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War Without Policy: Clausewitz and the German Army 1866-1914

By

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Introduction

This paper seeks to demonstrate that the Imperial German army, despite its veneration of Carl von Clausewitz, was fundamentally anti-Clausewitzian. By this it is meant that the German army in its actions and thinking rejected Clausewitz's most significant assertion, that "War is merely the continuation of policy by other means."[1] Instead, while in a vague, philosophical sense it accepted that war was a political act, it rejected the idea that war and the actions of the army should in any way be restrained or directed by civilian authority. The German army promoted itself as an apolitical and technocratic organization, such that political direction or "interference" would be inappropriate. To this end it developed a way of war that emphasized its own autonomy at the expense of Clausewitizian principles that would have necessitated cooperation with civilian bodies, such as the Chancellor or Reichstag.

Recent scholarship has defined a "German Way of War," characterized by independent officers, aggression, and an emphasis on short wars won by battles of annihilation.[2] These particular traits are argued to have developed as a result of the geographic vulnerability of Prussia-Germany and its unique relationship between the monarchy, the state, and the army. This historiographical turn comes in response to the operational history of the German Army being too often separated from the socio-political dimension of its history. Often, the operational plans are considered by themselves or the army is viewed from an entirely socio-cultural standpoint. The concept of a "German way of war" allows for a unification of the political, cultural, and operational aspects of the German army and their interrelation. This paper seeks to add to this

[1] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton University Press, 1989), 87.

[2] Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare: Operational Thinking from Moltke the Elder to Heusinger* (University Press of Kentucky, 2016), Robert Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich*, Modern War Studies (University Press of Kansas, 2005).

literature through the analysis of the thinking of the German Army from 1866-1914 and demonstrate the manner in which its rejection of Clausewitz created a strategic culture that rejected the primacy of policy.[3] In this, I argue that the German way of war contains significant flaws from a Clausewitzian perspective that weakened its utility as a tool of policy.

Prior to the historiographical turn, the idea that the German army held a recipe for victory was not a new one, having been particularly popular in the United States during the Cold War as a potential source for conventional victory in Europe. The so-called "Blitzkrieg" that resulted in the Fall of France was a feat that military professionals understandably sought the tools to emulate. The German army's methods could offer the ability to conduct offensive operations while at a material disadvantage and produce decisive results, and do so rapidly. As a result, there was a strong drive to understand and replicate the conditions that made such victory possible. A lionized history of the German Army emerged as a result of this, with the General Staff in particular emphasized as a locus of excellence.[4]

The fixation on German operational art in the United States can be partially attributed to lack of alternatives; in the wake of the Second World War no other major power's armed forces were available for interrogation. The only other major power that engaged in large scale mechanized warfare was the Soviet Union, which was none too inclined to provide the Americans with an explanation of the Soviet way of war.[5] As such, availability of information was substantially responsible for the prominence and influence of the German way of war.

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[3] See Christian Freuding, "Organising for War: Strategic Culture and the Organisation of High Command in Britain and Germany, 1850–1945: A Comparative Perspective," *Defence Studies* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 431–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2010.503683.

[4] T.N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945*, A T. N. Dupuy Associates Book (Prentice-Hall, 1977).

[5] For a discussion of Soviet Operational Art see: David M. Glantz, Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deep Battle, Cass Series on Soviet Military Theory and Practice 2 (London, England ; Portland, Or: F. Cass, 1991).

However, the conditions that led to an availability of information proved a double edged sword. While scholars and practitioners in the United States had access to the testimony of all the German officers they could desire, the accounts they received were inevitably slanted. The impact of this on historiography is most notable in the enduringly popular "clean Wehrmacht" myth, which maintained that the German armed forces were not aware of and did not participate in the perpetration of the Holocaust. At the same time, they rejected moral culpability, the memoirs and testimony produced by the German officers abrogated military responsibility for losing the war. In these exculpatory accounts, the German defeat was attributed to Hitler.[6] This was effective for two reasons, as Citino phrases it: "He had the perfect credentials. He was dead, first of all, and therefore incapable of defending himself; and second, he was Hitler."[7] Thus the German army shifted both its own moral and military failures onto the defunct political apparatus, thereby creating a narrative aimed at absolving itself.

While the exculpatory narrative did not go unchallenged, the predominant narrative which challenged it was not unproblematic. The Sonderweg theory sought to draw a direct line from the German militarism and cultural chauvinism of the nineteenth century to Nazi ideology and the Holocaust.[8] To accomplish this required some rough handling of the German way of war, attempting to draw a connection between the concept of a battle of annihilation and the Nazi policy of seeking the annihilation of particular races. Gerhard Gross argues convincingly that the German understanding of "annihilation" in a military sense did not constitute the "physical extinction" of the enemy but "reduc[ing] the enemy to such a physical and moral state that he

[6] See Erich von Manstein's *Lost Victories* (1958) is an example of this, as is Heinz Guderian's *Panzer Leader* (1950).

[7] Robert Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich*, Modern War Studies (University Press of Kansas, 2005).

[8] See Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen, and Prussian War Planning* (New York: Berg, 1991).

feels himself incapable of continuing the struggle."[9] A battle of annihilation therefore is unrelated to concept of personal or racial annihilation that characterized the Nazi regime. "Annihilation" in the military sense sought to destroy a fighting force's capacity to carry on the struggle, not seeking extermination as an end in itself.

The contemporary historiography has again focused on the operational aspect of the German way of war, seeking to demonstrate that the "Blitzkrieg" was not discovered accidentally by the Germans in the 1930s, but rather represented a development of the traditional Prussia-German method of waging war.[10] This scholarship further presents a more nuanced view of the German army compared to that of the mid twentieth-century, recognizing the technical and operational excellence of the German army, while nevertheless critically analyzing the deficiencies in strategy, organization, and intelligence that led the German army to defeat.[11] Central to these critiques is the German constitutional parallelism which prevented the development of civilian control over the army. As Gross notes, "Mutual distrust and departmental conceits were often more important than national interests… Moltke the Younger in 1912 was the first chief of the General Staff to notify the minister of war of his war plans."[12] The bureaucratic politics of Imperial Germany led to the General Staff failing to coordinate with bodies that possessed competencies related to the preparation for war and its actual execution and instead focusing parochially on the competencies delegated to it in an effort to avoid subordination to other institutions such as the minister of war or the chancellor.

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[9] Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 71.

[10]Citino, *The German Way of War,* 267.

[11] Dr Samuel J. Newland, *Victories Are Not Enough: Limitations Of The German Way Of War* (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2015).

[12] Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 132.

This paper focuses on the effects of this deficiency (the lack of the primacy of policy) in German war planning during the Imperial period, with particular emphasis on the manner in which this organizational failure is connected to the German army's limited engagement with the strategic level of war as defined by Clausewitz.[13] While war was acknowledged to be a political act, the army declared itself an "apolitical" body, with the political dimension of war outside its bounds. This was a distinctly anti-Clausewitzian position in that it rejected both the primacy of policy in waging war and the right of policymakers to influence the conduct of war. Such a position rested on the untenable assumption that there existed clear and divisible spheres of politics and war. The arrangement of domestic politics in the German Empire was deeply favorable to the army, yet crucial aspects of strategic planning lay outside its mandate, residing instead with the war minister, the war cabinet, and the chancellor. The army and state were constitutionally both subordinates of the Prussian King (then German Emperor) and there existed no intermediate authority to coordinate the two organizations. As a consequence, the German Army both lacked strategic direction from civilian authority and lacked the remit to develop such strategic concepts independently. The result was that the German Army sought to develop an "apolitical" conception of war that in reality sought the maximum political objective axiomatically, in effect denying the civilian government the right to define its scope and objectives. The simultaneous denial of civilian authority to impose political intentions on war plans as well as the army's own claim to apolitical status resulted in war plans defined in near exclusively operational terms which left it entirely unclear how a war was to be concluded.

[13] The definition of strategy used in this paper will be a Clausewitzian one, ""the use of engagements for the object of the war." *On War* (128) or, to a ubiquitous restatement of this principle, "the use of military means to achieve political ends."

Despite its claim to apolitical status, the German army in reality attained more political power at the expense of the Chancellor through its increased autonomy. The German army not only failed to integrate the state's political objectives into its operational planning but substituted its own conception of political objectives via the rejection of the state's role in the war-planning process. However, the responsibility this autonomy implied was not desired. "Political responsibility pivoted on the Supreme Commander in person, and when it fell into the remit of the military leadership by default… it was repudiated."[14] By rejecting Clausewitz and viewing itself as "apolitical" the German army attained the authority to make decisions in war planning and times of war of great political significance while at the same time denying their own capability and responsibility to either acquiescence to civilian leadership or to operate on a political level.

The consequence of the dismissal of the political dimension of war was that the German Army failed to develop an accurate perception of war as a process of bargaining, of the utilization of force to achieve compliance. Thomas Schelling provides the following analogy. "The principle is illustrated by a technique of unarmed combat: one can disable a man by various stunning, fracturing, or killing blows, but to take him to jail one has to exploit the man's own efforts. 'Come-along' holds are those that threaten pain or disablement, giving relief as long as the victim complies, giving him the option of using his own legs to get to jail."[15] Schelling's comparison would not have been alien to German officers. Clausewitz writes "A picture of [war] as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to

[14] Freuding, "Organising for War: Strategic Culture and the Organisation of High Command in Britain and Germany, 1850–1945: A Comparative Perspective," 454.

[15] T.C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword*, The Henry L. Stimson Lectures Series (Yale University Press, 2008), 8.

compel the other to do his will."[16] This paper will examine the manner in which the German army nonetheless developed an understanding of war and strategy radically different from what had been promoted by the army's premier theorist and the manner in which the absence of the strategic dimension weakened the war plans produced.

The chiefs of the General Staff expended tremendous energy in an attempt to substitute high acceptance of risk and superior morale for cooperating with the civilian government to develop a comprehensive strategic plan. I will demonstrate that the German army failed to develop a concept of war that enabled the cross organizational cooperation needed to function at the political level. As a result, the army developed plans for wars independent of any conscious political objective but implicitly aimed at the total defeat of the enemy. While Clausewitz wrote that "No one starts a war-or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so-without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how intends to conduct it,"[17] the German Army instead made doctrine the concept that war must aim at the highest objective, rendering the enemy helpless, irrespective of the wishes of the politicians.[18]

This was problematic in that the total defeat of the enemy was a risky objective, not necessarily commensurate with the aims of the government at any given time. Further, as will be discussed in the case of the Austro-Prussian War (1866) total defeat of the enemy was not desired, as it brought with it its own political consequences. The army failed to develop a schema for devising operations that could deliver a particular political object. This manifested in operational plans based on assumptions of extreme risk. However, the extent of the risk was

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[16] Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

[17] Clausewitz, *On War*, 579.

[18] Helmuth von Moltke, *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel J. Hughes (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1993), 36.

itself concealed by appeals to the superior intangible qualities of the German soldier, with him being expected to not only march enormous distances with the barest amount of logistical support and to then deny the enemy all agency when battle was joined. Thus, the German army, despite its veneration of Clausewitz, was itself anti-Clausewitzian, believing that it was not only possible but advisable to wage war without policy considerations.

Count Alfred von Schlieffen (Chief of the General Staff, 1891-1906) and his promise of a formula for total victory was deeply appealing to the German Army for the institutional aggrandizement it provided. In the German Wars of Unification, the Army had established itself as the most prestigious institution of the German state, and among the most prestigious in Europe overall. Yet, as Clausewitz writes, "in war, the result is never final."[19] The pride of place that the Army and the General Staff had earned was predicated on their ability to maintain a superiority that was as much a consequence of the fortune as its own excellence. As such, when faced with the Gordian Knot of Germany's weakening strategic position at the *fin-de-siècle*, Schlieffen's formula for unraveling it was seized upon, not only by his contemporaries, including the Younger Moltke, but also by interwar biographers who transformed his 1905 memorandum into an enduring myth of lost victory.[20] As a result of prolonged inaccessibility of primary sources, this perspective has encountered only limited critique, most significantly in Gerhard Ritter's work. The post-facto analyses of the viability of Schlieffen's memorandum, particularly in contrast to the Moltke Plan actually implemented in 1914 are interesting, but they are counterfactuals and thus of limited utility for historical investigation. Instead, this paper chooses

[19] Clausewitz, *On War,* 80.

[20] Gerhard P. Gross and David T. Zabecki, "There Was a Schlieffen Plan," in *The Schlieffen Plan*, ed. Gerhard P. Gross, Hans Ehlert, and Michael Epkenhans, International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 85–136, 119-120.

to investigate the effects of the institutional and theoretical deficiencies on operational planning as a whole.

The ultimate consequence was that when crisis came in 1914 the German Army, as it had at preceding crises, sought to revise the strategic situation-a fundamentally political problem-through the only military means in its vocabulary: namely enacting an operational plan understood to be a desperate gamble, for want of a strategic theory to supply an alternative. The German army had deliberately bounded its strategic thinking, sacrificing efficacy in order to maintain its position of prestige and privilege.[21] When faced with the choice between admitting the inability of the German army to promise victory in a two front war and condescending to coordinate with the Chancellor, War Minister, and Reichstag in order to redress this weakness, the army refused to choose. Instead it muddled on, seeking a solution to the strategic dilemma through operational means. The army's rejection of Clausewitz's unity of war and policy and the civilian control that the concept implied left it without a means of addressing the political dimension of war.

I will begin by clearly outlining Clausewitz's description of the nature of war as a tool of policy and his assertion as to the necessity of civilian direction of military efforts. This paper will discuss the thinking of the Chiefs of the German General Staff during the Wars of German Unification and the imperial period, specifically the tenures of Helmuth von Moltke the Elder from 1857-1888, Count Alfred von Schlieffen from 1891-1906, and Helmuth von Moltke the Younger from 1906-1914, and illustrate the manner in which their conceptions of the relationship between war and policy represented a clear break from those of Clausewitz. The Chiefs of General Staff espoused and carried out concepts of the relation between the army and the state

[21] For discussion of the position of the German army see Dennis E. Showalter, "The Political Soldiers of Bismarck's Germany: Myths and Realities," *German Studies Review* 17, no. 1 (1994): 59–77, https://doi.org/10.2307/1431304.

that rejected Clausewitz's conclusions without fullying developing an alternative view of the nature of the relationship between war and policy. I will conclude with a discussion of the potential reasons behind this divergence, highlighting the institutional factors and the political culture of the German officer corps.

Clausewitz's Theory of War

Carl Phillip Gottfried von Clausewitz (1780-1831) is not only a foundational figure in German military theory but in military thought in general. His magnum opus, On War, represents the only enduring work in Western military tradition that seeks to create a universally applicable theory of war. In contrast to contemporary theorists such as Antoine Jomini and Friedrich von Bülow, Clausewitz did not seek merely to create rules or guidelines for other commanders but aimed at defining the nature of war. Clausewitz introduced concepts such as friction (the tendency of unpredictable difficulties mounting upon one another to make simple actions difficult), the center of gravity, and the definition of war as a political act. *On War* is known primarily for its exceptionality as a work that creates a comprehensive theory of war and secondarily for its impenetrability. Clausewitz's untimely death of cholera in 1831 left his work in a thoroughly unfinished state. Clausewitz was well aware of the deficiencies of his manuscript and had intended to revise it for the sake of coherence and consistency. While the first book (of eight) had been revised by the time of his death, Marie von Brühl (1779-1836), Clausewitz's wife, undertook the unenviable task of compiling and editing his plethora of disorganized papers for publication.[22] Despite Marie doing her utmost, On War is manifestly incomplete, to the point that extracting Clausewitz's intentions and conclusions can be an ordeal. While his core concepts

[22] See V. E. Bellinger, *Marie von Clausewitz: The Woman Behind the Making of On War* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

are present, the wide-ranging nature of the work (addressing everything from the nature of war to the tactics of river crossings) means that intense study and academic discourse have been needed to reveal them. Unfortunately, this level of study was not undertaken until after the second half of the twentieth century, leaving the most significant effects of the work not in its meaning but in its misinterpretations.[23]

Clausewitz provided both normative and descriptive commentary on the relationship between war and policy. In descriptive terms, war is defined as a political act, the use of violence to seize an object or compel an enemy to concede it. That is to say, to impose a certain alteration in political circumstances on an enemy or to deny an enemy the ability to do so; "a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."[24] Clausewitz explicitly frames the prosecution of war in the context of its political purpose. War is thus the use of force to achieve a given objective, with that objective being defined by civilian authority. Thus, all military actions must be judged in the context of their political utility in regards to that purpose and cannot be understood outside their political context. To seek to wage war without policy was therefore impossible. The enduring effort of the German army to insulate itself from the policy apparatus of the civilian government was therefore anti-Clausewitzian.

Clausewitz separately provides a normative arrangement for civil-military relations. He explicitly recommends a certain organization for the purpose of coordinating civilian and military institutions, namely the inclusion of the military chief in the councils of the cabinet. "...The only sound expedient is to make the commander-in-chief a member of the cabinet, so that

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[23] See Michael Howard, "The Influence of Clausewitz," in *On War* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 27–44.

[24] Clausewitz, *On War,* 87.

the cabinet can share in the major aspects of his activities."[25] In the Howard and Paret translation of *On War* it is noted that this phrasing is consonant with Clausewitz's original first edition, whereas the second edition of the text rendered the passage as "that he may take part in tits councils and decisions on important occasions."[26] This edition, published in 1853, with its alteration provides a clear explanation as to how the German Army continued to make use of Clausewitz without explicitly rejecting his argument. It's unclear as to the motivation of the significant alterations in the second edition, in this case inverting Clausewitz's meaning. Whether an intentional alteration or an unintended product of the editing process, the new rendering promoted the autonomy of the army from political authority, reinforcing its existing disposition.[27]

Consequently, *On War* could be cited and quoted by the German army in order to promote the separation of policy apparatus from the conduct of war even as this contradicted Clausewitz's central thesis. Clausewitz's assertion of the nature of war as an act of policy was accepted, but the primacy of policy and civilian direction of operations this implied were rejected through the alterations introduced in the second edition. As a result, for German army's readers of Clausewitz, there was not a clear contradiction between Clausewitz's theory and the army's insistence on independence from civilian direction.

Moltke the Elder: Wars of German Unification (1866-1870)

Helmuth von Moltke "the Elder," first Chief of the Prussian General Staff (1857-1871) then of the German General Staff (1871-1891) was the most influential figure in defining the

[25] Ibid, 608.

[26] Ibid, 608, note 1.

[27] Carl von Clausewitz and Werner Hahlweg, *Vom Kriege: Hinterlassenes Werk Des Generals Carl von Clausewitz: Vollständige Ausgabe Im Urtext, Drei Teile in Einem Band*, 19. Aufl., Jubiläumsausg (Bonn: Dümmlers Verlag, 1980), 1236-1238.

cultural relationship between the German Army and political authority. Even Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, and Blücher, the heroes of the Napoleonic Wars, could not boast of the dramatic and decisive successes that Moltke had won for, not only Prussia, but all of Germany.[28] However, Moltke's tenure as CGS and the successes Prussia enjoyed during it cannot be understood without an appreciation of Bismarck's role as Chancellor.[29] A fundamental aspect of the Austro-Prussian War that had an underestimated impact on its outcome was that it was an offensive war undertaken by Prussia. Following the Second Schleswig War in which Prussia and Austria defeated Denmark, Bismarck negotiated the Gastein convention, setting out the terms of occupation for the newly annexed territory. Utilizing the border-friction he had engineered in the convention, Bismarck deemed the political moment opportune for challenging Austria for the position of leading German state. Bismarck did not merely trigger the war, but set its strategic terms. By securing an alliance with Italy and the neutrality of France, Bismarck secured numerical superiority for the Prussian army and forced Austria to fight on two fronts.[30] Thus, while a strictly civilian figure, Bismarck set the terms by which the Prussian army would fight. Had a less able diplomat been at the helm, the strategic situation facing the Prussian army may have been radically different. The question of alliances serves as a clear example of the policies of the civilian government being integral to the success of the military. Bismarck's initiative and the confidence he enjoyed from the monarch allowed him to make use of the German army as a tool of policy, regardless of the institution's reticence.

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[28] See Arden Bucholz, *Moltke and the German Wars, 1864–1871* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[29] Samuel J. Newland,"Leaders in German Unification: Founders of Traditions." In *Victories Are Not Enough: Limitations Of The German Way Of War*, 15–28. Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2005. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11996.7.

[30] See Geoffrey Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War: Austria's War with Prussia and Italy in 1866* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

However, the army's resistance to civilian direction reared its head in the period following the Battle of Königgrätz which displays a dramatic difference of opinion between the state and the army and demonstrates the manner in which the army's axiom of annihilating the main body of the enemy was an inadequate substitute for the integration of Clausewitzian political thinking into their war plans. In the view of the army and Moltke, the destruction of the Austrian army and an advance on Vienna was a prerequisite for peace.[31] However, Chancellor Bismarck, political chief, had no need for further war, having accomplished the aims of challenging Austria, namely increasing Prussian prestige and ending Austria's tenure as the preeminent German state.[32] The desire of the army to destroy the Austrian force and occupy Vienna was entirely superfluous and would have served no purpose as the objectives of the campaign had been achieved.

Further, the Chancellor had political objectives that would be imperiled by the continuation of the war. Bismarck wrote: "If we are not excessive in our demands and do not believe we have conquered the world, we will attain a peace that is worth our effort. But we are just as quickly intoxicated as we are plunged into dejection, and I have the thankless task of pouring water into the bubbling wine and making it clear that we do not live alone in Europe, but with three other powers that hate and envy us."[33] Continued military success would have been *detrimental* to German interests, a fact which the German army, through its rejection of Clausewitz, lacked the theoretical framework to recognize. Bismarck desired to avoid humiliating Austria in order to avoid embittering the power so that Prussia would have greater

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[31] Helmuth von Moltke, *Strategy; Its Theory and Application: The Wars for German Unification, 1866-1871*, The West Point Military Library (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1971), 68-69, no. 179.

[32] Newland, *Victories are Not Enough,* 19-20.

[33] Otto von Bismarck and Herbert Bismarck, *Fürst Bismarck's Briefe an seine Braut und Gattin* (Stuttgart, Cotta, 1900), http://archive.org/details/briefeanseinebr01vongoog, 572, as cited in Newland, 2005.

diplomatic flexibility and would not have a perennial foe to its south. The army's desire to destroy the Austrian army and march on Vienna thus constituted a genuine threat to Prussian national interest as defined by Bismarck in his capacity as Chancellor.

Moltke's desire to continue the war beyond the defeat of the Austrians at Königgrätz was an instance of his imposition of his own political judgment, an overstepping of his position as chief of the General Staff. This was no minor point. Moltke's position would have resulted in a fundamentally different position of Prussia in the emergent European order. The ruined and humiliated Austria that Moltke's prescription entailed would have presented a stark warning to Europe regarding the ascendancy of Prussia. This was directly contrary to the grand strategy of Bismarck. As a consequence of Bismarck prevailing over Moltke and the army, not only did Prussia succeed in its war aim of becoming the leading German state, but it had refrained from embittering Austria, thereby increasing its diplomatic flexibility. The Dual Alliance of 1879 would almost certainly not have been possible if Prussian soldiers had occupied Vienna or imposed a crippling indemnity.[34] Thus, the fact that Prussia did not seek absolute victory led to a strategically beneficial outcome whereas had the army not been restrained from seeking further operational success, the strategic position of Prussia would have been degraded. Bismarck crucially appreciated the manner in which the conduct of military operations and the objectives sought were indelibly connected to the strategic situation that Germany would face. This connection between war and politics that Clausewitz had theorized was fundamental to conducting a war successfully. As the case demonstrates, misapplied military force could not only be wasteful, but be unnecessarily detrimental to a nation's strategic situation.

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[34] See Bagdasarian, Nicholas Der. *The Austro-German Rapprochement, 1870-1879: From the Battle of Sedan to the Dual Alliance*. Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976.

Bismarck's desires had prevailed over Moltke's in 1866 on account of the King's distaste for war with a fellow German state. Policy had been given primacy in settling matters with Austria, but through the favor of the monarch, not on an institutional basis. The Franco-Prussian War is an instance of the incidental primacy of policy breaking down. While Bismarck had enjoyed the near total trust of Wilhelm I in 1866, by 1870 Moltke and the Prussian generals were able to exclude Bismarck from the council of war on the grounds that he was a civilian. This meant that the head of government was in the humiliating position of having to be informed of military developments through the press.[35] It once again took the direct intervention of the monarch to improve the Chancellor's position when Wilhelm mandated that Bismarck be informed of developments.

It is significant that the Franco-Prussian war took nearly a year to conclude which, while short in relative terms, was many times longer than it had taken to defeat Austria. The reason for this was not that the French army took longer to defeat. The Battle of Sedan was won about six weeks into the campaign, ending with Napoleon III in captivity, his army destroyed, and the Army of the Rhine under Bazaine surrounded in Metz with no hope of relief.[36] The French were undoubtedly in a far worse position strategically and operationally than the Austrians were after the Battle of Königgrätz. Yet, the war continued. This may partially be explained by the greater national animosity between France and Germany. It may also have its roots in the capture of Louis Napoleon at Sedan, leaving no authority in France which could conclude a peace. National animosity stoked the desire of German officers to continue the advance and entirely humiliate the

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[35] Günter Roth, "Field Marshal von Moltke the Elder His Importance Then and Now," *Army History*, no. 23 (1992): 1–10.

[36] See Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870–1871* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michael Howard, *The Franco Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870–1871* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

French. Bismarck in one of his letters writes, "My wish would be to let these people stew in their own juice, and to install ourselves comfortably in the conquered provinces before advancing further."[37] While Bismarck sought to avoid unnecessarily embittering the French, he was continually circumvented and forestalled by Moltke, until 1871, when the King explicitly forbade Moltke from corresponding with the French over terms of surrender and required him to keep Bismarck informed on military operations.[38] By that time, however, the Germans had suffered significantly in attempting to bring about French capitulation. Dennis Showalter describes the German experience of the occupation of France as "almost… conquering itself to death."[39] In the case of France, overzealous exploitation of operational success had left Prussia in a precarious position, engaged in an indefinite, costly occupation that left it vulnerable to exploitation by other powers.

The intervention of the King in favor of Bismarck is a clear refrain through the wars of German unification and the decisive factor that imposed the primacy of policy on German operations. It is from the political priorities of the Chancellor that the operational successes of the army derive their significance. From Königgrätz Bismarck was able to dismantle Austrian hegemony but without gaining an enemy on his southern flank. While Bismarck was less successful in controlling the course of events following Sedan, he nevertheless was able to attain German unification under the Prussian monarch and deal significant damage to France's ability to project power against Germany. Nevertheless, this victory revealed the fault lines of German civil-military relations. "The French request for an armistice was to come at an almost

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[37] Bismarck to Herbert Bismarck, 7 Sept., qu. Wilhelm Busch, *Das Deutsche Grosse Hauptquartier und die Bekämpfung von Paris im Feldzuge 1870-1* (Stuttgart and Berlin 1905) 10, in Howard (2001).

[38] Newland, *Victories Are Not Enough*, 24.

[39] Dennis Showalter, "From Deterrence to Doomsday Machine: The German Way of War, 1890-1914," *The Journal of Military History* 64, no. 3 (2000): 679–710, https://doi.org/10.2307/120865, 682.

providential moment. Had the war been prolonged for a few more weeks, it is difficult to see how either Bismarck or Moltke could have remained in posts which each felt the other was making untenable."[40]

However, even as Bismarck was ultimately empowered to impose policy on the army, Moltke's resentment to such interference became institutionalized in the German Army. Moltke, despite his fame, produced few written works on military subjects. However in 1871 he chose to write "On Strategy," declaring,

> Policy uses war for the attainment of its goals; it works decisively at the beginning and the end of war, so that indeed policy reserves for itself the right to increase its demands or to be satisfied with a lesser success. In this uncertainty, strategy must always direct its endeavors towards the highest aim attainable with available means. Strategy thus works best for the goals of policy, but in its actions is fully independent of policy.[41]

In this passage Moltke appeals to the "uncertainty" of policy on the basis of its right to increase or decrease its objectives, asserting that strategy, which Moltke here means as the plan of a campaign, should aim at the "highest aim attainable with available means," irrespective of the intentions of the political leadership. He here argues that operations possess a logic of their own and should be carried to completion before policy has its influence. In effect, Moltke asserts that while political leadership chooses when to start and end wars, during the conduct of a war, the actions of the army are "fully independent" of policy and therefore beyond the purview of civilian authority. Moltke acknowledges the theoretical unity of war, but argues that the dynamic nature of policy means that it cannot be allowed to affect the planning or conduct of war. Thus, while not directly contradicting Clausewitz, he proposes a distinctly anti-Clausewitzian relationship between military means and political ends.

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[40] Michael Howard, The Franco Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870–1871 (New York: Routledge, 2001) 432.

[41] Moltke, "On Strategy", in *Moltke on the Art of War*, 44-45.

This is particularly significant as Moltke is frequently portrayed as a studious executor or disciple of Clausewitz's theory of war, to the point that Clausewitzian theory and Moltkean practice are treated as singular entity.[42] Not just in German military theory but also in historiography, there has been a treatment of Moltke's and Clausewitz's ideas of war as congruous. In fact, Moltke's views contradict Clausewitz, who writes of war that "Its grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic."[43] The prominent publication of Moltke's "On Strategy" and unambiguous statement demonstrates clearly the manner in which Moltke failed to appreciate the role policy had played in converting his battlefield successes into an enduring victory. Instead Moltke drew a clear dividing line between policy and operations. In his view, politics should under no circumstances impact the conduct of operations.[44]

As a result of Moltke's foundational influence in history and culture of the German army, this view was propagated and carried forward as tradition. Moltke's statements are entirely congruent with the traditional Prusso-German conception of the role of the army in society. The institutional culture of the Prussian military, specifically the Prussian officer corps, was that of independent professionals exclusively in service to the king, unaccountable to his ministers. What is commonly considered *auftragstaktik* (mission tactics, also known as *mission command*) is a direct result of this relationship of autonomy. While *auftragstaktik* permitted greater flexibility and allowed for commanders to not be hampered in operations by lack of communications with the high command, this independence fostered a culture that was antithetical to the idea of subordination of the military to the political. The privileged place of the

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[42] Citino, *The German Way of War,* 142; Michael Geyer, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare," in Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age, edited by Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 548

[43] Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 605.

[44] Antulio J. Echevarria II, "Moltke and the German Military Tradition: His Theories and Legacies," *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 26, no. 1 (1996): 6.

army within society further meant that there was a tremendous amount of pride inherent in the officer corps.[45] Even in combat, the philosophy of *auftragstaktik* meant that the decision to obey or disobey an order was a matter of an officer's own professional opinion that was itself inflated in self-importance by his membership in the elite organization of the Prusso-German officer corps. This privilege is in stark contrast to the view of civilian officials in Prussian society, especially within the army itself. Not only was the civilian government viewed with skepticism by the aristocratic class that made up much of the officer corps, but it further lacked legitimacy among the monarchist and generally socially conservative population of nineteenth century Germany. This lack of prestige and legitimacy for the civilian government made the subordination of military desires to political interest as expressed by the civilian government-even those as trivial as a victory parade-an incredibly difficult task as demonstrated in the German wars of unification.[46]

In point of fact, the unification of Germany under Prussia, arguably the premier foreign policy coup of the 19th century, was predicated on Bismarck's grand strategy of appearing as a moderate power, uninterested in disrupting the balance of power and rewriting the European order. As a result of this maneuvering, Prussia was able to wage two Great Power wars within five years, almost doubling its population without provoking war from a coalition aimed at arresting its rise. This revision was accomplished as much through artful foreign policy and diplomacy as battlefield victories. Military means were essential to its accomplishment, but it was the manner to which these military means were utilized that permitted such exceptional success. The counterexample of Napoleonic France is illustrative of the manner in which

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[45]Citino*, The German Way of War*, 244.

[46]See Dennis E. Showalter, "The Political Soldiers of Bismarck's Germany: Myths and Realities," *German Studies Review* 17, no. 1 (1994): 59–77, https://doi.org/10.2307/1431304.

battlefield success can result in continuous struggle rather than victorious peace. Thus, Moltke's dramatic battlefield successes that became the focus of the education of succeeding German officers were not in themselves decisive. Rather, Bismarck's successful use of engagements for the object of the war-in Clausewitz's terms, strategy-prevented Moltke's successes from becoming "lost victories."[47] In conclusion, Prussian success in the wars of unification was a result of the effectiveness of coordination between the personalities of Bismarck, Moltke, and Wilhelm.[48] The effectiveness of this coordination obscured the massive institutional deficiencies that existed in the relations between the General Staff and the Chancellorship.

Moltke the Elder's Later Concept of War

Even while the Reinsurance Treaty between Germany and Russia remained in effect, the prospect of Franco-Russian rapprochement loomed large in German planning. The annexed territories of Alsace-Lorraine were an inevitable target of French revanchism and, while fortified, constituted only a short buffer before the vital industrial heartland of the Rhineland whose loss would make the continuation of a war near impossible. While Germany's eastern frontiers possessed less industrial value, Berlin was within striking distance from Congress Poland and the loss of East Prussia would be politically unacceptable. Thus, Germany lacked strong natural obstacles on the border with either France or Russia, and it could not utilize its strategic depth due to the proximity of vital industrial or political targets to its borders. With the freedom of action enjoyed by states in the Bismarckian system, in contrast to their later constraint by

[47] Newland, *Victories Are Not Enough*, 28.

[48] Freuding, "Organising for War," 441.

development of the alliance blocs, it was necessary to consider the opportunistic partnering of any number of states against Germany, regardless of the diplomatic situation.[49]

Moltke had been profoundly affected by the continuation of the Franco-Prussian War following the Battle of Sedan. 'Even with the greatest successes, we can never expect a rapid end to the fighting on this front, as the last campaign [the Franco-Prussian War] has sufficiently shown."[50] Along with the wider officer corps, the development of Franc-Tireurs and brutal casualties suffered by the Guards at St. Privat were sources of consternation regarding the future of warfare.[51] To Moltke, the first indicated that future wars would be popular wars, encompassing the whole energies of a people, where even a battle of annihilation would be insufficient to achieve peace. The second was indicative of the increasing importance of firepower and the increased advantage of the tactical defensive. The latter merely reinforced a conviction already held by Moltke, even when operating aggressively, that the ideal was to maneuver so as to force the enemy to take the tactical offensive. The increasing significance of firepower was a significantly more disruptive element. The Prusso-German formula for winning wars rested heavily on the ability to use qualitative superiority to overcome numerical insufficiency. However, the shocking culling of the flower of Prussian infantry at St. Privat suggested that élan and discipline were becoming secondary to material factors.[52]

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[49] See Klaus Hildebrand and David T. Zabecki, "The Sword and the Scepter," in *The Schlieffen Plan*, ed. Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, and Gerhard P. Gross, International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 17–42, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/stable/j.ctt9qhkwc.5.

[50] H.G. von Moltke, *Ausgewählte Werke Des Generalfeldmarschalls Graf von Moltke : Feldherr Und Staatsmann*, ed. F. von Schmerfeld, Ausgewählte Werke (Berlin: R. Hobbing, 1901), 68, in Gross *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare,* 52.

[51]See Stig Förster, "Facing 'People's War': Moltke the Elder and Germany's Military Options After 1871," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 1987): 209–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402398708437297.

[52]Citino, *The German Way of War*, 186-187.

The culmination of this thinking was that Moltke's war plans, even at their most optimistic, did not anticipate the accomplishment of a Sedan or Königgrätz in future wars.[53] This was not to say that the concept of a battle of annihilation was abandoned, but that even a battle of annihilation could not be assumed to be decisive. For this reason, by the end of Moltke's tenure, he considered total victory on either front untenable. Instead, he conceded the necessity of seeking a negotiated settlement based on limited victories.[54] This is deeply significant in that it represents a shift from Moltke's view, clearly elucidated in 1871, that the army must seek total victory due to the transience of political aims. Whereas in 1871 Moltke viewed the uncertainty of policy as something to be eliminated through seeking the "highest aim" (rendering the enemy helpless) as Germany's strategic position worsened and absolute victory became increasingly unlikely, the ability of the political apparatus to satisfy itself with lesser aims became an escape from the strategic dilemma. The renunciation of absolute victory meant the implicit allowance of a political dimension into war planning, even if it was not directly engaged with by Moltke or the General Staff as a whole. Inherently, in Moltke's later concept of war, if total victory was not anticipated, the General Staff had assumed the responsibility to define what conditions were favorable to positive peace and establish those so that the political apparatus could then fulfill its function.

The limitation of German strategic planning to the pursuit of this objective is the reason why the prospect of "people's war" in the Franco-Prussian War caused the Elder Moltke substantial consternation. While the Prussians and their allies had prevailed, it was only after a protracted struggle against several hastily assembled French armies. Moltke was aware that the Franco-Prussian War had taken place in better conditions than Germany could expect in a future

[53]Moltke, *Ausgewählte Werke*, 75-76.

[54]Moltke, *Ausgewählte Werke,* 77-78.

war. The French army had been qualitatively and quantitatively inferior to the Prussians and lagged in mobilization.[55] Crucially, no outside powers had intervened against Prussia. These favorable conditions could not be expected in future wars, particularly as states learned to better utilize the potent force of popular war.

Towards the end of his tenure the Elder Moltke thus privately foresaw the threat to the German way of war posed by the increased tactical advantage of the defensive and the manner in which popular nationalism drove wars toward Clausewitz's concept of "absolute" war. The increased strength of the tactical defensive by technical developments in firepower limited the benefits that could be derived from superior training and leadership; as seen at St. Privat, the Guards were as vulnerable to firepower as the Landwehr. Thus, the intensification of nationalism and firepower boded ill for the German way of war as a method for gaining swift victories. Moltke recognized that increasingly the political situation came to resemble a situation described by Clausewitz, "Between two peoples and two states there can be such tensions, such a mass of inflammable material, that the slightest quarrel can produce a wholly disproportionate effect-a real explosion."[56] One of the most significant differences between Moltke and his successors is Moltke's firm and developed conviction that the era of short wars of limited extent and limited national engagement had ended and future war was to be characterized by prolonged struggle between nations. "Any sensible government, "Moltke declared in 1891, "must hesitate to go to war under existing social, political, and technological conditions. The next conflict might last for seven years or for thirty."[57] He did not seek the "highest aim attainable"-to render the enemy

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[55]Howard. *The Franco Prussian War*, 38.

[56]Clausewitz, *On War,* 81.

[57]Showalter, *From Deterrence to Doomsday Machine,* 683.

helpless-but rather conceded the need for limited war.[58] Moltke's war plans, though ultimately vague, called for inflicting defeats on the attacking powers that would force the aggressors to seek a compromise peace.[59] This represented a shift to a more flexible approach from Moltke's 1871 assertion as to the necessity of seeking the highest aim.

Writing immediately after the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War, Moltke identifies the prospect of war with France and Russia as the greatest threat to the new Reich.[60] Russia's vast size, extensive population, and hostile climate made the prospect of entirely defeating that state beyond Germany's means. Moltke directly cited Napoleon's failed campaign of 1812 as to why a general offensive into Russia would be ill advised. In view of the deployment plans of his successors, the following passage from the memorandum is significant. "It must not be hoped to free ourselves in a short time from one opponent through a rapid and successful offensive against the weaker. We have just experienced how difficult it is to end even the most victorious war with France."[61] Moltke's war games, staff rides, and deployment plans were based on limited offensives and mobile defensive operations that sought to inflict battles of annihilation on the enemy, but these were viewed as methods of achieving an advantageous position for a negotiated peace rather than a recipe for total victory.

The shift of Moltke's views from his insistence of seeking total victory during the wars of unification was substantial. His later concept acquits itself well against the historical record. In the lessons learned from the Franco-Prussian War, Moltke appears to have moved toward acknowledging the strategic difficulty of compelling peace. He still resisted addressing the

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[58]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare,* 52.

[59]Moltke, *Ausgewählte Werke*, 4-20.

[60]Ibid*,* 75.

[61]Ibid, 79.

central political-strategic question as to how one might force an opponent to concede a specific object, but Moltke ultimately implicitly rejected the pursuit of the "highest aim" Rather, Moltke's later concept of war and his own relation to the political appears to be that he would win victories and then the chancellor would make what peace he could with them. Crucially, in this conception, the total overthrow of the enemy, while a possibility if circumstances permitted, was not taken as an invariable objective. Moltke had developed a deep skepticism towards the prospect of achieving victory through a single decisive battle in modern war. It became apparent that, as Gross writes, "As long as the warring parties still had the resources to field new armies, battles that in the past would have produced decisions were reduced to ordinary battle victories without necessarily having any strategic impact."[62] Thus, Moltke envisioned limited wars with limited victories as the preferred approach to the two-front war problem. He admitted a role of politics in concluding the war but did not directly integrate that process into his concept of operations or warplanning.

The flaw in Moltke's conception of politics was that it was based on his particular experiences in the wars of unification and the relationship between Wilhelm, Bismarck, and himself. What was not apparent to Moltke was how heavily the institutional relationship between the Chancellor, CGS, and Emperor was based on the personal relations of these men.[63] With the death of Wilhelm I in 1888, Moltke's own retirement in the same year, and the dismissal of Bismarck in 1890, the appearance of new personalities in these positions fundamentally altered the relationship between them. Succeeding Chancellors never possessed the prestige and influence with the monarch that Bismarck had. As such, while Moltke's own experience suggested that the army could rely on the Chancellor to derive political gains from military

[62]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 48.

[63]Newland, *Victories Are Not Enough,* 28; Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 55.

victories, superimposing a strategic framework on the operational successes, the replacement of the individuals who had enabled this dynamic led to the disintegration of this functional relationship. Bismarck's favor with Wilhelm had acted as a limited substitute for civilian control over the army. Moltke's efforts to undermine Bismarck during the wars of unification portended the successful sidelining of succeeding Chancellors by succeeding chiefs.

Crucially, not only did Moltke fail to broadly disseminate his skepticism regarding the possibility of recreating the "decisive" victories of Sedan and Königgrätz but the official histories produced during his tenure were shaped so as to cast the best light possible on the army's moment of triumph. The intervention of Bismarck to prevent the alienation of the Austrians and the supreme difficulty experienced in ending the war with France were minimized. As Freuding phrases it, "...these shortfalls were cemented after the war when the Kriegsakademie was directly subordinated to the General Staff: Thereby the General Staff became its own educator and interpreter."[64] While the General Staff and the officer corps more generally contained far more diversity of thought than is often stereotyped, the influence of Moltke and his minimization of the political and organizational factors that achieved German unification shaped the views that were to succeed him. The production of these lionizing accounts suggests that Moltke subordinated his own concerns about the viability of the traditional German way of war to the cause of maintaining the army's traditional prestige and independence.[65]

The concept that Moltke the Elder created of the Prusso-German military as an apolitical entity can therefore best be understood as a theoretical justification to preserve the independence

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[64]Freuding, "Organising for War," 441.

[65]Helmuth Moltke, *Geschichte Des Deutsch-Französischen Kriegs von 1870-71*, Schriften Des General-Feldmarschalls Grafen Helmuth von Moltke. Volksausgabe. 3. Bd. (Berlin: E. S. Mittler und sohn, 1895), https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000646722, 66-67.

of the military from civilian control. This concept necessitated the unspoken practical rejection of Clausewitz's most famous axiom, that war was "a continuation of politics with other means." If war was a political act, the organ that carried it out was necessarily a political entity. This fact was ignored by Moltke, who instead drew a sharp division between war, in which the army was the sole authority, and peace, in which the army was silent. This measure succeeded in placing the German military entirely outside of civilian control. Bismarck had only had influence through favor with the King, and succeeding Chancellors never had his level of influence, particularly not with Emperor Wilhelm II. This coup for the military that Moltke achieved came at the cost, however, of removing strategy in the Clausewitzian sense (the use of battles to achieve a political objective) from the lexicon of the German Army. Wilhelm II was predisposed in favor of the army, and was not inclined to impose political considerations on the army.[66]

Crucially however, Moltke's later conception of war represented a significantly less parochial view of civil-military relations in the context of war but was not propagated through the curriculum of the *Kriegsakademie* in the same manner that the great battles enshrined in the official histories were. Moltke's grim assessment of Germany's prospects of winning a war outright had permitted him to examine the prospect of drawing the policy apparatus into the process by employing the device of a negotiated solution at an advantageous point.[67] While this is a rudimentary integration of policy, in that it crucially does not involve the input of the actual policy apparatus in the development of strategy, it nevertheless provided a far greater degree of flexibility to the German Empire than the plans of Moltke's successors. Moltke's comparative moderation may have been a consequence of his actual experience fighting wars to their

[66]Newland, *Victories Are Not Enough*, 40.

[67]Helmuth Moltke, *Geschichte Des Deutsch-Französischen Kriegs von 1870-71*, 1.

conclusion, which necessitated political coordination. Ultimately, Moltke's legacy consisted of both introducing Clausewitz and negating his central thesis by asserting the necessity for operations to be conducted without regard for policy.

Count Alfred von Schlieffen (CGS 1891-1906)

Robert Citino does not exaggerate when he declares Schlieffen "one of the most controversial figures in all of military history.[68] Alternatively a genius who devised a clear plan for Germany to win the First World War and avert years of slaughter or the man who was responsible for Germany's entry and ultimate defeat, a more nuanced but nevertheless debated position has come to the fore of recent historiography.[69] Gerhard Gross and Annika Mombauer portray Schlieffen as far more flexible in his planning than he has been stereotyped, willing to consider the strategic defensive if placed in the "unlikely" situation of facing war against Britain, France, and Russia.[70] Nevertheless his operational planning was characterized by a neglect of logistics, a neglect of how a war was to be concluded, and a tendency to appeal to the moral superiority of the German soldier to overcome inferiority in numbers and firepower.[71]

This view is in sharp contrast to both the "Schlieffen school," consisting of officers who were personally acquainted with Schlieffen such as Wilhelm Groener, and the heavily critical view espoused by Gerhard Ritter, which portrayed Schlieffen as a single-minded technocrat. The

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[68] Citino, *The German Way of War,* 196.

[69]For the latter position see Gerhard Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth* (London, W.i.: Oswald Wolff, 1958).

[70]Gross, "There Was a Schlieffen Plan," 98.

[71]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 92; Annika Mombauer and David T. Zabecki, "The Moltke Plan:," in *The Schlieffen Plan*, ed. Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, and Gerhard P. Gross, International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 46.

Schlieffen school, popular in the 1920s and through the Second World War, insisted that Schlieffen had provided a surefire recipe for victory in his 1905 memorandum that he had left to his successor. This group (primarily consisting of officers) insisted that were it not for a few bunglers, particularly Schlieffen's successor, the Younger Moltke, the plan would have worked. The logistical plausibility of the plan was notably questioned by Martin van Creveld, who argues that Schlieffen's successor, the Younger Moltke, substantially improved the logistical aspects of the plan.[72]

A further symptom of the dysfunction between the General Staff and the state is Schlieffen's extensive and continual use of nonexistent forces in both war games and war plans. The first General Staff ride of 1904 utilized significant numbers of fictional reserve forces, such that the second staff ride of the year was undertaken with fewer of these fictional forces following complaints from its participants.[73] Schlieffen's 1905 memorandum likewise included non-existent formations as part of its decisive right wing. This tendency is itself indicative of the manner in which the General Staff became, in limited but significant ways, detached from reality. To acknowledge the reality would be to accept that there was no operational solution to the strategic dilemma, and inform the political authority, including the Emperor, that given the strength of the army and the configuration of alliances, the army could not provide victory if war broke out. The unwillingness of the German Army to present a grim assessment of its own capabilities meant it provided false confidence to the civilian government that its policy had placed the state in a less precarious position than it had.

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[72]M. van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*, Schieffelin Collection (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 138.

[73]Gross and Zabecki, "There Was a Schlieffen Plan," 106.

Despite the broad authority of the Chief of the General Staff, Schlieffen did not have the power to increase the size of the army to that which the 1905 plan called for. That power lay with the War Ministry and the Reichstag, which had no institutional link to General Staff except through the Kaiser.[74] The flighty Wilhelm II lacked the ability and inclination to coordinate the two bodies.[75] As a result the two competed jealously for authority, with Schlieffen refusing to share his operational plans on the grounds of secrecy. In this manner, the Chief of the General Staff was able to take political decisions on his own, without interaction with political authority and develop plans that would only be known to the rest of the government when it became time to implement them and it was too late to make any other political decision than that which the Chief of the General Staff had prepared for.[76] However, the General Staff equally was left without access to the political tools to adequately prepare for the execution of its plans.[77] Schlieffen himself never appealed to the war minister, much less the Reichstag, for the troop increases his plans would have required.[78]

The aspect of most significance to German strategy is Schlieffen's concept of how operations were to lead to the political objective. Schlieffen's thought, while flexible in the means, focused entirely on the pursuit of what he believed to be a decisive battle. However, as Clauswitz writes:"War does not consist of a single short blow. If war consisted of one decisive act, or of a set of simultaneous decisions, preparations would tend toward totality, for no

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[74]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 78.

[75]Freuding, "Organising for War: Strategic Culture and the Organisation of High Command in Britain and Germany, 1850–1945: A Comparative Perspective," 442-443.

[76]Mombauer and Zabecki, "The Moltke Plan," 44.

[77]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare,* 55.

[78]Gross and Zabecki, "There Was a Schlieffen Plan, 117"; Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare,* 74-75.

omission could ever be rectified."[79] The strategic assumption that underwrote Schlieffen's solution to the problem of a two-front war was the pursuit of total victory on both fronts based on an initial battle of annihilation that would decide the war in what amounted to a single blow. Schlieffen's emphasis on the initial blow of a war to the exclusion of more depthful planning was thus, anti-Clausewitzian.[80]

The extensive use and quotation of Clausewitz by the German army during its spirited doctrinal debates during Schlieffen's tenure are well documented.[81] Thus his theories warrant comparison to Schlieffen's methods. It is apparent that while Clausewitz and his concepts had proliferated in the discourse of the German army, the depth of the discussion of his concepts had degenerated. Clausewitz's extensive, dense, and heavily theoretical work was reduced to a handful of quotations to be deployed in support of one's own positions. Even as Clausewitz was exalted, succeeding German thinkers nevertheless insisted that war possessed a logic of its own in which civilian and political forces had no influence, thereby directly contradicting Clausewitz's assertion of policy driving military action. There was a major lack of discussion and debate regarding theoretical and strategic issues. While Clausewitz was used, he was not imitated or seriously engaged with. As Herbert Rosinski writes, "We [the German army] did not want any theory, only practice, and we overlooked completely that the practical man too follows theory, even when he himself is not conscious of that fact… The work *On War* itself had before the World War ceased to exercise any direct influence."[82] The decline described by Rosinski is

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[79]Clausewitz, *On War*, 79,

[80] For an explicit contradiction to Clausewitz, see Field-Marshal Alfred Graf von Schlieffen, *Cannae [Illustrated Edition]* (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2014), 3.

[81]See Antulio J. Echevarria II, "Borrowing from the Master: Uses of Clausewitz in German Military Literature before the Great War," *War in History* 3, no. 3 (1996): 274–92.

[82]Herbert Rosinski, "Scharnhorst to Schlieffen: The Rise and Decline of German Military Thought" 29, no. 3 (1976): 83–103, 101.

not a decline in practical military thinking in terms of tactics, maneuvers, and logistics but of a lack of continuity between Clausewitz and later thinkers leading to a general abandonment of attempts to further develop a comprehensive theory of war. Rosinski argues that while *On War* was sanctified in German intellectual tradition, only particular elements relating to the attack and annihilation were internalized and widely disseminated. As a result, the form of Clausewitz's work that was ingrained in the institutional culture of the German military was not Clausewitz as he was and as he wrote, but Clausewitz as Moltke (and later Schlieffen) desired him to be.[83] Clausewitz's work was lauded but infrequently read with German military thought failing to engage directly with his concepts. The extent of this is illustrated by Colmar von der Goltz who, in 1883, published his work *Das Volk im Waffen*, (The Nation in Arms) which began with the following, "Everything of any importance to be said about the nature of war can be found stereotyped in the works left behind by that greatest of military thinkers."[84] von der Goltz illustrates the manner in which lip service was paid to Clausewitz while the army focused on the conduct of war to the exclusion of its Clausewitizian elements. The German theory of war became theories of tactics and operations, with concepts that had defined Clausewitz's thinking, such as war as a tool to achieve political ends, left behind.

There remains debate regarding whether Schlieffen at all engaged with the political dimension of his office, with Gerhard Ritter evaluating him as an apolitical technocrat. Others including Mombauer reinforce this view. Gerhard Gross, on the other hand, presents a more favorable view of Schlieffen, using evidence from his war plans, and particularly from the

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[83]See Howard, "The Influence of Clausewitz," in *On War* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 27–44; Rudolf Stadelmann, *Moltke Und Der Staat* (Scherpe-Verlag, 1950).

[84]Colmar von der Goltz, Ashworth, Philip Arthur,, *The Nation in Arms: A Treatise on Modern Military Systems and the Conduct of War.* (London: H. Rees, 1913), 1.

concluding remarks on the staff rides and war games.[85] Robert Foley further demonstrates that Schlieffen modified his operational concepts as a result of the efforts of the German government to effect a rapprochement with the Russian government following Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War.[86] However, while it may be granted that Schlieffen was not so ignorant of politics as to disregard which states were likely enemies of Germany, his concept of war nevertheless emphasized annihilation to the exclusion of alternatives that may be demanded by the strategic-political situation. In contrast, the Elder Moltke wrote, "It greatly depends on the political situation whether it is right at the risk of heavy losses during a war to plan the battles in such a way that they aim for annihilation, or to choose the safe path and achieve the goal through a series of less decisive successes."[87] As such, Schlieffen's more intense focus on annihilation removed potential moderation based on political circumstances. Specifically, Moltke viewed such moderation desirable in circumstances in which there was a threat of people's war, which could bog Germany down in a war of attrition.

In summation, during Schlieffen's tenure Moltke's 1871 assertion as to the necessary pursuit of the highest aim due to the uncertainty created by the vacillations of policymakers was accepted. Civil-military relations had not seriously altered since Moltke's tenure, but they no longer possessed the personal dynamic between CGS, chancellor, and monarch that had allowed Bismarck, Moltke, and Wilhelm I to achieve German unification.[88] The fact that this period

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[85]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare,* 82.

[86] Robert T. Foley and David T. Zabecki, "The Schlieffen Plan—A War Plan," in *The Schlieffen Plan*, ed. Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, and Gerhard P. Gross, International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 67–84, 76.

[87]Helmuth von Moltke*, Kriegslehren: Die Operativen Vorbereitungen Zur Schlacht,* vol. 4, *Moltkes Militärische Werke* (Berlin: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1911). vol. 4, part 3, 214.

[88]Freuding, "Organising for War," 441.

passed without major war allowed for this deficiency to go unnoticed. Moltke's minimization of the importance of this interaction in the army's official histories further contributed to its obscurity. As such, German officers thought increasingly in operational and tactical terms exclusively. The questions regarding the nature of war and politics and of the army, the state, and the people that had engaged Clausewitz were considered settled matters by the army's consensus.[89] Their task was the technical one of waging war successfully.

Despite the praise heaped on Clausewitz by German officers including Schlieffen, the prevailing conception of the relation between war and politics was antithetical to Clausewitz. The most significant deviation from Clausewitz's thinking is the absence of the discussion of political objectives. Clausewitz succinctly defines what he sees as interaction between tactical victory and strategy. "The original means of strategy is victory-that is, tactical success; its ends, in the final analysis, are those objects which will lead directly to peace."[90] Thus, in the view of Clausewitz, the annihilation concept only sought the means of strategy (tactical success) but did not consider how to use the means to achieve the ends (peace). The intellectual ancestry of this break with Clausewitz is the view of Moltke that political concerns (such as creating the conditions necessary for peace) were matters of policy that could be modified by politicians and were thus beyond the pale of military planning.

While after the wars of unification Moltke shifted away from the dogmatic pursuit of total victory this tendency intensified under Schlieffen. Schlieffen's approach to avoiding the problems of people's war and the attritional struggle it would bring was to win quickly and on a grand scale. However, this choice was of profound strategic-political importance as it necessitated an enormous initial effort on the part of the German Army. Schlieffen proved

[89]Rosinski, "Scharnhorst to Schlieffen: The Rise and Decline of German Military Thought," 13-14.

[90]Clausewitz, *On War*, 143.

unwilling to lobby for the political changes and alterations in the German strategic disposition needed to prepare for such a massive blow. The non-existent formations he believed were necessary to achieve victory remained non-existent and Germany continued to lack the forces involved in his war plans. The result was a concept of war without policy, seeking the greatest victory possible regardless of the political objectives and purely with the operational means that were available to the General Staff, underwritten by the dubious assumption that the superior moral qualities of the German soldier would overcome any difficulty.[91]

The Younger Moltke (CGS 1906-1914)

While the Younger Moltke was quickly maligned after 1914 as the man who lost the war, his modifications to the Schlieffen Plan are not necessarily indicative of a difference in principle from Schlieffen. Schlieffen's 1905 memorandum involved a one-front war against France, based on the weakness of the Russians and assuming that the French would retain a defensive posture as a result.[92] However, following the Russo-Japanese War, just as the French recovered from the defeat of 1870 quicker than the General Staff had anticipated, the Russian Empire rearmed at a concerning rate. Russia began to industrialize in earnest and invest commensurate amounts in its military. The Reichstag, having not been informed otherwise by the General Staff, did not attempt to increase German capabilities to maintain the balance of power. Limited resources had been diverted to the failed Tirpitz Plan. The balance of land power swung further against the Germans.[93]

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[91]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare,* 87-88. See Clausewitz, *On War,* 184-187.

[92]"Volltext Alfred Graf von Schlieffen, Denkschrift Krieg Gegen Frankreich [Schlieffen-Plan], Dezember 1905 / Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (BSB, München)."

[93]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 93; Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen, and Prussian War Planning*, 266.

As a consequence, Schlieffen's successor was immediately confronted with a markedly different situation than the one in which the 1905 memorandum had been produced. Moltke nevertheless retained Schlieffen's basic concepts as a basis for victory, sharing the conviction that skilled mobilization and use of railroads to facilitate rapid advances and achieve a mass battle of encirclement would decide the war.[94] As discussed, Schlieffen's operational concepts were of far greater breadth and demonstrated a greater degree of flexibility than has been stereotyped. As such, his 1905 memorandum was not representative of the totality of his thought, and the plans devised for war solely against France that aimed to reduce the risk assumed were not due to the character of the Younger Moltke, but a change in the strategic situation in which an impotent Russia temporarily removed the need to assume the risks of Schlieffen's memorandum. Moltke's critics attacked his decision to defend Germany's eastern border and strengthen German forces in Alsace-Lorraine-however, Schlieffen's memorandum was for war against France alone and assumed Russian neutrality and a defensive orientation on the part of the French.[95] Thus it is important to consider that Germany's adversaries were not idle in the years between the production of Schlieffen's memorandum and the outbreak of war and that the assumptions on which Schlieffen had based his memorandum had been altered. The Younger Moltke thus acted to make modifications to Schlieffen's concept in view of the increased likelihood of French and Russian offensives, while maintaining the same principles of war as Schlieffen.

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[94]Mombauer and Zabecki, "The Moltke Plan," in *The Schlieffen Plan*, 43–66.

[95]David T. Zabecki, "Appendix: Deployment Plans," in *The Schlieffen Plan*, ed. Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, and Gerhard P. Gross, International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 339–526, 416.

Moltke wrote, “If the political situation of Europe does not change, we will, owing to Germany’s central position, always be forced to fight on several fronts, and therefore will have to be on the defensive on one side with weaker troops in order to be on the offensive on the other. That side can only ever be France. Here, a speedy decision can be hoped for, while an offensive war into Russia would be without a foreseeable end.”[96] This illustrates clearly the problematic assumptions that beleaguered German strategic planning. Moltke is explicit in the expectation that inflicting a defeat on the French would be decisive, despite the substantial evidence to the contrary in the German Army’s recent experience, in which even following total political collapse French armies continued to engage them for a year before a peace was signed. The assessment of the difficulty in forcing the Russians to come to terms demonstrates the sharp limits of strategic thinking in the General Staff. The question as to what it would take in order to compel the Russians to conclude a separate peace is fundamentally a political one. As such, the younger Moltke and the General Staff are shown to be unwilling to engage deeply with it. The competencies that could make an informed assessment as to what degree of military success would be needed to force Russia out of the war were outside the bounds of the General Staff and as such were simply not included in the planning process. It is from this that we see the simplistic determination that Russia is understood to be unable to be knocked out of the war quickly whereas France is assumed to be willing to come to terms after a defeat. This is based purely on the greater strategic depth of Russia, and the operational difficulty in annihilating an army that can retreat into the interior. Yet, a careful examination of the political circumstances of Germany’s rivals could have easily led planners to the opposite conclusion. The Russian state, to say nothing of the army, had its fragility exposed sharply a mere nine years earlier in the

[96] Mombauer and Zabecki, “The Moltke Plan:,” in *The Schlieffen Plan*, 43–66, 48.

Revolution of 1905, spurred by Japanese victories in the Far East.[97] In light of this, the ultimate fate of Russia in the war should not have been unexpected in 1914.[98] Indeed, military defeat once again presaging revolution was feared by the Russians when considering the consequences of a European war. Thus, the idea that defeating the Russians required marching on Moscow should not have been taken as fact *a priori*.

Moltke did enact increased coordination with other institutions from the absolute nadir of coordination under Schlieffen, campaigning for a troop increase and deigning to share his war plan with the Chancellor.[99] Nevertheless, Moltke was unwilling to admit the extent to which the plan for war with France was a desperate gamble and the faults that wargaming the plan had exposed, even with the inclusion of fictional formations, as demonstrated in the Staff Ride of 1905.[100] Like his predecessor, Moltke refused to cross the self-imposed delineation between warmaking and policy to explain the need for Germany's strategic reorientation. Instead, he continually lobbied for early, preemptive war, stating that the odds became longer the longer war was avoided. However, this presentation obscured how long the odds already were. To admit the dire strategic situation would impinge upon the honor of the German army and so was unthinkable. While the blame must ultimately fall on Moltke for failing to coordinate strategically with the civilian state, it is crucial that this be understood not as a personal flaw but

[97]Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen, and Prussian War Planning*, 257.

[98]See Moltke's view of Russian weakness in the Russo-Japanese War, von Moltke and von Moltke, *Erinnerungen, Briefe, Dokumente, 1877-1916: Ein Bild Vom Kriegsausbruch, Erster Kriegsführung Und Persönlichkeit Des Ersten Militärischen Führers Des Krieges*, 322.

[99]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 132.

[100]See Bundesarchiv, BArch PH 3/646, "Schlußbesprechung zum Kriegsspiel vom Nov./Dez. 1905."

rather a failure to alter a systemic problem that was embedded in both the structure of the German empire and the social and strategic culture of the German army.[101]

Following Moltke's abandonment of *Aufmarsch* East in 1913, the General Staff was left with only the capacity for a strike directed against France in the event of a crisis. This is explicitly stated in the Mobilization Schedule 1914-1915, "Germany's preparations for war are first and foremost directed against France."[102] The choice to strike East or West was of a fundamentally political nature, yet by preparing only for a strike against France, Moltke usurped the power to determine the target of Germany's offensive ostensibly on military grounds. While the CGS could appropriately advise the Chancellor regarding anticipated difficulties in the course of one action or another, the judgment as to the most effective means of attaining German objectives was a decision beyond the capacity of the army. Moltke here subordinates strategic concerns for operational ones, deeming it more advantageous to act first against France. He may well be correct, but the balance between operational and strategic concerns must be weighed by the political authority and enacted as a policy which the army then carries out. As Clausewitz wrote, "When people talk, as they often do, about harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not really saying what they mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself, not with its influence."[103] Instead, Moltke appeals directly to the supposed "harmful political influence" that Clausewitz discounts in order to justify "From this date onward, [1913] Germany only had a single strategic plan which, regardless of the casus belli, had to be implemented in

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[101]Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 97-98. See also Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen, and Prussian War Planning*, 214.

[102]*The Schlieffen Plan,* "Appendix," 517.

[103] Clausewitz, *On War*, 608.

case of war, as was indeed to happen in 1914."[104] The Younger Moltke had further intensified the General Staff's tendency to utilize its war planning authority to undertake political decisions de facto, such as constraining Germany to an initial offensive against France, regardless of the intentions of the Chancellor or even the Kaiser.

Moltke further did not seek to develop a conception for how the planned war was to be ended. Schlieffen's memorandum actually gave more consideration to the topic than previous deployment plans in that the "super Leuthen" which sought to encircle the French forces on the frontier between Belgium and Switzerland was to take place after the victory over the enemy's main body, which was to happen in the first days of the war.[105] Yet the fundamental question of how to "compel our enemy to do our will," as Clausewitz defined war, remained unaddressed. The classical formula of inflicting a defeat on the enemy's main body had become bankrupt in strategic terms by 1914. With the proliferation of popular war and Germany's lack of a powerful chancellor, the coercive value of a single victory had diminished and could not be exploited. Without a chancellor that could make a conciliatory peace after a victory, the popularization of war meant that a state defeated in battle would simply raise more armies in a far more efficacious way than the French had done in 1870-71. This would de facto result in a war of attrition and necessitate the occupation of the entire country, two prospects that the annihilation method was aimed to avoid. Thus, the strategic bankruptcy of the annihilation approach was based in its inability to credibly coerce a power to make peace in a short time without additional political means. However, the army lacked other options within its authority and so carried on with its plan as the odds mounted. For example, the Aufmarsch of 1913-1914 anticipates the hostility of

[104] Mombauer and Zabecki, "The Moltke Plan," 51.

[105] Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare,* 84.

England in a conflict with France and Russia whereas in 1910, the Aufmarsch anticipates only that England "might" join such a war.[106] [107]

While the Younger Moltke maintained Schlieffen's precepts of operations, he expressed doubts about their ability to produce a truly decisive victory. "It will be a people's war, that can't be ended with one decisive battle, instead it will be a long and tedious struggle with a nation that will not give up until its national strength has been broken, and our own people will too be exhausted in victory."[108] His thinking, particularly his reservations regarding Schlieffen's operational plans, resembled that of his uncle, Moltke the Elder, in important ways. Both feared the prospect of a people's war and the attritional warfare that could destroy Germany. However, the Elder Moltke proposed limited war based on defensive operations in order to achieve this, whereas the Younger clung to Schlieffen's concept with growing trepidation. As the course of the First World War demonstrated, firepower and nationalism made the prospect of swift and total victory a fantasy. Moltke hedged the German war plans against the prospect of a longer war and demonstrated an anxiety that, while counterproductive, recognized the genuine disaster Germany faced in the event of war. The Younger Moltke's ultimate failing was in taking a stance of hesitance towards the operational plans he produced. He lacked confidence in the prospects of the plan proposed by Schlieffen in his 1905 memorandum even with his own modifications but chose neither to devise an entirely new plan he could execute with confidence or, if this was impossible given the strategic situation, to inform civilian leadership of this fact so that German policy may be reoriented in light of the dim prospects in the event of war.

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[106]Zabecki, "Appendix: Deployment Plans," 517.

[107]Ibid, 471.

[108]Moltke and Moltke, *Erinnerungen, Briefe, Dokumente, 1877-1916: Ein Bild Vom Kriegsausbruch, Erster Kriegsführung Und Persönlichkeit Des Ersten Militärischen Führers Des Krieges*, 308.

Conclusion

What Moltke and his successors refused to acknowledge was the uncomfortable truth that in the effort to wage war "apolitically" the German military acted as a political organization of its own. Moltke's concept of avoiding political concerns by seeking total victory was itself an intensely political act. The means by which a war is waged is necessarily a political question, both in the Clausewitzian sense, as well as in that certain means are incongruous with certain political ends. In the case of the Franco-Prussian War, Moltke's decision to besiege Paris had profound political consequences. Thus, the idea that the army was apolitical and therefore a parallel authority to the civilian government served the function of usurping the political power of the civilian government to determine the manner in which a war was waged, which included the nature of the peace sought. The chancellor, as head of the cabinet, and the chief of the General Staff, as head of the army, were parallel servants of the Prussian king (and later German Emperor), serving at his pleasure. This arrangement was as much an artifact of Prussia's history and constitution as much as the Elder Moltke's own desire for institutional independence.[109] As a result, the ultimate decision as to whether to privilege the advice of the civilian government over the desires of the military lay with the monarch. Thus, rather than being apolitical, the German military was a secondary political authority that went so far as to make claims to supremacy in times of war. Bismarck's successes, which were strongly based in his ability to enforce his will on the often recalcitrant Elder Moltke, were thus entirely dependent on Wilhelm I's willingness to lend him authority. The army, when not forced into cooperation by the monarch, pursued a policy of near absolute autonomy justified on its status as an "apolitical" organization.

[109] Citino, *The German Way of War*, 310.

Ultimately, despite the spread of Clausewitz's quotes and aphorisms throughout the General Staff and officer corps, the German Army remained fundamentally in opposition to his central thesis. War was not considered a continuation of policy, but a fief to which only the professionals of the army had a legitimate claim. This was an anti-Clausewitzian view and one that blinkered the strategic functioning of the General Staff, depriving it of the theoretical framework to formally coordinate with the political bodies of the war ministry and chancellor that possessed capabilities of vital importance for planning war on the strategic-political level. The German army was not unique in its desire for independence, but the prestige and privilege afforded to it as the tool of unification allowed it to insulate itself from a constitutionally weak civilian government.

The chiefs of the General Staff further proved ultimately unwilling to address the failings of German civil-military relations brought about by this institutional arrangement. Why this was the case is difficult to answer definitively. One answer may be that doing so would have undermined the status of the army as well as the chief himself, a position that, while powerful, was nevertheless fragile, as the ousting of CGS Waldersee, the Younger Moltke, and eventually Erich von Falkenhayn demonstrated. As such, there was professional risk in crossing the boundary between the army and the state, particularly to present a grim assessment, as would have been necessary by the tenure of Schlieffen. Another factor is that the pride and prestige of the army prevented the CGS from coordinating with the chancellor and war minister in order to develop a cohesive German strategy. This was itself justified through the theoretical division of the practice of war and politics. In contradiction to Clausewitz, the Elder Moltke insisted that war could be waged without regard for its political objective, that there was a logic of its own that was the domain of the army. This proved highly consequential as succeeding German

officers took this seriously. Civilians, not privy to this expertise, were in this framework logically of little utility to confronting military problems. Thus, the strategic danger of a two front war was to be confronted through the competencies within the General Staff, not through the coordination needed to operate on the strategic level, thus prioritizing the integrity of the army's prestige.

Samuel Huntington's concept of a "profession" is an accurate description as to the manner in which the German Army regarded itself and supports this explanation.[110] Huntington argues that the professionalization of war creates resentment towards encroachment from organizations outside that profession who lack the expertise and socialization that defines membership in the profession. In this view, even the political chief has no business telling professionals how to do their jobs. In the German case, the German constitution fostered this through the parallel disposition of the army and the Chancellor. Thus, the profession of officership was made parallel to that of political leadership, with the political leadership being permitted only to direct when the army was to act, and in no way impact the manner in which it conducted operations unless the army was overruled by the army. Huntington portrays this parallelism as beneficial to the development of professionalism in the German army, and that may well be the case, however the independence of the army contributed to its unwillingness to participate in meaningful strategic consultations with the civilian government.[111] The army possessed the independence and prestige of a profession and sought to maintain those qualities by the exclusion of those not within the officer class. This poses a clear problem in that the armed forces are to act in the national interest *as defined by political leadership*. Instead, the German army appealed to its constitutionally enshrined professionalism to argue that its actions

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[110] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations,* 19. print (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2002).

[111] Huntington, *The Soldier and the State,* 36.

during war should be unrelated to the intentions of the civilian leadership, weaponizing professionalism as Huntington describes to increase its own autonomy.

Ultimately, the divergence between the thinking of the successive Chiefs of the General Staff is essential to understanding the role of institutional factors in limiting the strategic thinking of the German army. As talented and highly intelligent people, the lack of institutional coordination between the civilian government and the army was a source of serious concern, with each chief developing various perspectives on means of resolving or circumventing the consequences of this for the planning of war. Under the Elder Moltke, this initially consisted of the construction of a firm line between civil primacy in peacetime and military primacy in wartime. The army was to pursue maximalist aims, ensuring that the enemy was in no position to do anything but acquiesce to whatever the civil authority decided it desired from the war. However, through Moltke's experiences in the wars of German unification, he became convinced that the ability to render an enemy incapable of resisting was an unrealistic prerequisite for a successful campaign. While Moltke did not formally break from his original assertion, the acknowledgement of the necessity of advising political leaders to seek a peace is a departure from the pursuit of total victory. Schlieffen and Moltke the Younger sought to utilize maneuver to inflict a defeat that was decisive, adhering to the concept that victory by battles of annihilation (or decision) was the only method to resolve Germany's strategic inferiority in the face of a Franco-Russian alliance.

Both Schlieffen and the Younger Moltke were cognizant of standing in the shadow of their predecessors and were necessarily constrained by both the institutions and prevalence of adherents to the schools of the previous chief. While both Schlieffen and the Younger Moltke sought to overcome adherents to their predecessors and promote their own methods of war,

Moltke had comparative freedom to develop his own theories without constraint. The General Staff was of course not monolithic, with debate continually challenging his assertions, but not seriously threatening the orthodoxy. The distinctions between the chiefs of the General Staff illustrate the manner in which the institution failed to live up to its monolithic reputation. Schlieffen represented a sharp break from the Elder Moltke's philosophy that no war plan could extend beyond the first major engagement with the enemy, as Schlieffen sought to utilize improved technical means of communication to enable a methodically planned campaign. While the varied temporal extent of planning may appear superficial, it is demonstrative of a fundamental difference in approach and philosophy aimed at ending a war, and thus had strategic-political implications. Moltke's limited scope of initial planning was based on a more flexible view of the political outcome of the war. Beyond initial contact with the enemy, either the political goals would be achieved or further operations in the new situation would be necessary but what the political objectives or what the operational situation might be could not be anticipated.

Crucially both the latter CGS categorically failed to present accurate assessments as to the viability of their prospective campaigns. The concept that war was preferred as early as possible was used to disguise the fact that even immediate preventative war did not have strong prospects. Both the Schlieffen Plan and the Moltke Plan were understood as risky endeavors by their architects, but were viewed nevertheless as the best option. The risking of national survival on an operation with limited prospects of success was based on two assumptions: that a strategy of nothing less than total victory could be pursued and that the diplomatic situation was intractable. These assumptions were less based in careful analysis than in a refusal to entertain alternative courses outside the strictly military sphere. The Chiefs of the General Staff, including

the Elder Moltke, neglected developing a joint strategy with political decision makers. To do so would have invited so-called "political interference" into the development of war plans. The chiefs of the General Staff sought to develop war plans in reaction to the strategic situation produced by political circumstances but in so doing sought operational solutions for strategic problems. They equally failed to supply the political authorities with the sober assessments of the likelihood of disaster should war occur and impress the imperative to alter the balance of power through political means. However, to do so would have been to admit that the genius of the General Staff was insufficient to grant Germany its place in the sun. As a consequence, the formations that took part in so many of Schlieffen's map exercises were only requested by his successor and did not exist when war eventually broke out.[112]

This paper has examined the period of Imperial Germany-however, the same forces that affected German operational planning by limiting strategic thinking continued to operate during the Weimar Era and through the Nazi period. I have chosen to focus on the Imperial period for its role in establishing the "classical" conception of the German way of war given that the continuation of the strategic culture of the German army was explicitly couched in reference to this period. Schlieffen and his 1905 memorandum were elevated by German writers in the interwar to the status of a recipe by Wilhelm Groener and other adherents to the "Schlieffen school" within the army. Further, Hans von Seeckt, the most influential chief of the Weimar period wrote glowingly of Moltke, as the army sought to maintain its distance from a poorly regarded civilian regime.[113] As such, the army's continued resistance to civilian control was firmly anchored in the Imperial period and the Chiefs that had been elevated to deific status.

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[112]Gross and Zabecki, "There Was a Schlieffen Plan," 106.

[113]See Hans von Seeckt , *Moltke, ein vorbild*. (Berlin: Verlag für kulturpolitik, 1931).

A central theme of the German army's experience in the imperial period is the indispensability of theory. The chiefs of the General Staff considered themselves practical men, engaged in a business in which theory played a minor role compared to practice. Rosinski describes the position of one who considers himself above the abstracts of theory. "He takes this theory on without examination, without real understanding, schematically."[114] Thus, the consequences of the army's aversion to strategic-political theory meant that the approach utilized was one that was a product of limited critical examination and self-reflection. The army outwardly accepted the conclusions of Clausewitz, but was in conduct anti-Clausewitzian in its relation to policy. By not explicitly rejecting Clausewitz's theories, there was no impetus to create an alternative. Rather, Clausewitz's theories were accepted nominally, but a myth of "apolitical" war was created, which left the army with a schema through which to connect military action with the political goals that were its ultimate object. The myth of apolitical warfighting meant that the plans produced were, except in the broadest sense, unrelated to the political object of a war, seeking total victory axiomatically even when the goals sought did not require it or the means necessary to attain it were counterproductive. The success of Moltke and Bismarck in the wars of unification had obscured the institutional and theoretical deficiencies of the German army which were to be sharply revealed in 1914.

Crucially, each of the succeeding chiefs of the General Staff was aware of the inability of the military to function at the political level of war. This was intensified by a sense of vulnerability as the prospect of a two-front war was realized. Each man sought to devise a way out of the strategic dilemma with the operational means at their disposal. However, the same parochial form of professionalism that motivated the implicit rejection of Clausewitz's description of the nature of war prevented the development of an alternative theory. While aware

[114]Rosinski, *Scharnhorst to Schlieffen*, 101.

that other state bodies possessed strategically relevant functions, the General Staff continued to look inward for a recipe for victory, unwilling to give up its power or prestige. As a result of the constitutional arrangement of the empire providing no means for the civilian state to initiate strategic cooperation, the chancellor and the war minister proved impotent and the Emperor unwilling to alter this arrangement. Ultimately, rather than coordinate to develop a cohesive German strategy, the General Staff chose to accept decreased prospects for German victory in the event of war in order to preserve the independence and prestige of the army. The German Army rejected Clausewitz and did not develop a formal alternative theory, instead appealing to professionalism in an effort to maximize its decision-making authority.

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