1912, the discussion concerned a General Staff request for approval of marching through Belgium. On that occasion one of the ministers, no less a personage than Declasse, argued that the British would not object if they were sufficiently eager to see Germany defeated.

4. Eugene Te not, Les Nouveles defenses de la France: Les Frontieres 1870-1882 (Paris, 1882), p 313. The importance of Tenot's book is heavily underlined by G. Pedroncini, "Uinfluence de neutralite' beige et luxembourgeoise sur Ia strategie francaise." Paper presented at The International Colloquium on Military History, Teheran, July 6-16, 1976, p 1.

5. In 1911 the two General Staffs had agreed on the transfer to France of a British Expeditionary Force in the event of war with Germany. In 1912 a naval convention was to follow. The development of French planning on the basis of newly available French documents is dealt with at length in the Teheran paper of Pedroncini, pp 2-16.

6. The French suffered over 300,000 casualties during a single week (19-25 August), most of them as the result of futile attacks in Lorraine. The result of an overall defensive posture by Germany ought to have been correspondingly more devastating.

7. Snyder, p 122.

8. On the German side during the First World War the sole exceptions that spring to mind are such extraordinarily insightful figures as Max Hoffmann and Wilhelm Groener.

9. Bethmann-Hollweg related this to Count Lerchenfeld in May 1914, saying that for Germany the time for preventive wars had passed and that the Emperor would never agree to one anyway. Lerchenfeld interview, July 1938.

10. Conversations with Groener and Wetzell, July-August 1938.

11. Gen. Dmitri Gourko, G-2 of the Russian Imperial Army, related how he purchased a copy of this war game from a German officer in 1913. This induced the Russians to switch to an offensive strategy against Germany instead of throwing almost everything against Austria-
Hungary. The revised plan was ready in April 1914, virtually on the eve of war.

12. Helmut Johannes Ludwig von Moltke, Erinnerangen, Briefe, Dokumente. 1866-1916 (Stuttgart, 1922), p 19.

13. In 1912 Germany drafted 52 percent of her manpower of military age against 72-82 percent by France (estimates differ sharply on France). In view of the disproportion in the two populations (sixty-five million against thirty-nine million), the size of the two standing armies was about the same after the French had added an extra year of service.

14. Hammerstein stood out among top army figures for wider political and social horizons. He was one of the few generals who did not share in the bitter prejudice against the Republic. In a milieu so ultraconservative or starkly reactionary this looked close to radicalism, and in some quarters he was known as the "red general."

15. Five days after he became Chancellor Hitler told assembled generals that his foreign policy would go far beyond mere revisions of the Versailles Treaty. His aim, he averred, was to destroy the very framework of the treaty itself as well as the existing balance in Central Europe.

16. Edouard Calic, ed., Ohne Maske: Hitler-Breiting Geheimgespraeche 1931 (Frankfurt,1968). English edition, Unmasked: Two Confidential Interviews with Hitler in 1931 (London, 1971), pp 44, 109.

17. Among other pieces of evidence it is so reported in a dispatch of the British Embassy in Berlin.

18. Much light is thrown upon this aspect of the German rearmament problem by two recent studies. R. I. Overy, "Hitler's War and the German Economy: A Reinterpretation," in The Economic History Review XXXV No. 2 (May 1982), pp 272-91, argues that labor resources
were fully employed and that the real brakes on industrial expansion were lack of raw materials, skilled labor, and foreign exchange. A big windfall that came just in time for the war that began in September 1939 was the takeover of rump-Czechoslovakia in March of that year. It yielded the Germans half a billion RM in gold, a huge stock of arms, and nearly two billion RM worth of raw materials. Williamson Murray in his superb The Change in the European Balance of Power 1938-1939 (Princeton, 1984), devotes most of his first chapter (pp 3-49) to a
penetrating analysis of the German economic and armament problems that arrives at the same general conclusion.

19. Called thus because the Fuhrer's Wehrmacht adjutant, Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, took notes and later reconstructed the course of the meeting.

20. Interview with Gen. Gerhard Engel, Hitler's army adjutant, March 11, 1970. Also his then still unpublished diary entry of April 20, 1938.

21. As related in 1945 by Richard von Kuhlmann, a World War II foreign office official and in the thirties confidant of Neurath. Kuhlmann was selected by the French to carry the message to Neurath and through him to Hitler.

22. Quoted by Gerhard Ritter, "Deutsche Widerstand: Betrachtungen zum 10 Jahrestag des 20. Juli 1944," in Zeitwende-Die Neue Furche, V25N7 (Jul1954), no pagination.

23. The motor center lay in the command of the Abwehr (armed forces intelligence) under its Chief of Staff, Col. Hans Oster, with the tacit support of the commander, Adm. Canaris.

24. The latter episode has not yet been discussed in print but will be dealt with at length in the writer's forthcoming book on this phase of the military conspiracy.

25. Engel interview, March 11, 1970.

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