

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL-MILITARY RELATIONS ON THE USE OF
GERMAN MILITARY POWER DURING OPERATION BARBAROSSA

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL-MILITARY RELATIONS ON THE USE OF GERMAN MILITARY POWER DURING OPERATION BARBAROSSA, by LCDR Richard Carnicky, USN, 93 pages.

The German General Staff launched Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 assuming the eastern campaign would last only three months. However, within six months after the initiation of hostilities the Red Army blunted the Wehrmacht's attack outside the gates of Moscow, Operation Barbarossa had failed. Although a long standing and professional organization the German General Staff failed to achieve strategic success, despite significant success during the early stages of the campaign. Adolf Hitler's national goal of Russian extermination exceeded the German Army's capabilities. The war lasted nearly four years and resulted in the devastation of western Russia, millions dead and the destruction of Germany. This thesis examines how the divergence between the Wehrmacht's capabilities and Hitler's ideological national objectives affected Operation Barbarossa.

Through examination of the historical role the German General Staff held during military operations, this study addresses the linkage between German political and military relations during war. It begins with an analysis of the Prussian General Staff system under Moltke the elder. It follows the staff's development through the wars of German unification, prelude to World War I and, the interwar period leading up to Hitler's rise to power. It concludes with an analysis of Operation Barbarossa and the German General Staff's efforts to achieve strategic victory on the eastern front. Finally, it concludes with lessons modern military leaders should learn from the General Staff's mistakes.

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ACRONYMS

AOR	Area of Responsibility
COG	Center of Gravity
COCOM	Combatant Commander
CS-INC	Commander in Chief
DIME	Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic
LOO	Lines of Operations
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
OKL	Oberkommando der Luftwaffe
OKM	Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine
OKH/ OBDH	Oberkommando des Heeres
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Bock said that it was clear to him how to force the Red Army to give battle and defeat it but how, asked the field marshal, can the Russians be forced to make peace?¹

Oscar Pinkus, *The War Aims and Strategies of Adolf Hitler*

Field Marshal Von Bock of Army Group Center asked Hitler this question six months prior to Operation Barbarossa. Army Group Center had the responsibility as the main effort in Hitler's war against the Soviet Union. Bock's question illustrates a fundamental divergence between Hitler and his generals concerning their views on war on the eastern front. The nature of war and the military's role in shaping a political outcome is at the heart of Bock's question. Why did Germany's strategic leadership begin an ideological war against the Soviet Union when their military's tactical doctrine predicated short decisive campaigns? At the center of this question lie the differences between the theories of limited and total warfare and the role of the military in achieving national objectives. This thesis focuses on these different theories to answer the following question: How did the divergence between the Wehrmacht's capabilities and Hitler's desire for ideological campaign objectives impact the Army's effect against the Soviet Union at the strategic level?

Several writers, such as David Glantz, Matthew Cooper, and Albert Seaton to name a few, have attempted to analyze the German-Russian war in order to determine the cause of the German defeat. Numerous theories and suppositions on the causes of Barbarossa's operational failure have been suggested. However, there are two factors consistently cited in most analysis of the war. The first identifies Germany's poor

logistical planning and inability to sustain forces over great distances.² The second factor recognizes Hitler's micromanagement of the war effort and his failure to define adequately his strategic objectives.³

Logistically, the German Army could not provide the required supplies, ammunition, and spare parts needed by the panzer forces to achieve their operational encirclements. The Soviet Union consisted of 850,000 miles of road networks, only about 150,000 were suitable roads with an additional 40,000 classified as all weather, hard surfaces.⁴ The poor transportation infrastructure took a heavy toll on the Germans' logistics. After action reports between November 1941 and March 1942 indicate Germans losses in transportation vehicles at 75,000 with only 7,500 replacements.⁵ Maintenance losses and the fact that logistical transportation competed with the motorized infantry division's requirements for mobility meant the German supply train suffered severe shortages in vehicles as the war moved further into the Soviet Union.

Arguably, even if the infrastructure network had been adequate to support Germany's logistical traffic, the nation lacked the strategic resources necessary to sustain a long war. The 1939-1940 campaigns depleted German war stocks and prior to Barbarossa the Germans still relied on foreign shipments of oil, bauxite, tin, copper, lead and zinc to sustain their military.⁶ Germany's resource shortages convinced Hitler the Caucasus region, with its oil and grain producing areas, should be the primary objective during the German 1942 Summer Offensive, Operation Blau.⁷ German consumption of 176 million gallons of motor fuel and 390,000 tons of ammunition in 1941 reduced stocks to such a degree that it affected Germany's follow-on campaigns after 1941.

Although logistics certainly hampered the success of Barbarossa, it can not be solely blamed for its failure.

The German Army fielded a modern force in 1941 that required fuel, ammunition, and spare parts for the maneuver units. Yet the economy needed to produce the war material and the system required to distribute it could not satisfy the logistical requirements of an armored force operating over 700 miles from its supply base. Mobilization of the economy for war required Hitler's approval; therefore the German Army's logistical short falls are just a smaller component of the larger problem. The problem stemmed from Hitler's understanding of the nature of war which differed from that of his military leadership. Logistically the Wehrmacht supported themselves for decisive engagements designed to force a decision quickly not long battles of attrition. Their 1939-1940 campaigns taxed their logistical system but was able to support the Wehrmacht's operational plans. Operation Barbarossa, however, illustrated the deficiencies in the German logistical system with respect to campaigns with increased duration and over greater distances.

The second most popular theory on Barbarossa's failure in 1941 addresses Hitler's increased desire to micromanage the war effort as the campaign lengthened. He curtailed his subordinate commander's freedom of maneuver and independent decision making abilities by directing the movement of specific units on the battlefield. His relief of Field Marshal Brauchitsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, in December 1941 allowed him to assume the vacated position and direct combat forces with reduced military interference. As the war progressed Hitler filled key leadership positions with

individuals who demonstrated great loyalty to him despite their military experience.

General Halder notes in his diary of 7 December 1941:

The occurrences of the day have again been heartbreaking and humiliating. ObdH is now no more than a messenger boy, if that. The Fuehrer, over the head of ObdH, gets in direct touch with the Cs-inC of Army Gps.⁸

Hitler's meddling in Army tactical and operational matters led to the diversion of Army Group Center's thrust from Moscow.

Following the end of World War II in Europe, the prominent military historian B. H. Liddell Hart had the opportunity to interview captured German officers in order to gather their accounts relating to the conflict. During one of those interviews General Blumentritt, Chief of Staff of Kluge's 4th Panzer Army, credited Hitler's micromanagement of the war as the primary reason the German Army failed to take Moscow in 1941.⁹

However, Hitler cannot bear sole blame for Barbarossa's failure because of his management style. Hitler directly interfered with the Army's operations due to a growing dissatisfaction with his generals. This attitude stemmed from numerous disagreements between Adolf Hitler and military leadership as to the direction of the war effort. Hitler rarely interfered with operations on the west front during 1939-1940, but did so almost on a daily basis starting in 1941. This fact lends itself to suggest the political and military leadership views on warfare shifted between the campaigns in the west and Russia.

Traditionally, the German General Staff had attempted to isolate the organization from political vacillations and opinions. The staff believed after the politicians made the decision to mobilize the army for war, the operational maneuver fell to the General Staff to prepare, plan, and conduct. Hitler on the other hand did not follow this traditional

viewpoint and frequently interfered with his generals and their operations. In Liddell Hart's interviews with the German generals after the war, General Blumentritt stated that:

After we had reached Smolensk there was a stand-still for several weeks on the Desna. This was due partly to the need of bringing up supplies and reinforcements, but even more to a fresh conflict of views within the German command about the future course of the campaign. There were endless arguments.¹⁰

The conflict Blumentritt refers to is Hitler's decision, against the advice of his senior commanders, to advance on Moscow late in the year with the threat of winter setting in before the operation could be successfully completed.

The German generals were not prepared for this level of friction between the political and military systems and were not equipped to deal with it effectively. The German Army had to rely on the personalities of its senior commanders Brauchitsch and Halder in order to influence Hitler. However, they allowed him to erode their positional responsibilities over time to the point that they became ineffective.

Brauchitsch's influence over Hitler decreased as the dictator's popularity increased after the successes against Austria and Czechoslovakia. His arguments against Hitler's decisions did little to sway matters. Eventually Hitler would accept Brauchitsch's resignation in 1941 and appointed himself as Commander in Chief of the Heer. Halder's impact on operational matters as the Chief of the German General Staff also had a decreasing trend as Hitler reduced the staff officer to that of an "advisor, helper and executive, but [one that] did not participate in the Commander's responsibility."¹¹ These changes set the conditions allowing Hitler to become increasingly involved in operational military affairs.

Although these theories point to contributing factors in Germany's defeat in 1941, they do not answer several important questions. Primarily, why such a professional military organization overlooked logistics, or why the political leadership supplanted military experience with increased micromanagement and fanaticism? Prior to Barbarossa Hitler and his Generals held the belief that they could win a war against the Soviet Union in a matter of months.¹² However, six months after the campaign began the reality of the operation and the nature of war on the eastern front took its toll on the German Army.¹³ The fulfillment of Hitler's vision for German *lebensraum* (living space) would have to wait.

A third possible conclusion is that the General Staff lacked the necessary skill sets to comprehend and adapt to warfare on the eastern front. It is unlikely that the German military leadership failed to prepare adequately for combat operations in Russia due to its history and efforts in military transformation since World War I. The successful campaigns in 1939-1940 directly resulted from the efforts of the German General Staff to prepare their forces for combat. The staff had pride in military professionalism and possessed a long-standing history of refining German tactical doctrine, increased modernizing and reorganizing the army to suit Germany's threats.

Even after the disastrous consequences of the Great War and the restrictions enforced through the Treaty of Versailles the German military continued to demonstrate a willingness to adapt its organization. The limitations placed on the German Army to cap its end strength at 100,000 men and ten divisions seriously hampered the Reichswehr's ability to publicly develop a military force. Additionally, the treaty disbanded the German General Staff in an attempt to prevent Germany from planning another war in

Europe. This further complicated any German effort to develop its forces and prepare for future military operations.¹⁴ Yet through determination and inventiveness, the staff persevered and maintained their level of commitment to the defense of the German nation.

Through study and analysis under the General Staff's guidance, the German Army began to war game new and revolutionary tactics, such as conducting breakthrough and exploitation attacks using armored and mechanized forces. Due to the treaty's limitations it had to develop the concept using mock tanks fabricated by attaching wooden skirts to the chassis of a truck. Inventiveness and initiative became the bedrock of the German officer corps when preparing for tactical warfare.¹⁵

This focus on maneuvers produced an officer who was tactically unmatched by the European powers of Poland, Czechoslovakia, France, and Great Britain during Germany's opening offensives of World War II. Even the Red Army, which eventually succeeded in breaking the German war machine and regaining the strategic initiative in 1943, could not stem the tide of German forces from reaching the gates of Moscow. It had to rely on the country's unpredictable summer rains and severe winters to halt the German advance. Yet the General Staff's focus on the tactical level of war came at the cost of significant examination of the strategic and operational levels.

Logistics, Hitler's mismanagement of the war, and the General Staff's approach to war did not individually cause the failure of Operation Barbarossa. Collectively, they did have an impact on the Wehrmacht's efforts against the Soviet Union. An undersupplied and poorly reinforced army which Hitler increasingly micromanaged could not adapt to warfare on the eastern front. However, the shortfalls in logistics, national

leadership, and operational doctrine originated from a bigger issue between the German military and political establishments. The issue was the gap between Hitler's desired political objectives and the Wehrmacht's capabilities which stemmed from their differing approaches to waging war.

On the eve of Barbarossa the German Army leadership and Hitler agreed on three objectives. The first objective dictated the Red Army's destruction in western Russia. The second objective sought to deny the Russians the ability to bomb Germany's infrastructure. The third and final objective in 1941 identified the line from Archangel to the Volga River in order to isolate Asiatic Russia for follow-on operations (see figure 2).¹⁶ However, even though the military and political leadership shared the same views on the objectives their views on the nature of warfare differed significantly. Hitler's plan for an ideological war sharply contrasted that of the German General Staff's view on limited military campaigns. Hitler's insistence on objectives designed to destroy the Bolshevik regime and subjugate the population to forced labor contradicted the Wehrmacht's vision. The clash between Hitler's ideals and the German Army's traditional responsibilities led to a fatal contradiction in Germany's war theory.

When Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 the political landscape of Germany changed dramatically and with this change so did the nature of German warfare. Between 1933 and 1939 the German Army underwent a vast transformation of its armed forces. In the span of six years the Army grew to over 1.8 million men under arms and in the reserve.¹⁷ The concepts of armored warfare the General Staff tested began to receive added focus and enabled the Germans to field six panzer divisions during their campaign against Poland. The German Luftwaffe, previously banned from producing military

aircraft, secretly developed its air force before 1935 so that it had 4,303 operational aircraft in 1939.¹⁸

The German military undertook this transformation without examining its strategic significance. Forced to prepare and train for their profession in secret by the Allied powers after World War I, the generals surrendered any dissenting viewpoints to Hitler's desire for rearmament. The German Army did not take an active roll in strategic planning with respect to the application of military force. Instead it only prepared for operational campaigns, in essence leaving the political process to Hitler. This is not to say that the generals did not have their own viewpoints with respect to the political realm, it is just that their views were not factored into Hitler's strategic vision. This gap between Hitler's political agenda and the Wehrmacht's specific capabilities contributed centrally to the failure of Operation Barbarossa in December 1941.

Historians and theorists have attempted to establish the relationship between the political and military branches of a nation. One in particular, a German military historian and critic from 1881-1929, wrote extensively about the relationship between German political and military establishments. Hans Delbrück, a student of history, sought to establish a link between political and military theory by illustrating military means as an extension of the state's political framework. Clausewitz wrote in his book *On War* that "War is therefore an act of policy."¹⁹ The state's political direction essentially drove the development of military strategy which in turn resulted in specific tactics. Therefore the two establishments became interconnected and interdependent upon each other when exercising national power. Changes in one establishment correspondently require changes in the other in order to maintain the balance between the two.²⁰

Delbrück's view can be described as a shaft with political and military strategy on either end. If you rotate the shaft the political and military ends should rotate in synchronization together. If you try rotating the shaft at only one end while holding the other end fixed or rotating each in opposite directions, it will place undue torque on the shaft. Over time and with enough torque the shaft will eventually break under the strain. Delbrück asserted that "state policy conditioned" war and strategic planning, and therefore the latter should be subordinated to the former.²¹ As long as the military establishment followed along with the changes within the political arena, the shaft should not break. Germany's political changes in 1933 required a realignment of the military organization in order to support the changing national objectives.

Delbrück's work is significant not only because of the period in which he wrote his work but also because he establishes the critical linkage between national objectives and military capabilities. Delbrück's assertions were not met with enthusiastic support from the German military establishment. Primarily because he suggested the political and military spheres should interact closely. This close interaction allowed political desires to interfere with military operations and this was something many German military leaders, such as Moltke the elder, did not favor.

If one concedes Delbrück is correct, then it is not unreasonable to propose the relationship between the political and military establishments plays a critical role in the success of combat operations. Delbrück's theories on military power contrasted those of the German General Staff. Delbrück's assertions came at a time when the German Army began to incorporate the emergence of modern battlefield technology into its view on war at the end of the eighteenth and into the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. The

army's focus on technology at the tactical and operational level shaped its doctrine during the Great War and again during World War II. The German General Staff officer failed to grasp the significance of his role in national strategic policy and therefore it impacted the application of military force on the eastern front.

The German military lost sight of the importance of the relationship between the political and military elements and failed to act in time to avert defeat. The German Army underwent a significant transformation to learn from its mistakes. Ultimately, this transformation did not shape the military force for success on the eastern front in 1941. The German General Staff failed to identify several critical elements of political-military relations. Military leaders at any level can learn from the failure of the German General Staff and avoid making the same mistakes that befell it and the German Army in 1941.

This thesis examines the linkage between German political and military relations from 1864 until 1941 in order to answer the question: Did the divergence between the *Wehrmacht's* capabilities and Hitler's political desires impact the Army's ability to affect the strategic level of war on the eastern front? In order to answer the primary question this thesis addresses the following secondary questions. First, what military theories did Hitler and the General Staff adopt, and what affect did these theories have on the conduct of warfare on the eastern front? Second, did the gap between Hitler's political agenda and the *Wehrmacht's* capabilities result in the failure of Operation Barbarossa in December 1941? Third, what critical elements of political-military relations did the German General Staff fail to identify and what can contemporary military professionals learn from this?

The first question addresses the issues concerning German leadership, their views on the nature of warfare and the war theories they adopted to support those views. The second question addresses the implementation of those theories throughout the interwar years leading up to Operation Barbarossa. The third question will address the critical elements of political-military relations and their significance on military operations.

There is one fundamental assumption concerning this research. Germany could not have won the war on the eastern front after December 1941. Although the conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union lasted from June 1941 until May 1945, the thesis will focus only on operation Barbarossa during the summer and winter months of 1941. There was a conscious decision in restricting research to the time period before 1942 for several reasons. First, the Germans never regained the ability to affect the strategic level of war after they failed to capture Moscow in 1941. The German Army lost a significant amount of personnel and material which it was not able to recover adequately through the rest of the war. Second, its major summer offensives, in June 1942 and July 1943 to gain strategic advantages over the Soviets, failed due to several reasons but most importantly due to a loss in division combat power. The loss of which eliminated its capability to achieve Hitler's strategic objectives. Once the army lost these capabilities it could not regain it without sufficient reset and rearmament periods.

The main limitation in researching the topic is the author's inability to speak or read the German or Russian language. This limited the research of original source documents without the filters of translation. This required the use of translated works from multiple sources in order to research the necessary data. The use of translated works from official war records, after action reports, personal manuscripts, and

interviews became primary source documents in order to mitigate this problem. German official records for this time period are generally accurate with respect to force structure and training during the interwar years leading up to the Nazis gaining power. In particular they are especially critical of their evaluation and application of lessons learned from World War I.

In order to gain a better understanding of this work there are several key terms, models, and concepts that require understanding. The sources for these terms vary from current army field manuals to captured German-Soviet documents.

Key Terms

The first key term is *Kriegsführung* or war direction. The *Kriegsführung* is the “strategic doctrine that may be defined as the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil [*sic*] the ends of policy.”²² In the German Army, prior to the rise of Adolf Hitler, the responsibility of the *Kriegsführung* rested with the Chef Der Heeresleitung (Chief of the Army Command). The Chief’s responsibilities included providing the Army with the necessary direction, through doctrine, training, and organization, to conduct warfare in support of the nation’s policy.

This is a critical term to understand because of its linkage to the primary research question. The *Kriegsführung* will differ based on the leadership’s concept of war. It will focus the development of the armed forces and shape its doctrine in peacetime and drive the planning of operations during war. It also provides the purpose for operations and sets the tone for which the campaign should follow.

Models

The first model that used in this thesis is one commonly referenced by the Directorate of Joint and Multinational Operations at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, as the DIME (Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic) model.²³ Clausewitz's book *On War* discusses the interrelationships between policy, strategy, and economics to describe the instruments of national power. The different theories on the nature of war establish varying degrees of importance on the components of the instruments of national power. The two that this thesis will focus primarily on are the military and diplomatic aspects of the model.

Concepts

Nature of War²⁴

Fundamental to my thesis is the nature of war and how the various proponents of national power viewed it. Clausewitz wrote about war's nature in his book *On War*. In his view war historically took only two forms. He based this on the interaction between the civilization and the battles they fought. He concluded societies fielded armies whose societal and cultural characteristics shaped the nature of the conflict. The moral forces, characteristics and political climate imbued on war a uniqueness that emerged in every conflict. This uniqueness shaped the belligerents and therefore affected battlefield strategy and tactics. It also placed limitations on the conflict, or as Clausewitz called them barriers. The barriers shifted from conflict to conflict due to the variables in determining them. Therefore each conflict is unique in nature and although certain general principles and concepts remained consistent, the over arching rational behind war

became vastly different. He did not prescribe what those limitations should look like, but only that they exist. He called this form of conflict limited war.

The second form of warfare he described as absolute or total war. Clausewitz's described this form of warfare as the unaltered nature of conflict. War is "an act of force, and there is no logical limit to an act of force."²⁵ Each side could increase the level of violence as the conflict grows with intensity. Clausewitz theorized that in essence all war has the potential to become that of total. Only the limitations or barriers placed on it by the populations prevented it from achieving its absolute state.

Clausewitz believed nations fought wars for one of two purposes. The first purpose sought to destroy the political freedom of a nation. The military campaign eliminated those factors or centers of gravity which gave the nation strength to resist. The second purpose seeks to achieve some level of favorable peace terms that satisfy the nation. The underlying theme with the former is that the political/military goals need to encompass a broader range of objectives in order to successfully achieve their desired end state. The latter purpose allows for a smaller range of objectives and ones that are not as severe as in the former. The two purposes do not necessarily coincide with any one particular view of war. It is logical to conclude the severity of national objectives sought by one nation will shape the nature of war for the other. The interaction between the belligerents and these different views on the nature of war had a profound impact on the conflict. In 1941 Germany and the Soviet Union approached war differently and this had an impact on the nature and the conduct of war on the eastern front.

Another Clausewitzian concept used in this thesis is the notion of the "paradoxical" trinity and its application in war. Clausewitz wrote about war comprising

three elements which he claimed were wars dominant characteristics. The interaction or balance between violence and passion, uncertainty, chance and probability, and political purpose and effect were the foundation for describing war.²⁶ Modern interpretations often link these three characteristics to a nation's population, military force and government respectively.

Clausewitz drew his experiences for the basis of his writings from the Napoleonic era. This is significant because the impact it had on his theory. Macgregor Knox and Williamson Murray, two prominent historians, categorize the French Revolution as a military revolution. That is a revolution which affected the fabric of society, not only in France but also the rest of Europe.²⁷ Kings and nobles gave way to national will of the violently empowered masses. War became the interest of the nation state and not just the noble aristocrat and ruling elite. This had a dramatic affect on warfare and Clausewitz attempted to capture it by including the "violence and passion" of the people as one of his three dominant characteristics in war.

Each characteristic affected war differently and uniquely based on the conflict. Since each conflict would be distinctly different based on the belligerents, time, scale of conflict and desired end state, he did not elaborate what the impact each characteristic would have on war. Clausewitz, therefore, believed careful consideration should be given to the interaction and affects of these three characteristics when preparing for war.

Levels of War

Level of War is a concept defined by the U.S. Army as "doctrinal perspectives that clarify the links between strategic objectives and tactical actions."²⁸ Strategic, operational and tactical categorize the three levels of war. Furthermore, actions taken in

the field affect either one, some or all levels depending on what objectives they achieve. This thesis will focus on the strategic level of war.

“The strategic level is that level at which a nation, often as one of a group of nations, determines national and multinational security objectives and guidance and develops and uses national resources to accomplish them.”²⁹ The direction of national policy, theater strategy and military campaigns fit into this level of war.

Hitler’s strategic goals in Russia, first established in his book *Mein Kampf*, played a significant role in planning for Barbarossa. “We National Socialists must hold unflinchingly to our aim in foreign policy, namely, to secure for the German people the land and soil to which they are entitled on this earth.”³⁰ This strategic goal would drive Hitler’s foreign policy from 1938-1941 and was one of the primary goals in his war against Russia. Although Hitler used the other components of the DIME model, he relied on the use of his military power in order to gain *lebensraum* during his Russian campaign.

Centers of Gravity

“Centers of gravity are those characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.”³¹

During the planning for Barbarossa the General Staff identified the Red Army as the center of gravity (COG) for the campaign. Its destruction became the primary focus of the German war effort. Hitler’s Directive No. 21 (the order to conduct Barbarossa) signed on 18 December 1940, identified one of the German operational objectives as “destruction of the Red Army as far west as possible to prevent them from retreating deeper into the Soviet Union.”³²

Clausewitz described COGs as the “hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends.”³³ During his time the enemy’s army usually provided the means by which a belligerent would resist. Naturally then by attacking and neutralizing the opposing army the aggressor could impose their will on the enemy and compel them to make peace. However, as the nature of conflict changes so can the enemy’s COG.

This is important because the effect it has on military operations. National objectives sought to support an ideological war significantly alter the enemy’s COG. During limited conflicts the army may become the COG. However, during a protracted conflict fought for state and cultural survival, the COG may in fact shift to the population or to the government itself. Identifying the correct COG is critical for military planners so that they may prepare operations which target it.

Chapter Design

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the impact that German military theorists had on shaping the German Army during the years prior to and including The First World War. This work identifies those individuals that had the most influence in creating the operational and tactical doctrine the Wehrmacht would use in 1941. These chapters primarily focus on war theorists and their contribution to the German war machine from 1850 until the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. Chapter 4 discusses the operational planning for Barbarossa and its initial execution. It also discusses Hitler’s strategic level goals and the operational methods the German Army used or employed in order to achieve them. Chapter 5 includes conclusions concerning the linkage between the political and military elements of power and the implications they have concerning future conflicts.

¹Oscar Pinkus, *The War Aims and Strategies of Adolf Hitler* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005), 173.

²David Glantz asserts in his book *When Titan Clashed* that the Russian campaign exceeded the German's logistical capabilities and the lack of supplies halted their operations.

³B. H. Liddell interviewed the German High Command after the war and published those interviews in his book titled *The German Generals Talk*. In his discussions with them the generals clearly blame Hitler for Germany's failure to achieve victory outside of Moscow in 1941. His micromanagement of the Army Groups operations fatally hampered the OKH's conduct of the war.

⁴Earl Ziemke and Magna Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2006), 14.

⁵Matthew Cooper, *The German Army, 1933-1945* (Lanham, MD: Stein and Day Publishers, 1978; reprint Lanham, MD.: Scarborough House/Publishers, 1990), 408.

⁶Albert Seaton, *The Russo-German War, 1941-45* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 40.

⁷Earl Ziemke and Magna Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2006), 358.

⁸Franz Halder, *The Private War Journals of Colonel General Franz Halder*, ed. Arnold Lissance (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), 1340.

⁹Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (New York, NY: Quill, 1979), 176.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 180.

¹¹Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, NY: Praeger 1953), 342.

¹²Department of the Army, *The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations, 1940-1942* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1955), 20.

¹³*Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁴Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1991.), 124.

¹⁵James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 188.

¹⁶General Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Publishing, 1952), 513-14.

¹⁷Department of the Army, *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 15, part VII, *The Eastern Theater*, ed. Donald Detwiler (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1979), 25.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁹Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 607.

²⁰Peter Paret et al., eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 326-31.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Matthew Cooper, *The German Army, 1933-1945* (Lanham, MD: Stein and Day Publishers, 1978; reprint Lanham, MD.: Scarborough House/Publishers, 1990), 131.

²³US Command and General Staff College, *ILE Common Core C200 Strategic Studies* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Command and General Staff College, May 2006), C202RC-2.

²⁴Michael Howard's book *Clausewitz* was used to help interpret Clausewitz's writings. In which Mr. Howard dissects Clausewitz's writing and distills the major thesis behind his points concerning the nature war.

²⁵Michael Howard, *Clausewitz* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf 1983), 49, quoting Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 77.

²⁶Peter Paret et al., eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 201.

²⁷MacGregor Know and Williamson Murry, eds., *The dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050* (Cambridge, London: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.

²⁸Department of the Army, FM 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 14 June 2001), 2-2.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), 652.

³¹Department of the Army, FM 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 14 June 2001), 5-7.

³²Geoffrey Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 131.

³³Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 595.

CHAPTER 2

THE GERMAN NATURE OF WAR

Theory is instituted that each person in succession may not have to go through the same labor of clearing the ground and toiling through his subject, but may find the thing in order, and light admitted on it.¹

Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*

How did German political and military leadership view war and what theories did each adopt because of these views? The period between 1850 and 1933 was a time of development of German military strategies concerning war and the politics surrounding them. From Moltke the elder until the rise of National Socialism German military planners had a predictable political-military model to formulate strategic and operational assumptions. To understand the German Military's view on war it is useful to examine the events that shaped the strategic, operational, and tactical visions concerning future conflicts. These planning assumptions, originally formulated under the Prussian General Staff, became the foundation for German military preparation and specifically provide insight into the German General Staff's view on the nature of war.

Prussia's geographical position in Europe had been a strategic concern for the General Staff and the Prussian political system. The potential of fighting a war against a coalition of forces from France and Russia, as well as Austria, Poland, and Italy produced the clear possibility of fighting a multi-front conflict. Military planners attempted to secure German borders through a combination of diplomatic alliances and military action. Even though Germany's operational and tactical doctrine adapted with the aid of new

technologies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Germany's geographical weakness remained a constant concern in the development of German war plans.

Prussian / German war theory from 1850 to 1891²

Helmuth von Moltke was Chief of the Prussian General Staff from 1857 until his retirement in 1888. Moltke's tenure is important for two main reasons: the role of the General Staff changed and technology was incorporated into strategic planning. Moltke's efforts in shaping these two issues affected future General Staffs well into the twentieth century.

During the three wars of unification the role of the Prussian General Staff changed significantly, at least for the duration of the conflicts. Prior to the war with Austria in 1866 the Chief of the General Staff did not have a significant role in military affairs.³ The War Minister was the primary individual responsible for providing the King with military advice. Subordinated to the minister the Chief of the General Staff did not have the privilege to speak directly to the King concerning military affairs.

Additionally, the War Ministry department drafted and transmitted orders to field commanders, bypassing the General Staff. This meant that the Chief of the General Staff did not have a significant role in either the strategical planning or conduct of Prussian wars. However, in 1866 this changed due to a combination of fortuitous events, Moltke's personality, and his success in operational planning during the Danish War of 1864.

Shortly after the war's conclusion legislature expanded the role of the General Staff and granted it two important responsibilities. The Chief of the General Staff was appointed as the sole military advisor to the King with direct power to transmit orders to

the field commanders bypassing, the War Minister. These measures enabled the military to become involved in strategical as well as operational planning for war.

However, Moltke had difficulty combining political maneuvering with strategic thinking.⁴ He attempted to define the specific and separate roles of each in preparing the nation for conflict. In his view the politician's role stopped at the war's onset and did not resume until after the military's successful conduct of the campaign.

Politics uses war for the attainment of its ends; it operates decisively at the beginning and the end, of course in such a manner that it refrains from increasing its demands during the war's duration or from being satisfied with an inadequate success. . . . In this way, it aids politics best, working only for its objectives, but in its operations independent of it.⁵

Moltke thought diplomacy was important at the proper time and place. However, Otto von Bismarck, Prussia's Minister-President from 1862 to 1890 and the prominent statesman at the time, disagreed fueling a conflict with Moltke.⁶

Bismarck interfered on numerous occasions in military affairs during the unification wars because of the political significance. During the Austrian campaign he communicated with General von Falckenstein's headquarters, bypassing the General Staff, in order to ensure the operations favored his desired political agenda. Despite Moltke's objections, Bismarck curtailed Prussia's territorial gains after the defeat of Austria to facilitate a peace process and prevent France from entering the conflict. Moltke thought this curtailment placed the army at a disadvantage.

Bismarck's political maneuvering prevented a multi-front war between France and Austria perhaps indicating a cooperative need between military and political actions.⁷ Yet limiting the military operations to facilitate the peace process placed Moltke's army

at a disadvantage, and therefore he disagreed with this strategy regardless of the political benefits.

This interaction of the political-military realm from 1864-1871 was unique due to the increasing importance of the General Staff and its chief. Bismarck and Moltke did not agree on the role each had in Prussia's foreign policy. However, each shared the same limited aspect of war as is evident in Bismarck's approach to diplomacy and Moltke's operational objectives.

Bismarck was aware of the impact military objectives had on foreign relations. He attempted to limit objectives in order to facilitate the peace process. Moltke understood it as well and stated "Strategy can only direct its efforts towards the highest goal which means available make attainable."⁸ Although they did not share a common attitude toward political-military relations they did share the importance of pursuing limited objectives. This initial interaction between the General Staff and the political realm shaped future staff officer's approach to political-military affairs.

In addition to the increased importance placed on the General Staff, Moltke also established the foundation on which the German military anchored its operational and tactical doctrine throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He sought an alternative to frontal attacks because advancements in technology and larger battlefield armies required greater military capability to disperse forces along external lines.⁹

Moltke the elder addressed the issues that new technologies in transportation, communication and weapons were having on warfare. As the technology changed so did the need to rethink operational objectives. Nationalism allowed for greater mobilization of the populace for war and increased the size of armies on the battlefield. Larger sized

armies meant military leaders needed to consider the operational level of war to manage these armies on the battlefield. The concept of operationally outflanking and encircling opposing armies became one of Moltke's legacies to the German Army. Subsequent German military planners refined this doctrine over time into what western historians have called *Blitzkrieg*.

Moltke the elder developed his primary views from two themes of Clausewitz's writings on the nature of war. The first concerned the purpose of war and the second dealt with the object of combat. As described in chapter one, Clausewitz identified two purposes to war. Moltke subscribed to the belief that the objective of war was the achievement of a satisfactory political end.¹⁰ This fact molded his views towards the limited nature of war and impacted his approach to it. Although he had his differences with Bismarck, he kept the minister informed of his operational plans. This allowed Bismarck to plan for peace negotiations once the campaign had ended. In shaping the German Army Moltke geared his operational design toward decisive battles. The objective was the destruction of the belligerent's army and the enemy government's ability to resist. After the destruction of its army the government would have no choice but to sue for peace.

The second Clausewitzian theme Moltke adopted concerned the objective of combat. Clausewitz wrote "combat means fighting, and in this the destruction or conquest of the enemy is the object, and the enemy, in particular combat, is the armed force which stands opposed to us."¹¹ This led to Moltke's belief and practice of engaging the enemy through decisive battles intent on destroying the enemy's fighting force. Aware of mobilization tipping Germany's hand to the adversaries, Moltke attempted to

harness the use of railroads to provide the strategic surprise lost through the deployment of the army. By transporting troops by rail, he could retain the initiative through rapid offensive operations. Moltke's theory of encirclement and the decisive battle became the foundation which shaped German tactical doctrine. Succeeding Chiefs of the German General Staff continued to build and refine his doctrine.

Another important aspect of Moltke's tenure was the influence of Alfred von Waldersee, Moltke's deputy as Quartermaster-General for the General Staff. Waldersee became involved with Prussia's foreign politics and the affect on the General Staff warrants examination. Waldersee involved himself with foreign affairs through interaction with Prussia's military attachés. Although unorthodox, it was not uncommon for him to receive copies of the official country assessments sent to the foreign minister. Additionally he also maintained communication and encouraged the military attaches to "represent the views of the General Staff, even when such views were at variance with those of the Foreign Office."¹² At the same time as Waldersee was meddling in foreign affairs the Bulgarian crisis of 1887-88 began. As Russo-German relations deteriorated the General Staff began to explore the possibility of launching a pre-emptive Austrian-German attack.¹³ Waldersee expressed the military views to the Austrians through the military attachés without discussing it with Germany's foreign minister. Bismarck quickly addressed the situation and in a letter to the Austrians he stated:

I cannot avoid the impression that it is the aim of certain military circles in Vienna to distort our defensive alliance. . . . We must both take care that the privilege of giving political advice to our monarchs does not in fact slip out of our hands and pass over to the General Staff.¹⁴

Even though Bismarck curtailed his interferences, Waldersee continued to influence Germany's foreign policy until his departure as Chief of the German General

Staff in 1891. This was a post he briefly held after Moltke retired. Waldersee's actions and failures were the primary reasons Alfred von Schlieffen and other future Chief of Staffs stressed the German Army's neutrality in the realm of politics

German war theory from 1891 to 1919

Alfred von Schlieffen succeeded Waldersee and became the Chief of the German General Staff in 1891. Schlieffen is known for shaping the operational plan against France in 1914.¹⁵ Opposite from Waldersee's approach, Schlieffen focused exclusively on planning multi-front operations and remained isolated from political interaction. A student of Clausewitz and a subscriber to Moltke the elder's views on encirclement, Schlieffen refined German operational doctrine to meet emerging threats from France and Russia.

Schlieffen needed a strategy to achieve victory against a numerically superior force.¹⁶ French and Russian combined forces outnumbered Germany's manpower by a ratio of 5:3. Using history, Schlieffen focused on the tactics used by Hannibal at the battle of Cannae in 216 BC.¹⁷ During the battle the Carthaginians defeated a numerically superior Roman force through the use of encircling tactics. Although a tactical success for the Carthaginians, they eventually lost the war. Schlieffen neglected to consider this fact in his historical study and instead focused on the dynamics of the decisive battle.

Schlieffen firmly believed the answer resided in an encirclement doctrine which brought mass against the enemy's flank. The desired intent, which came to be known as battles of annihilation, was to encircle, isolate, and eliminate the enemy forces.¹⁸

Like Moltke the elder, Schlieffen placed emphasis on war's limited nature rather than the absolute notion Clausewitz had described. In Gordon Craig's book, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, Schlieffen's view on war is illustrated as:

In an age in which progress of trade and commerce. . . . A strategy of exhaustion [*Ermattungsstrategie*] is impossible when the maintenance of millions necessitates the expenditure of [billions].¹⁹

This outlook shaped Schlieffen's approach to war and operational planning. He focused on the technical aspects of warfare and not Clausewitz's philosophical ideals. He possessed little desire to explore any areas outside of his military expertise and he demanded his staff do the same. This prevented him from considering the political implications surrounding war and instead he focused on the means or technical aspects to successfully conclude it.

Schlieffen looked upon war as an eventuality and fate not something that he or Germany could avoid.²⁰ Since war was inevitable and the army provided the nation the capability to resist, the destruction of the enemy force became the measure of success. However, several historians and one in particular did not share this view and considered other means to achieve victory.

In 1879 Hans Delbrück proposed a thesis in which he asserted annihilation battles were not the sole means the state had to achieve victory. Using history and Clausewitz's work he suggested a partial destruction of the enemy with overwhelming force may compel adversaries to negotiate for peace.²¹ He suggested the application of military force depended on the political circumstances at the time. A battle of annihilation may not succeed in achieving political success if certain conditions existed. The prevailing political and military climate of the day defined these conditions. Schlieffen did not

agree with Delbrück's assertions and continued to refine his war planning concepts centered on battles of annihilation through decisive engagements.

Ironically, both Schlieffen and Delbrück used the same historical battles and text yet each arrived at different lessons from the studies. The difference stems from their differing approaches to war. Schlieffen approached war through the lenses of a technical expert whereas Delbrück approached it through more of Clausewitzian lens. Schlieffen was not able to implement his plans prior to his retirement as Chief of the German General Staff in 1905. However, his replacement Moltke the younger, patterned his operational approach to the Austrian crisis in 1914 using Schlieffen's concepts.

German war theory from 1919 to 1933

Following the disastrous results of World War I, the military system which Moltke and Schlieffen built was in tatters and complete disarray. Hans von Seeckt, Chief of Army Command had the responsibility of rebuilding Germany's military after its defeat in 1919. Hampered by the limitations of the Treaty of Versailles, Seeckt began a military transformation with a focus on self reflection and education. Unlike Schlieffen and Moltke the elder before him, Seeckt had an inward focus on the military because of the affects the war had on the military and political systems.

Politically Germany became unstable following its defeat in 1919. Four years of savage warfare devastated Germany's economic and social structures.²² As the political establishment attempted to correct itself and the nation the military channeled their energies toward an inward look at the military apparatus for lessons to learn. It was easier for the military staff to focus their efforts in military areas familiar to them rather than involve themselves in the political chaos present during the 1920s.

The concept of defense became increasingly more important than seizing initiative through pre-emptive action because of the military realities after the war. Militarily the German Army lacked the capabilities required for an approach modeled on Schlieffen's doctrine. The reduction in manpower and the limitations imposed on offensive equipment such as aircraft and armored vehicles limited Germany's military options and required a shift in doctrinal emphasis.

Von Seeckt first set about his task by establishing a basis for mobilization of the German Army. The limitations placed upon Germany severely hampered the Reichswehr's attempt to prepare for war. In order to strengthen Germany's strategic position, Seeckt sought innovative ways around the treaty restrictions. To achieve this goal he focused on four areas to help improve Germany's strategic position.

An attempted coup in Berlin in 1919 affected Seeckt's view concerning politics and the German military. Because of this event Seeckt placed political restrictions on the German Army. One of his first actions was to issue an order to the German Officer Corps in which he stated:

Any kind of political activity in the army will be prohibited. Political quarrels within the Reichswehr are incompatible with both the spirit of comradeship and with discipline and can only be harmful to military training. We do not ask the individual for his political creed, but we must assume that everyone who serves in the Reichswehr from now on will take his oath seriously. Those who do not condemn the unfortunate attempt made during the month of March at overthrowing the government, and those who still believe that a repetition would end in anything but new misfortune for our people and for the Reichswehr, should decide on their own that the Reichswehr is not for them.²³

Seeckt intended to insure the protection of the army from communist or democratic influences. His actions insured the army became politically isolated in order to maintain its independence. This measure supported his goal of rebuilding the German Army. He

intended to use the restrictions placed on Germany to build a Leader Army which would fill the vital role of staffing a mobilized German force in times of war.²⁴ However, in order to insure the army would only be used for external conflicts and not to suppress the German populace, he concluded the Army needed to remain free of political intrigue.

This legacy persevered after his departure from the army in 1926 since many of his young officers including, Leeb, Guderian, Runstedt, Beck, and Halder would hold command positions within combat units during Operation Barbarossa. Two in particular (Beck and Halder) would later become Chief of the German General Staff during critical times of mobilization and war.²⁵ For most German officers the aversion to political intrigue held constant from the 1920s up through the rise of the National Socialists. It was not until 1939 when Hitler's desire for war could not be curtailed that officers again began to delve into political intrigue.²⁶

Seeckt's aversion to political action is understandable given the circumstances surrounding the German Army at the time. He had to rebuild the army and needed the loyalty of his officers. According to Seeckt every soldier had a duty to display discipline and obedience to the orders given. This attitude demonstrated to the civilian government that the army leadership could be trusted. According to Seeckt the soldier's loyalty rested with the state and not the party in power.²⁷ These notions of duty and loyalty would eventually conflict with each other in the latter years of Hitler's Third Reich. The impact Seeckt's ideals had on Hitler's interaction with his generals will be examined further in chapter three.

Seeckt's second measure dealt with the establishment of the Reichsarchiv (Department of state archives) to facilitate the study into the First World War. He

intended to use this department to distill and incorporate the lessons into its reorganization and modernization. Officers openly debated and conducted critical analysis of these lessons from both the Allied and Central Powers viewpoints.

One of the primary lessons came from the comparison between combat on the various fronts. After the failure of the Schlieffen Plan in 1914, combat on the Western front degenerated into positional trench warfare. This resulted in high casualty rates with little territory gained. However, combat on the Eastern front remained highly mobile throughout the war allowing the Germans the freedom to conduct offensive operations utilizing their encirclement doctrine. The Germans learned the value of mobility and the affect it could have on the enemy when the battlefield remained elastic. The Germans focused on this idea as they prepared for future wars. This critical analysis by the staff officers led to the development and incorporation of new technologies.

Seeckt's sweeping changes to the army and strict belief in an apolitical force required the support of like minded officers in key positions. This led to his third critical step in rebuilding the German military, assignment of key personnel who shared similar views. Seeckt accomplished this by reaffirming the need to maintain the Kreiskommissars (District commissioners for defense).²⁸ The Kreiskommissars provided frontier security in the form of military districts and provided the opportunity for Seeckt to assign and therefore control the personnel charged with defending the German state.²⁹ He quickly assigned officers from the General Staff to these organizations. These officers shared his views concerning warfare and carried his ideas forward.

The fourth step Seeckt undertook was formulating better relations with the Soviet Union. This is one of the few instances where Seeckt interacted with foreign policy

making. In 1921 he convinced von Maltzahn of the foreign office to enter negotiations with Russia which eventually led to signing of the Treaty of Rapallo.³⁰ The treaty provided both military and economic benefits that aided the transformation process. This marked the beginning of German-Russian military cooperation agreements which were essential in the German Army's re-emergence as a European power.

German industry transferred the production of aircraft, tanks and poison gas to Russia.³¹ This enabled the Germans to manufacture prohibitive equipment, while at the same time avoid Allied repercussions. Additionally, the Germans established armor and aircraft training schools within the Soviet Union at Kasan and Kharkov. Seeckt's efforts facilitated and guaranteed Germany's rapid rearmament in the 1930s.

Seeckt's efforts also had a strategic impact on Germany's security. Peaceful relations with the Soviet Union reduced the potential of hostilities between the two nations. This allowed him to focus on the internal problems facing the German Army, which consumed the majority of his time as Chief of Staff. The cooperation between Germany and Russia in the early 1920s helped establish the foundation for the German-Russo Pact in 1939.³²

Concerning his views on the nature of war, it is difficult to narrow them to one particular vision. He undertook several initiatives which supported both a limited and total war mindset. The first one was his desire for a small professional, highly trained army. Seeckt wrote in his book *Thoughts of a Soldier* in 1930:

The whole future of warfare appears to me to be in the employment of mobile armies, relatively small but of high quality, and rendered distinctly more effective by the addition of aircraft, and in the simultaneous mobilization of the whole defense force, be it to feed the attack or for home defense.³³

This view suggested Seeckt did not adopt the view of an attritional based strategy. A small highly trained army would not be suitable for long duration warfare.

The second initiative concerned the mobilization of the German economy for war. In 1924 Seeckt established a military economic office to prepare operational plans for mobilizing the economy during war.³⁴ The Rüstungsamt worked with industry to ascertain the requirements to provide for the military's armament needs. Companies such as Krupp worked in secret to tool factories for dual production of either civilian products or military equipment. The best example of this was the research and development of heavy tractors. These tractors were in essence the precursors to the first model tanks that appeared in the early 1930s.³⁵ Seeckt wrote "there is only one way to equip masses with weapons and that is by fixing the type and at the same time arranging for mass production in case of need."³⁶ This suggests he was preparing the army and the German state to adopt a total war posture if needed.

Although it appears Seeckt had conflicting thoughts on warfare he did not share the same views on warfare as did other prominent military leaders. One in particular, Erich Ludendorff, had a different approach to it. Ludendorff's total war theory had a severe impact on the German state and the welfare of the population. Seeckt's belief in the importance of the state and the soldier's duty to protect it would have precluded him from adopting such a destructive posture. His attention to the economical factors of war and his preparation of German industry to support the military illustrated the thoroughness of his methodology. Therefore his policies and efforts prepared the German Army for a limited form of warfare but prudently made plans for German

industry to support national mobilization if required. Chapter three examines Ludendorff's total war theory further.

Seeckt's transformation of the German Army immediately after its defeat in World War I directly impacted its further development during the Hitler's mobilization in the 1930s. The underlying measures to form the nucleus of a leadership cadre as well as the emphasis on critical analysis allowed the Heer to refine German operational and tactical doctrine. Seeckt took the operational concepts first established by Moltke the elder and incorporated emerging technology. The result led to the establishment of a modern German Army which could dominate the European continent under Adolf Hitler. However, the further divorce from political interaction and the willingness to subordinate the use of military power to the political policies of the state had its consequences.

From 1850 until 1933 the German General Staff prepared for war using a consistent operational and tactical doctrine. Although each Chief of the General Staff took a different approach to preparing for the possibility of a multi-front war, they all shared common themes. The first was to offset Germany's geographical weakness through superior maneuver of force. Moltke the elder was the first to incorporate new technology to maintain the strategic initiative and Schlieffen refined it. Schlieffen's annihilation doctrine attempted to defeat the enemy quickly through decisive engagements. Finally Seeckt took the efforts of Moltke the elder and Schlieffen and used them as the foundation for the Reichswehr's doctrine as he began to rebuild the German Army in the early 1920s.

However, as German operational doctrine matured and adapted to the changing times, the General Staff's opinion towards the political aspect ebbed and flowed

depending on the personality of the Chief of Staff. Moltke the elder's attempt to recognize the time and place for diplomacy was overshadowed by Waldersee's attempt to circumvent official foreign policy channels. The result led officers such as Schlieffen and Seeckt to focus almost exclusively on the technical aspects of their profession, leaving the policy making to the politicians. These technical soldiers's became extremely proficient and adept professionally, but they neglected to develop political savvy. Although Seeckt delved into the foreign policy realm it was merely to facilitate the development of the armed forces and eventually it lost its significance. The German General Staff therefore found themselves at a distinct disadvantage as the National Socialists rose to power in the 1930s. Adolf Hitler would take advantage of this weakness as he influenced the Wehrmacht and led the General Staff and the German people to war, a war which eventually destroyed all that Moltke the elder and the other General Staff officers created.

¹Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Anatol Rapoport (London, England: Penguin Books, 1968), 191.

²In order to gain a better understanding of the history of the General Staff prior to 1650 it is recommended to read Walter Goerlitz's book, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, translated by Brian Battershaw.

³Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of The Prussian Army* (London, England: Clarendon Press, 1955), 194.

⁴Ibid., 196.

⁵Ibid., 216.

⁶Ibid., 204.

⁷Ibid., 200.

⁸Ibid., 196.

⁹Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, NY: Praeger 1953), 75.

¹⁰Peter Paret et al., eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 299.

¹¹Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Anatol Rapoport (London, England: Penguin Books, 1968), 303.

¹²Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army* (London, England: Clarendon Press, 1955), 268.

¹³*Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵The “Schlieffen Plan” as it will later be known as attempted to achieve strategic victory through a massive encirclement of French forces at the outbreak of hostilities between the two nations.

¹⁶Jehuda Wallach, *The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation: The Theories of Clausewitz and Schlieffen and their Impact on the German Conduct of Two World Wars* (London, England: Greenwood Press 1992), 37.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁹Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army* (London: Clarendon Press, 1955), 281, quoting H. v. Kuhl, *Der deutsche Generalstab in Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Weltkrieges* (2. Aufl., Berlin, 1920).

²⁰Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, NY: Praeger, 1953), 128.

²¹Robert Foley, *Alfred Von Schlieffen Military Writings*, trans. and ed. Robert T. Foley (London, England: Frank Cass Publishers 2003), 188.

²²In March 1920 Colonel Bauer and Wolfgang Kapp attempted to overthrow the Weimar republic. Known as the Kapp Putsch the ramifications of this attempted coup affected Seeckt’s approach to military reform. Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army* (London, England: Clarendon Press, 1955), 375.

²³*Ibid.*, 385-6.

²⁴*Ibid.* 397.

²⁵Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, NY: Praeger 1953), 227.

²⁶Hitler's interaction with his generals will be further examined in chapter 3.

²⁷Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of The Prussian Army* (London, England: Clarendon Press, 1955), 386.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 401.

²⁹Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, NY: Praeger 1953), 219.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 231.

³¹*Ibid.*, 232.

³²John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945* (London, England: ST. Martin's Press 1953), 142.

³³*Ibid.*, 101.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 143.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*

CHAPTER 3

HITLER'S WAY OF WAR

This little affair of operational command is something that anybody can do. The Commander-in-chief's job is to train the Army in the National Socialist idea, and I know of no general who could do that as I want it done. For that reason I've decided to take over command of the Army myself.¹

Adolf Hitler 1938

The year 1933 marked the start of a radical shift in the direction of the German state. With the rise of the National Socialist Movement the political landscape in Germany changed. Prior to Operation Barbarossa, the German Army had undergone a significant rearmament program. Advances in mechanized warfare, the introduction of the Luftwaffe, and the expansion of the German Army provided the General Staff with the means to wage war previously unknown. However, along with this expansion came the effects of National Socialism, the consolidation of Adolf Hitler's power and the erosion of the army's political independence. How did these drastic changes to the fabric of the German state affect the General Staff in their preparation for war?

At the forefront of Germany's expansion was the German General Staff led by General Ludwig Beck. Beck became Chief of the General Staff in 1933 the same year Hitler rose to power. Previously disbanded after the Treaty of Versailles, the General Staff reformed from the officers in the Truppenamt. The traditional Prussian organization first established by Scharnhorst in 1808 and preserved by Seeckt through the interwar period, remerged.

German War Theory from 1933 to 1938

Like Moltke the elder, Schlieffen, and Seeckt before him, Beck became the Chief of Staff at a critical phase of the German Army's development and expansion.

Additionally Beck had to deal with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime which resulted in a changing political culture whose members focused on distrust and undermining the military leadership.

Beck dealt with three major issues during his tenure: the expansion of the General Staff and its role in military planning, the adaptation of German operational doctrine to Hitler's foreign policy and the growing competition between the Heer, the SS and the Luftwaffe.²

Beck reorganized and expanded various military departments within the organization. The General Staff expanded from four to twelve departments and personnel were increased from 3,000 to 25,000 officers.³ This action was necessary to support Hitler's desire for a larger army. However, the rapid expansion of staff officers also had an impact on the character of the organization.

Beck could not duplicate Seeckt's methods to maintain political isolation of his officers because of the number of officers required to expand the army. Additionally Hitler's attempt to indoctrinate the officer corps with National Socialist views meant many officers became politically influenced by Hitler. The result was a divide between the older generation staff officer, trained under the traditional staff system and the younger generation who became enamored with Hitler.

Just as officer personnel increased during the rearmament period, so did the German Army. Hitler instituted conscripted service for the Wehrmacht in 1935 in order

to expand his armed forces. This expansion decreased the German General Staff's influence because it reorganized and redistributed its existing personnel into new units thereby diffusing the staff's professional expertise. Beck feared for Germany's security during this period because violating the articles of the Treaty of Versailles allowed Germany's traditional enemies of Russia and France to act.⁴ The disorganization within the staff and their loss of influence over the army created vulnerabilities and weakened Germany's defensive capabilities.

Beck believed that any aggression by German forces against the European community as disastrous for Germany as those countries would retaliate. According to Beck's estimates it would take until 1942-43 before the reorganization of the German Army and General Staff was complete and capable of pursuing Hitler's provocative foreign policy.⁵ However, despite Beck's apprehension Hitler continued to utilize the military as the primary means to achieve his expansionist objectives.

Beck not only had to reorganize the staff but also address its role in preparing for war. Historically the General Staff's responsibility was to provide military advice, plan campaigns and oversee combat operations. Germany's strategic geographic weakness became even more significant due to Hitler's rearmament program and his foreign policies. His sudden move to re-occupy the Rhineland in 1936 resulted in a crisis within the German General Staff. Unaware of Hitler's intentions until the day prior, Beck believed occupying the zone violated the Treaty of Versailles and was therefore too great a risk for Germany to undertake.⁶ Hitler's failure to take into account the General Staff's strategic concerns indicated his views concerning their role in military planning.

Hitler interjected himself into the planning process more and more as Germany's rearmament progressed. Initially limited to providing strategic guidance to the German General Staff during his early years in office, it gradually devolved to approving the movement of specific units on the battlefield. As this level of interaction increased his capacity to heed his military leadership's advice waned. Hitler's constant interference in military affairs hampered the General Staff's planning and his desired end state often invalidated their planning assumptions.

The second issue concerned Hitler's shifting foreign policy away from diplomacy and emphasizing military operations. Beck's strategic outlook conflicted directly with Hitler's. Realizing the weakness of the German Army during its rearmament, Beck attempted to prepare operational plans centered on a defensive strategy. Beck believed Germany should avoid any posture with the potential of provoking the Allied powers into action.⁷ Two of Beck's operational plans supported his defensive mindset.

The first operation dealt with contingency operations in the event the French opposed Germany through the use of sanctions. The second considered the possibility of defensive action against Poland and Czechoslovakia. However, because of Hitler's insistence on an aggressive foreign policy program, Beck had to prepare for conflict far sooner than he anticipated and with less than ideal military force.

In order to prepare the German Army for conflict, he wrote new instructions shifting military operational emphasis from defensive to offensive operations.⁸ The development of armored units coupled with tactical aviation provided the General Staff ways to attain the objectives of Schlieffen's annihilation battles. Despite these innovative

means of applying technology to German warfare, the General Staff did not significantly alter their operational or tactical planning assumptions.

In 1866 Moltke the elder envisioned using rail to achieve strategic mobility and decisively seize the initiative for German forces on the battlefield. The tank and motorized units in the 1930s enhanced this operational capacity, increasing the German Army's mobility on the battlefield. The common themes between these two operational concepts are the German planners assumed speed of maneuver and decisive engagements were critical capabilities required to achieve victory. These capabilities rapidly provided Germany the means to achieve objectives and quickly resolve the conflict. However, German national objectives changed when Adolf Hitler assumed power and therefore dictated a subsequent change to the staff's strategic planning assumptions.

Beck's third issue concerned the role of the Schutzstaffel or SS and Luftwaffe within Germany's strategic planning. During the rearmament of German forces these organizations competed with the army for limited resources of men and material and they did not report to the General Staff for planning purposes. Each organization had its own planning cell and Hitler considered them co-equal in the hierarchy of the German military. The establishment of the SS, and the Luftwaffe as separate military organizations impacted the effectiveness of Hitler's military force by dispersing resources amongst them. Also with the creation of additional planning staffs, the German General Staff lost its monopoly on strategic planning.

Beck's primary concern with these organizations was the growing influence of Henrich Himmler's SS units. Initially the private army of the Nazi leader, SS units slowly began to encroach into military operations. Beck resisted the formation of land

units that did not fall within the General Staff's sphere of control. Initially he met with success as Hitler limited the SS to non-military roles such as state security and Hitler's personal bodyguards. However, this did not last and by 1935 Hitler expanded the SS's capabilities to include military responsibilities.⁹ In the midst of Germany's rearmament the Waffen-SS divisions began to receive priority in military equipment and personnel. Hitler placed more faith in the Party's army than the regular army. By War's end in 1945 Himmler had control of over forty two Waffen-SS units, a significant number considering the industrial and resource shortfalls of German manufacturing.

Beck did not have the same aversion to the Luftwaffe as the SS since he recognized the value of aviation. As was the case with the SS, Beck wanted the General Staff to maintain authority for planning operations for the German Luftwaffe. However, since it was not subordinated to the Oberkommando der Heer (OKH), its operational planning and tactical doctrine developed independently from the Heer. Although there was strong cooperation between tactical aviation and armored units, the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe (OKL), Luftwaffe's High Command, never demonstrated the same level of proficiency as the General Staff in operational planning. Whereas the German General Staff was a mature organization whose conceptual roots dated back to 1640, the Luftwaffe's High Command was not. Their efforts largely produced a tactical air force which had strategic aspirations.

Eventually Beck achieved his goal of a unified military effort within a single planning staff. However, the results were not what Beck and the other staff officers had envisioned. Instead of elevating the responsibility of the General Staff, Hitler created a new staff directly under his control. Several months before Beck retired from the army in

1938 Hitler established The Oberkommando der Wehrmacht or OKW. The OKW became Hitler's personal planning staff and "constitute[d] the main advisory body to Hitler on strategy and planning."¹⁰ With the creation of the OKW, the German General Staff's traditional function of war planning and military guidance became the purview of Hitler. From its establishment the OKW waged the war Hitler desired despite any misgivings from the General Staff.

To a degree the creation of the OKW had merit. In order to coordinate the efforts of the Luftwaffe, Kriegsmarine and Heer a planning body with the authority to direct Germany's war effort was certainly needed. However, its creation also signified the further divergence of opinion between Hitler and the Chief of the German General Staff's view on the nature of war. Beck's desire to avoid provocative action on the part of Germany provided a look into his views concerning war.

In 1937 Beck drafted a memorandum in which he illustrated his concern. In it he wrote:

Experts have made the point that the situation of 1936 was like that of 1917. . . . We are entering the new year without food reserves; the harvest expectations have proved to be illusory; we will not be able to reach the new harvest without stretching things; and increased imports of fats-and, this time, of grains, too-are anticipated. If it should come to developments of a warlike nature in May or June of 1937, our position would be inconceivable.¹¹

Beck's reference to Germany's situation in 1917 illustrates his understanding of the devastating impact war could have on the German state. Furthermore he firmly believed France, Britain, and Russia would form an alliance if Germany continued to pursue its warlike course.¹² After his resignation in 1938 he wrote in his book, *Germany in a Future War*, that:

A war begun by Germany will immediately call into the field other states than the one she has attacked, and in a war against a world coalition she will succumb and for good or evil be put at that coalition's mercy.¹³

It is uncertain what he would have thought if Hitler had given him until 1943 to complete the German Army's rearmament. However it is likely his opinion would have been the same because of his dislike for the Nazi regime. Whatever the case he did not agree with Hitler's view on war and understood the Wehrmacht's limitations conducting Hitler's strategy. Yet, like many German officers Beck did not make any significant attempts to publicly defy Hitler until after his resignation.

Beck's role as chief of the general staff came at a critical and tumultuous time for the German Army. From 1933 until 1938 he witnessed the Wehrmacht undergo an expansion through rearmament and mobilization. His efforts to mobilize the German Army, expand the General Staff and conduct operational planning were continually frustrated by Hitler's actions. Hitler's decision to occupy the Rhineland in 1936, the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938 only complicated Beck's problems. Additionally Hitler made policy decisions without discussing the military impact with Beck. As the 1930s drew to a close the importance of the German General Staff decreased, but the prospect of war grew stronger with each decision Hitler made.

German War Theory from 1938 to 1941

After Beck retired in 1938 two significant events occurred. The first was the creation of the OKW during the same year. The second occurred later in December 1941 when Hitler relieved General Walther von Brauchitsch and assumed the post as Commander in Chief of the Army. With these two actions Hitler finally removed the last vestiges of the General Staff from the planning and military advisor process. Beck's

replacement, General Franz Halder as well as subsequent Chiefs of Staff, became curators of the General Staff with no real power to plan and execute campaigns. They did not have a significant impact on the German military organization or its operations on the eastern front after the failure of Barbarossa.

As Germany edged toward war with the Europe, Hitler became the dominant figure in military operations. Historians have suggested Hitler's motivation for war at the time was cleverly disguised by his ability to captivate and manipulate the German state. However, by examining his military decision making from 1933 onward in addition to his writings it is possible to identify Hitler's view on warfare.

His actions concerning foreign policy suggest he was comfortable using war in both limited and total forms. Some of his policies in the mid 1930s have already been addressed but examination of Germany's campaign against Western Europe provides further insight into his views. Certainly the occupation of France indicated Hitler had no objections to seeking acceptable peace terms. He did not displace French citizens and relocate them to gain *lebensraum* for the German people. His war against France was not an ideological one but one of foreign politics perpetrated in order to set the conditions for Germany's return to European significance. However, German occupation of Poland and the subsequent deportation of Polish Jews to concentration camps highlighted Hitler's more radical views.

The German invasion of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Belgium, and France highlighted the strengths of the Wehrmacht. Rapid envelopment of enemy forces using armored and motorized spearheads was the epitome of German operational doctrine. Schlieffen's concept of the decisive battle against the west had worked. Despite fierce

resistance the French, Czechs, Poles, and Belgians capitulated freeing Hitler to pursue a strategy against Britain and Russia.

However, Hitler viewed the Soviet Union differently than France and this had a major impact on the nature of war in the east. In Hitler's *Mein Kampf* he described his attitude toward Slavs. Three facets concerning Hitler's views not only demonstrated the possibility of hostilities between Germany and Russia, but also illustrated the savagery which would characterize the fight and dictate the nature of the conflict.

First Hitler characterized Bolshevism as an attempt by the Jews to dominate the World.

Germany is today the next great war aim of Bolshevism. It requires all the force of a young missionary idea to raise our people up again, to free them from the snares of this international serpent, and to stop the inner contamination of our blood, in order that the forces of the nation thus set free can be thrown in to safeguard our nationality, and thus can prevent a repetition of the recent catastrophes down to the most distant future.¹⁴

This passage clarified Hitler's view not only towards the Communist threat but also his desire to "raise the people up" to defend German nationality and heritage. This passage alone does not provide evidence of Hitler's intentions to invade Russia but only that he viewed it as a threat to the nation and also the German way of life. However, taken with a few of his other passages Hitler identified his true vision for Germany.

We National Socialists must hold unflinchingly to our aim in foreign policy, namely, to secure for the German people the land and soil to which they are entitled on this earth.¹⁵

If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states.¹⁶

These far-reaching political end states did not lend themselves to the theory of limited war. Hitler's desire for *lebensraum* and intent to protect Germany's racial qualities meant conflict on the eastern front would be anything but limited. The escalation of

hostilities to their most brutal conclusion and the required resources fits Clausewitz's theory of war's potential.

World War I illustrated the affects on society such a national commitment could have on the stability of the state. In 1916 Erich Ludendorff was the architect of Germany's total war strategy during the Great War. He would later publish a book in 1935 discussing his total war theory which he had adopted and implemented from 1916 until 1918. Ludendorff described total war as struggle between people and the entire state and not just between armies. This struggle required the full backing of the population with nothing less than the full commitment of the economic, industrial and military base of the nation. This level of commitment became essential in the total annihilation of the enemy state. Anything less than full commitment doomed the state to a long protracted conflict and eventual defeat.

To be successful every aspect of the state should subordinate to the military establishment and a military dictatorship was required to direct the war effort. Ludendorff's total war theory was a dramatic shift from war with limited objectives to a conflict between nations. Clausewitz theorized on this level of escalation when he wrote, "[war] is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to an act of force."¹⁷

This shift requires drastic changes not only in the military application of force but also the commitment of the population. The society must be willing and prepared to share the same hardships as the armed forces. The sole purpose of the population must be to provide the means for the armed forces to fight. The old need to rally popular support, young men need to enlist; women need to assume the jobs in factories and production centers vacated by enlistees. The fabric of society changes to support the war

effort. However, this level of commitment was not without its consequences. The entire state directed its effort towards war and not areas of economic and social growth. This would have disastrous affects on the society as the conflict increased in duration because neglect of these areas eventually weakened the state and led to its collapse.

Ludendorff's policies during World War I eventually resulted in the open social revolt of the German people and helped bring an end to the conflict. The fact that Ludendorff's theory failed to produce decisive results in 1918 did not escape the attention of the General Staff's study in the 1920s. However, the staff acknowledged the destructive nature this theory had on the state and discounted it as a valid approach to war.

Hitler's approach to warfare partially paralleled Ludendorff's prescription for total war. He became a dictator with complete power over the German state. He mastered the art of propaganda and convinced the German people they were destined for something better. His charismatic personality coupled with his desire to return Germany to a position of power on the European continent met with wide popular support. He removed the limitations on the armed forces by the treaty and encouraged rearmament. Economic growth in local industry and the production of goods and services began to revitalize Germany's sluggish economy.

However, Hitler did not fully implement Ludendorff's concepts until February 1943, over a year after Barbarossa began. Why Hitler did not shift his strategy to include the commitment of the entire German State earlier in the conflict is unknown. The question of whether the German people would have supported Hitler if he mobilized the entire nation for war in 1933 is debatable. Historians may never know for certain

however, historically the power of nationalism is a very powerful motivation which should not be discounted.

France's mobilization of its "citizenry" in 1794 allowed for the conscription of 750,000 men.¹⁸ It is not unreasonable to assume Hitler had a good chance of harnessing German nationalism based on his charismatic personality. The rise of the Nazi Party in 1933 is directly linked with Hitler's promises to return Germany to its preeminence as a European power, free from the restraints of the Treaty of Versailles. If the reaction to a speech given by Goebbels in Berlin during the winter of 1943 is any indication of the people's inclination, then they probably would have supported Hitler's decision to mobilize the nation.

During the years 1933 until 1942 Hitler did not perceive a crisis in Germany sufficient enough to warrant mobilizing the entire German economy for war. However, during the winter of 1942-1943 the German Army began to show signs of having waged continuous warfare for over four years without a strong strategic reserve to replace losses. Having begun its summer offensive in June of 1942, Army Group B besieged the Russian city of Stalingrad along the Volga. Under-supplied and lacking necessary reinforcements, Paulus' 6th Army spent five months trying to break the Red Army lines in order to seize the city. However strong Soviet resistance and the resurgence in Soviet operational art frustrated the German efforts and eventually led to a Russian counter-attack which at first cut off and then destroyed 6th Army. It was a devastating defeat for the German Army and the first of its kind in the war against the Soviet Union.

Hitler could no longer hide from the German people the dire situation on the eastern front after the loss of Paulus' 6th Army at Stalingrad. As a result Hitler's

propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, delivered a speech with the intent of maintaining popular support for the war. In his speech Goebbels said “I ask you: Are you ready from now on to give your full strength to provide the Eastern Front with the men and munitions it needs to give Bolshevism the death blow?”¹⁹ His speech was met with wide support from the crowd and was evidence of the potency of Hitler’s propaganda machine. Hitler’s decision not to mobilize the German population early on in the war meant the Wehrmacht would fight an ideological war against Russia without the support from the entire German state.

In Clausewitz’s description of the trinity between a state’s government, military and population, he suggested “a theory or policy would be flawed if it ignored any one of them.”²⁰ Hitler’s decision to implement such a radical policy shifted the balance of the trinity and neither the military nor population adjusted to compensate for it. The military’s insistence on remaining apolitical and Hitler’s desire to not involve the German masses contributed to the failure of the three elements to remain in equilibrium. Clausewitz did not suggest his state was doomed to failure if the trinity became unbalanced. However, if the enemy correctly maintained the balance between their own elements then success would be much harder to attain.

Unaware of Hitler’s vision, the German military began its rearmament in 1933, and utilized the same planning assumptions used in the past. As a result a gap formed between Hitler’s political desires and the Wehrmacht’s capabilities. Neither the political nor the military leadership recognized this until late 1942-43 when it was too late to reverse the course of the war without altering Hitler’s mindset.

German military leaders and the General Staff planned and prepared for a multi-front war because of Germany's geographic location, yet they had considered it assuming limited objectives. German offensive doctrine relied on rapid, decisive engagements against an enemy on one front so that, when complete, those forces could redeploy to fight the adversary on the secondary front. Germany could not afford a long protracted conflict because of their limited resources in manpower and material. The General Staff based their operational timelines on the assumption the enemy would capitulate if his means to resist were eliminated. This assumption fits the Clausewitzian theory of limited war fought for an agreeable political end state.

German planners such as Moltke the elder, Schlieffen, and Seeckt sought limited objectives to help achieve a favorable political end state. Once achieved the enemy had to accept peace terms and consider them reasonable or the enemy would continue to fight. Therefore the political end state became the focal point for the use of military force. If the severity of this end state caused the enemy to continue to resist; then the planning assumption of a rapid victory would prove false and therefore impact the General Staff's campaign plan.

Since the German General Staff placed greater importance on technical proficiency and removed the soldier from the political decision making process, the army's leadership was inadequately prepared to counter Hitler's radical views on war. Until the rise of Hitler and National Socialism German foreign political decisions had not exceeded the army's capabilities. Logically this pattern led the General Staff to believe Hitler's policies would not. Additionally, the German General Staff assumed operational planning would continue to be their responsibility. Hitler's decision to remove them

from actively planning the eastern campaign gave a clear indicator of the gap between Hitler and his military.

¹Timothy A. Wray, *Standing Fast: German Defensive Doctrine on the Russian Front During World War II* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1986), 64, quoting Franz Halder, *Hitler as War Lord*. trans. Paul Findlay (London, England: Putnam, 1950), 64.

²Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, NY: Praeger 1953), 292-94.

³Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of The Prussian Army* (London, England: Clarendon Press, 1955), 482.

⁴*Ibid.*, 486.

⁵Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, NY: Praeger 1953), 299.

⁶*Ibid.*, 305.

⁷*Ibid.*, 302.

⁸*Ibid.*, 293.

⁹*Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁰United States War Department. *TM-E 30-451, Handbook on German Military Forces* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1945), 15.

¹¹Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of The Prussian Army* (London, England: Clarendon Press, 1955), 488, quoting Wolfgang Forester, *Ein General Kämpft gegen den Krieg: Aus nachgelassenen Papieren des Generalstabschefs Ludwig Beck* (München Germany, 1949).

¹²John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics 1918-1945* (London, England: ST. Martin's Press 1953), 397.

¹³Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, NY: Praeger 1953), 339.

¹⁴Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), 662.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 652.

¹⁶Ibid., 654.

¹⁷Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 77.

¹⁸*The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge, England.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 193.

¹⁹Joseph Goebbels', "*Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose*" , 18 February 1943, German Propaganda Archive, Calvin Minds in the Making, [Http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb36.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb36.htm), internet accessed 11 December 2006.

²⁰Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 201.

CHAPTER 4

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

The National Socialist movement must strive to eliminate the disproportion between our population and our area-viewing this latter as a source of food as well as a basis for power politics – between our historical past and the hopelessness of our present impotence.¹

Adolph Hitler

After the fall of France in June 1940, Hitler focused his attention on Great Britain. However, because Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill refused to surrender, the German General Staff began planning for the invasion of England. With the Heer and Luftwaffe making preparations for Operation Seelow, the code name for the invasion of England, Hitler began to look towards the Soviet Union. At Hitler's request, Commander in Chief of the Army, Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, began to examine the possibility of a military campaign against Russia. Consequently in the summer 1940 Adolf Hitler started the German Army down a road which would lead to a multi-front war between Great Britain, Soviet Union and eventually the United States.

Strategically Russia remained the only European continental power capable of resisting Hitler. He believed by eliminating Russia, Britain would have had no choice but surrender. This fact coupled with Hitler's desire to acquire living space meant a confrontation with the Soviet Union. The key issue was the timing of the Russian campaign. If Germany began an offensive against Russia without first subduing England a two-front war would result. As discussed in previous chapters the German General Staff approached the problem of a multi-front war by developing campaigns whose strategic objectives planned for the rapid defeat one enemy before focusing their efforts

on the other. Churchill's refusal to surrender indicated it would take considerable time and resources to bring Britain to the peace table. Therefore by turning their attention towards Russia and eliminating them quickly, the Wehrmacht could once again shift its focus towards Britain.

The longer Germany waited for a confrontation with the east meant more time for Stalin to build his forces. Although Hitler signed a non-aggression pact with Stalin before Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, he had no intention of honoring it. One only has to read Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* to grasp his true intentions towards the Soviet Union. Stalin's purges of his military forces and the Red Army's failure during the Russo-Finish War meant preemptive strike by Russia against Germany during 1941 was unlikely. Yet despite this Hitler feared if given time, the Soviets would launch their own offensive against Germany.

Examination of B. H. Liddell Hart's interviews with the German generals after the war suggests many of Hitler's military leaders did not share their leader's view. According to Liddell Hart the Chief of the OKH, the German General Staff, the OKW and its operation department chief did not agree with Hitler's assessment of the Soviet Union. In addition to senior leadership various unit commanders disagreed as well.

According to Field Marshal von Runstedt, Commander Army Group South:

Hitler insisted we must strike before Russia became too strong, and that she was much nearer striking than we imagined, He provided us with information that she was planning to launch an offensive herself that same summer, of 1941. For my part, I was very doubtful about this--and I found little sign of it when we crossed the frontier.²

Army leaders were not the only ones to have concerns about the Russian campaign. The Navy High Command (OKM) under Admiral Raeder also believed a

campaign against Russia should not be undertaken until Great Britain was no longer a threat. Raeder suggested Britain remain the focus of Germany's attention until she was defeated, not Russia. He also thought it was unlikely Russia would attack Germany in 1941 and that any campaign on the eastern front would only expend unnecessary resources.³ Despite the military's reservations Hitler still believed the key to defeating Britain would be the destruction of the Soviet Union. With the last continental European power capable of militarily influencing Germany eliminated, Britain would have no other choice but to negotiate for peace. Thus the next major campaign the Wehrmacht would undertake would be against the Soviet Union.

How could Germany succeed where Napoleon failed? With this question in mind the General Staff began its planning effort for Barbarossa in July 1940. Hitler initially established several key military and political objectives during a meeting with the army leadership. The military objectives consisted of defeating the Soviet Army, establishing a buffer zone for German industry and seizing vast amounts of Russian territory. The intent was to destroy Russia's ability to resist, protect German industry from air attack and eliminate the capability for Asiatic Russia to continue the war once the Germans conquered western Russia. Politically Hitler expressed the desire to establish a separate Ukraine and Baltic States under German control.⁴ The establishment of German occupational governments in the occupied territories would bring the population under control and enable the Germans to utilize the resources from those territories.

Preliminary planning for the operation fell to General Franz Halder. His initial plans focused on a quick drive to seize the Russian capital of Moscow and then subsequent operations to eliminate the Russian forces in the Ukraine and Baltic region.

He believed this would have the greatest chance for success as it would bypass the majority of the Soviet frontier defenses and cause the Red Army to fight on a reverse front.⁵ Under this framework Generalmajor Erick Marcks, Chief of Staff of the Eighteenth Army, developed an operational plan addressing five critical areas of objectives, terrain, enemy forces, operational maneuver and logistics.

Marcks' plan identified the Red Army and the Russian capital as the enemy's COG.⁶ The intent was to destroy the Red Army before it could withdrawal into the eastern hinterlands. Its destruction would eliminate the enemy's capability to resist and allow the German Army to seize Moscow. The German General Staff viewed the Russian capital as the key to Stalin's political and economic powerbase.⁷ Its capture would result in the collapse of the government and also signify the end of enemy resistance. Also since the most industrial significant areas were found in western Russia their loss would fatally disable the Russian war machine.

The vast territory and nature of Russia's geography provided unique challenges to Marcks' campaign plan. The most distinguishable among them was the terrain. (see figure 1). The predominant land feature in western Russia consisted of a large forested and swamp area known as the Pripyat Marshes. The marshes extended from the border with Poland to the Dnepr River just south of Minsk and north of Kiev. This meant any operations conducted against Russia would have to be split into at least two maneuver forces.

Army Group North would be assigned the area north of Warsaw to the Baltic Sea and Army Group South would have from Warsaw to the Black Sea. The terrain north of the marshes favored mobility while the terrain to the south was more limited due to only

one main highway leading east towards Kiev. Additionally, Russia's unimproved road network meant operations were best conducted either during the dry summer months before the rains started or after the winter freeze when the ground was solid. Since German operational doctrine focused on a quick campaign any slowdown would have a severe impact on operations.

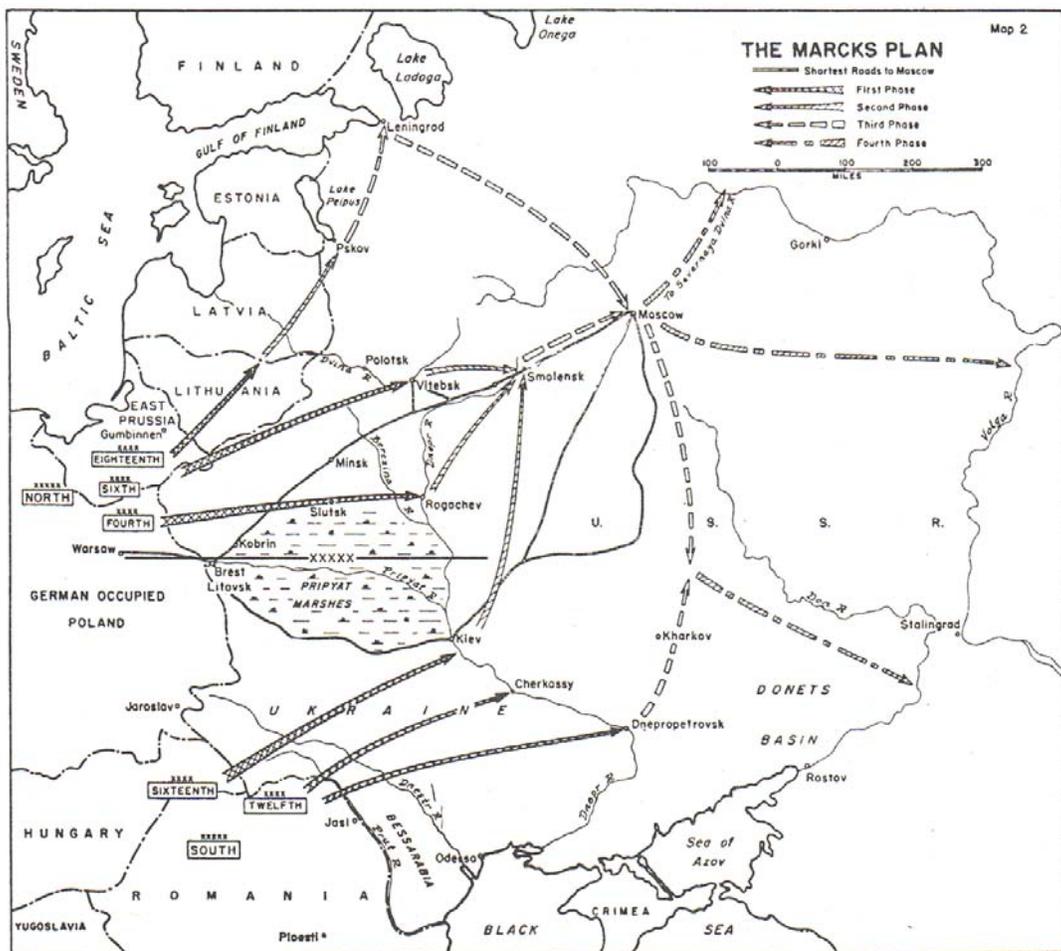


Figure 1. Marcks' Campaign Plan: Operation Barbarossa

Germany's initial assessment of the Red Army estimated their forces at 121 divisions comprised of 151 infantry, thirty-two cavalry and thirty-eight mechanized brigades.⁸ Of these forces only 147 were available on the western front facing Germany. The remainder of their forces faced Japan, Turkey, or Finland. During mission analysis the General Staff assessed the Red Army would defend western Russia due to the location of Russia's industrial centers.⁹ They would not be able to abandon them if they wished to continue the fight. Although Soviet production centers were located in the Urals, the staff assessed these were not capable of sustaining the Soviet Armed forces. According to their terrain analysis the furthest east the staff thought the enemy would withdrawal was to the Dnepr River. The river was a natural barrier to Germany's advance and therefore posed the most logical course of action for defending Russia.

The enemy's disposition of forces concentrated around three areas, north and south of the Pripyat Marshes and around Moscow. The Soviet force distributed between the Baltic States and the Ukraine was equally divided between north and south. The assessment of these forces highlighted their lack of adequate mobility and therefore could be easily destroyed once the frontier defenses had been breached. However, due to the nature of the terrain and the extensive distances, the enemy would have to be defeated in multiple operations designed to encircle and then eliminate large force concentrations.

Under Marcks' plan the German's overall main effort would be concentrated in the north to seize Moscow. Forces staged from East Prussia would breach the Soviet's initial frontier strong points and rapidly advance to capture the capital. After seizing Moscow those forces would then advance towards the south and aid Army Group South in eliminating opposition in the Ukraine. German Panzer and motorized forces would

lead the attack supported by the Luftwaffe. The infantry would follow the motorized units and complete the encirclement of Russian forces.

The plan suggested an operation with a total of 147 German divisions, of which twenty-four were panzer and twelve motorized infantry.¹⁰ Since the General Staff identified Army Group North as the main effort it had the preponderance of German forces with sixty-six percent of the assigned available forces. Each Army Group would have a limited number of reserve divisions with Army High Command retaining the bulk of them. This provided OKW the ability to shift assets to locations as needed. However this reduced the strategic depth of the Army Groups and meant the forces would quickly become diffused as the territory seized increased.

The German Luftwaffe's initial assignment was to support the Army Groups with close air support, battlefield interdiction and establishment and maintenance of air superiority.¹¹ No plan for strategic bombing was developed for the operation. This meant Russian production centers and industrial sites would remain relatively undamaged until the German Army approached them. The initial plan also assumed the Luftwaffe had sufficient assets to accomplish all of the assigned tasks and that any necessary units would be made available from the Western theater.

In order to support the two German Army Groups a logistics force was needed which could maintain sufficient supplies over vast distances. To complicate operations the German logistical tail would have to rely on poor Soviet road and rail networks which only got worse as the forces moved further and further away from their supply points. The OKH placed emphasis on keeping the Red Army off guard using special operations units to seize key bridges and rail lines before the enemy destroyed them. The General

Staff also knew the Russian rail system would have to be converted because the gauge of rail lines changed as they moved from Poland to Russia. This would certainly complicate and slow down the logistical system if the Russians managed to destroy their rail rolling stock as they withdrew.

In August as General Marcks submitted his proposal, the OKH (see figure 2) and OKW staffs submitted their own concept of operations for the conduct of the campaign. The intent was for the various staffs to validate the campaign plan through their own analysis. Although similar, the different operational concepts had two differences between them. All assessed the main effort should be focused north of the Pripyat Marshes, but the OKW/OKH plans suggested using three Army Groups instead of two. Army Group North planned to seize Leningrad in coordination with Finnish forces operating around Lake Ladoga. Army Group Center would retain the task of capturing Moscow and Army Group South would continue its planned drive on Kiev and the Donets Basin.

The other significant difference in the plans rested with the importance placed on the capture of Moscow. In the OKH's and Marcks' plan the seizure of the Russian capital was paramount. Only after its capture would forces be redirected to support other Army Group's advances into Russian territory. The attack on Leningrad would only be a secondary effort and would not draw forces from the advance to Moscow. However, the OKW did not place the same level of significance on seizing the Russian capital. Under their plan Army Group Center's advance on Moscow would only be continued if Army Group North met with success in capturing Leningrad. If Army Group North met with

stiffer resistance as the operation unfolded, than the OKW would divert forces from Army Group Center to assist.

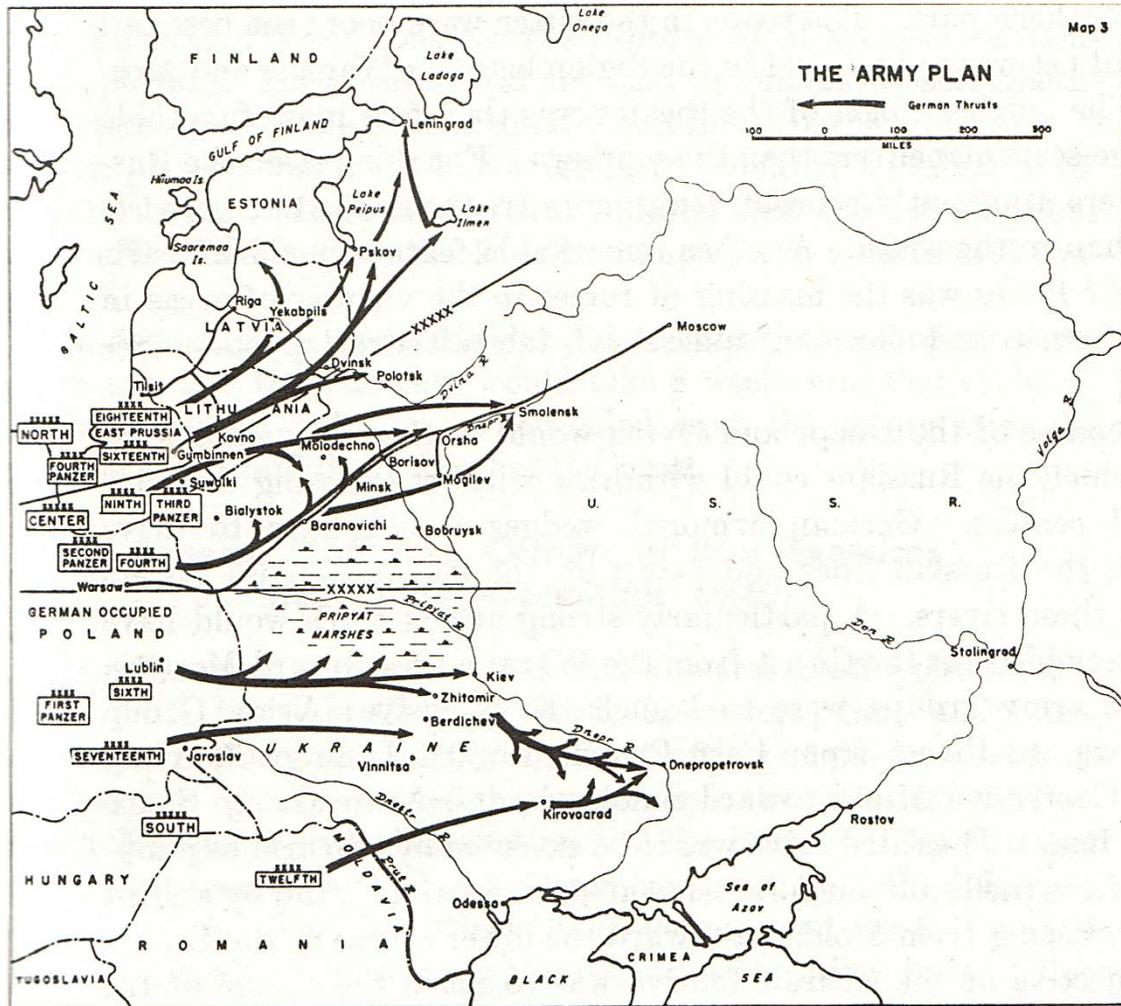


Figure 2. Army Campaign Plan: Operation Barbarossa

Also of note was the OKH's analysis of the population in the Balkan States, Ukraine, and the Caucasus regions as predominantly anti-communist. Therefore the general view of the OKH was the population could possibly support the German objective of destroying the Bolshevik regime. If proven correct this fact would help offset the Russian manpower advantage. Yet, in order for this to occur the German

forces would have to be viewed as liberators and not conquerors. The treatment of the local population by German forces would have to support this view as well in order to achieve the desired affect. However, Hitler had a different vision for the local populace and one which hampered any attempt to convince them to assist the German Army.

Of the three plans considered ultimately the OKH presented a variation to Hitler in December 1940. The proposed attack would consist of the three Army Groups suggested by the OKW/OKH however the principal objectives would be first to destroy the Red Army in western Russia and then immediately advance towards Moscow. Hitler agreed with most of the plan but shared OKW's viewpoint concerning the importance of Moscow and the decision to capture it would only be made based on Army Group North's success.

With the general outline for operations against Russia established the OKH began to war-game the campaign. Headed by General Paulus, the war-game allowed the General Staff to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the campaign plan. Staff officers openly discussed any points of interest in order to isolate problems and develop possible solutions. At the conclusion of the exercises the consensus amongst the Staffs was the eastern campaign would last no longer than ten weeks.¹²

In addition to the development and war-gaming of an operational plan, an economic survey was undertaken to study the economic aspects of the eastern campaign. The Armed Forces Economic Office under the direction of Herman Goering conducted the survey. The results of their assessment identified three key economic points that they assessed needed consideration during the campaign.

The first point was the importance of seizing Soviet supplies before they were destroyed. If the Soviets were able to destroy their infrastructure than valuable time would be wasted producing the necessary equipment required to exploit the agricultural and oil rich regions of western Russia. If seized intact, the equipment could immediately be pressed into service by the local population and used to support Germany's war effort.

The second point addressed the local populations and suggested using them to help support the German war effort. Their willing participation would become critical in order to maintain the uninterrupted flow of resources. As already discussed, Hitler expressed a desire in the planning phase to establish German controlled governments within the occupied territories. However, the details of the plan and how the population would be co-opted or coerced into aiding the Germans were not incorporated into the army campaign plans. Instead the details of soliciting the aid of the population were left in the hands of party officials.

The third point concerned the disposition of Soviet production centers within Russia. According to the survey seventy-five percent of the armament and one hundred percent of the precision-tool and optical industries were located in western Russia.¹³ This fact coupled with the predominant belief the Russians were incapable of moving the industry led to several false planning assumptions concerning Russian manufacturing.

There is no evidence the economic survey changed the operational planning considerations or even Hitler's attitude towards the campaign. Given Hitler's desires for an ideological war against the Soviet Union, consideration for the attitude of the Soviet people towards the German forces should have been considered in greater detail. If anything the economic survey strengthened the popular belief the campaign would be

short in duration due to the location of Soviet industrial centers. As a result very little emphasis went into contingency planning for any potential for the campaign to last longer than originally forecasted.

Hitler signed the final draft of Directive No. 21 on 18 December, 1940 and detailed German preparations began for Barbarossa. In the interim months until the campaign's start the German Army continued its military build up of forces in Poland and Romania. In addition German forces continued to harass British shipping in the Atlantic, invaded Yugoslavia, Greece, and Crete and assisted the Italians in North Africa.

As the Wehrmacht prepared for the eastern campaign German forces were spread throughout occupied Europe and in support of operations in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. These operations delayed the start of Barbarossa until late summer.¹⁴ As a result before the operation began the German Army ran the risk of not concluding the campaign before the onset of the difficult autumn/winter weather.

Germany launched its Russian offensive on June 22, 1941 and met with overwhelming success during the early stages of the campaign. The rapid movement of motorized forces encircled large numbers of Soviet forces. The major battles near Minsk, Kiev, Smolensk, and Briansk as well as other minor engagements resulted in the capture of over three million prisoners of war.¹⁵ However despite their early successes the Germany Army would eventually culminate outside the gates of Moscow by early December. The Soviet Government had not collapsed as predicted and the Soviet people were rallying to Stalin's call to defend the Motherland. Russian industry had been moved east due to heroic efforts by the Soviet citizenry and it continued to support the

war effort. Finally winter had set in and began to take its toll on the ill prepared German forces.

Almost every planning assumption made by the OKH staff had proven false. The war they planned on waging against Russia was not the war Hitler had created. The campaign plan called for rapid decisive engagements over an extensive distance with limited lines of communication in order to destroy the Red Army. In addition to, but separate from the operational plan, was the desire to exploit the Russian resources using the assistance of the local population. Hitler's desire for an ideological war and the military's failure to plan for it severely impacted Germany's ability to achieve its strategic goals.

A disconnect between the political and military instruments of national power resulted in several mistakes concerning key planning assumptions. There are three critical mistakes which deserve particular attention because of their connection to shaping the conflict. The staff assessments identifying the enemy's COG, the operational effect of the population, and campaign timing considerations all played a major role in Barbarossa's outcome. To complicate the situation the planning assumptions were not re-evaluated during the campaign in 1941 even when data from the front indicated the planning assumptions were incorrect.

All three German strategic surveys produced by Marcks, OKW and OKH identified the Soviet Army as the center of gravity for the Soviet Union. According to the campaign plans, defeating the Red Army before it could withdraw to the east was the highest operational and strategic consideration. During the execution of the operation

Hitler and the OKH primarily measured German success by analyzing the number of Red Army units destroyed.

Concerning a nation's center of gravity Clausewitz wrote:

One must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of those characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point at which all our energies should be directed.¹⁶

The key operational objective for each Army Group was the destruction of the Red Army within their area of responsibility (AOR). German military planners assumed by destroying the Soviet's means to resist Stalin would surrender. They had no reason to believe this approach would not produce the desired results. In Germany's previous campaigns against Poland, Belgium, and France this assumption had appeared to have been validated. However, the nature of those conflicts was far different than the nature of fighting on the eastern front. The ability of the Red Army to withstand tremendous losses and still function was its most valuable characteristic.

Despite the German Army's best efforts, they could not completely destroy the combat capabilities of the Red Army. As the Soviet Union's forces replaced losses using extensive manpower reserves, the German Army slowly exhausted theirs. This in conjunction with the ever increasing territory the Germans had to occupy and govern led to the culmination point of the German Army by the end of 1941. Also critically important to Russia's survival was the nature and character of Hitler's ideological war in the east which shifted the critical center of gravity from the Red Army to the population itself.

The Russian people became a force multiplier for the Red Army through their ability to replace troop losses. Although often ill trained, the Russian conscripts added

mass to the Soviet Army and provided them the time needed to regain the initiative. The fact these forces would suffer horrendous losses at the hands of the better trained Germans did not overly concern the Soviet High Command. Unless the Germans could neutralize the Russian population from reinforcing the Red Army they could not eliminate the enemy force. They failed to plan against the likelihood of this factor as a significant obstacle to the attainment of Barbarossa's objectives.

The second planning assumption error concerned the local population. Of all of the factors this miscalculation had the greatest impact on the conduct of operation Barbarossa. Although this impact was not immediately felt by the Wehrmacht in 1941, the implication of the actions would have long lasting strategic affects on Germany's war in Russia.

As previously discussed a critical component of the enemy's strength at first appeared to have been overlooked by the OKH, the Soviet population. By reviewing the various strategic estimates produced by the OKW/OKH it appears there were some discussions concerning the local population's importance. Specifically the OKH's plan makes note of the fact of the anti-communist attitudes within European Russia.¹⁷ It even alludes to the potential of using this attitude to help overthrow Stalin's regime once the Red Army was defeated. In Marcks' plan he stated:

A military administration would have to be set up for the occupied areas. In the Baltic States, White Russia, and the Ukraine the military government agencies would have to work toward turning their authority over to autonomous, non-communist local governments.¹⁸

This quotation at least demonstrates the desire by the initial planners to account for the population in some respect. The intention to return the territories to local self rule, albeit free from communist influences alludes to the attitude of the German military concerning

the type of war they would conduct. German planning staffs did not view the population as particularly hostile. The war the General Staff planned to wage was against Bolshevism and its armed forces, not the entire Soviet population. Mistakenly the General Staff assumed they could wage and control such a war without involving the entire Soviet Union's population base.

This attitude towards the population directly complemented Goering's economic survey report as well. As the survey illustrated the population would play a critical role in the exploitation of Russia's resources and production potential. If the Germans intended to make use of captured Russian territories the population's assistance would be needed. Although this did not seem as important in a short campaign, it would become vital in case of a long attritional one.

However, Hitler's plans for the local population removed the possibilities of gaining their support as suggested in the various surveys. His overt hatred towards Slavs and the brutality of his directives and their implementation eliminated any possibility of mass cooperation. This attitude was not effectively conveyed or seriously considered by the German military planners and therefore was not factored into the plans.

The evidence of Hitler's plans for the Soviet people can be discerned by a meeting he held in July 1941 to discuss the future for German occupied territories within Russia. In attendance were Hitler, Henrich Himmler, Reichsleiter Alfred Rosenberg, Reichsminister Lammers and Field Marshal Keitel.¹⁹ Ironically neither the Commander in Chief of the Army, Field Marshal Brauchitsch, nor any OKH representatives were present at the conference. Himmler's minutes offer a valuable look into some of the decisions Hitler made concerning the Slavic races.

Another interesting fact is the date of the meeting. The meeting was held nearly a month after the eastern campaign began and clearly shows a lack of concern connecting the military operation to German policies concerning the local population. Yet the policies developed from this meeting directly impacted the General Staff's campaign plan by shaping the nature of the conflict.

Several key passages from Himmler's minutes illustrate this point.

We will, therefore, point out we were forced to occupy, organize, and secure a territory. In the interest of the inhabitants we had to provide for law and order, food, transportation, etc. That this is a preparation for a final settlement should not be discernible. That should not prevent us from taking all necessary measures, such as shooting, exportation, etc., and we will do that, too.²⁰

Now, the Russians have issued an order to initiate partisan warfare behind our lines. This partisan warfare has its advantages for us. It gives us the possibility to exterminate anybody who opposes us.²¹

The final settlement Himmler referred to was the exploitation of the populace through deportation, forced labor and in many instances extermination. Undoubtedly this attitude would have implications for the army campaign plans and they planted the seeds of resistance within the Soviet population. This resistance formed by Hitler's policies shifted the nature of the Russian campaign. It changed the category of the German Army from liberators to conquerors and made their task all the more difficult. According to Field Marshal von Kleist:

Hopes of victory were largely built on the prospect that the invasion would produce a political upheaval in Russia. Most of us generals realized beforehand that, if the Russians chose to fall back there was very little chance of achieving a final victory without the help of such an upheaval. Too high hopes were built on the belief that Stalin would be overthrown by his own people if he suffered heavy defeats. The belief was fostered by the Führer's political advisors, and we, as soldiers, didn't know enough about the political side to dispute it.²²

Closely linked to the second, time was the third major planning assumption which proved incorrect during operations on the eastern front. The predicted length of the campaign ranged anywhere from eight weeks at the earliest and up to seventeen weeks at the latest depending on which staff survey is examined. Although eight weeks was extremely optimistic, seventeen weeks would still be a difficult challenge given the German Army's disposition in 1941.

In the time frame planned the Wehrmacht had to take and hold 2,500 miles of front, eliminate the bulk of over 200 Russian divisions and sustain its force over 800 miles from its supply points.²³ Also German authorities would have to pacify the population, establish local governments and maintain security for the army's over extended supply lines. To complicate matters military operations and local population pacification were not synchronized at either the strategic or operational levels. Despite the obvious military benefit co-opting the local population had, the SS Einsatzgruppen brutally liquidated millions of Russian citizens in their quest for racial superiority.²⁴

The German tactics within the rear exasperated the military situation on the front. As the territory the German Army seized increased so did the partisan activity. Attacks along limited lines of communications and intelligence gathering forced the Germans to detail more forces to anti-partisan duty. German forces in turn increased the brutality of their operations which further drove the population to the Soviet side.

The resources needed to pacify an area increased as German forces moved further and further in country. These considerations impacted the OKH's timetable for operations by lengthening the campaign. As had already been discussed time was a critical factor for the Wehrmacht because of the approaching winter months. As time

went on the Army Group's lack of strategic depth meant they could not recoup losses in men.

To further exasperate the problems the German Army was not equipped nor was the German economy geared to conduct an attritional based conflict lasting longer than the originally planned time frame. The decision to not provision German units with winter clothing illustrates the shortsightedness of German planners.

In December 1941 the Russian Army began its winter counteroffensive to push back the Germans from Moscow. This was not the first counter offensive from the Red Army; however it was the first which was successful. Although the Soviet counter-offensive faltered at the strategic level, this massive operation demonstrated to the German General Staff that the enemy was not going to be eliminated as easily as predicted. It would still take another three and a half years and millions more dead before the offspring of flawed German planning assumptions would storm into the ruins of Hitler's chancellery.

¹Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), 646.

²Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (New York, NY: Quill, 1979), 171.

³Department of the Army, *The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations 1940-1942* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1955), 17.

⁴Ibid., 1.

⁵Ibid., 4.

⁶Ibid., 6.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 7.

- ⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 10.
- ¹¹Ibid., 24.
- ¹²Ibid., 20.
- ¹³Ibid., 21.
- ¹⁴General Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Publishing, 1952), 151.
- ¹⁵Matthew Cooper, *The German Army 1933-1945* (Stein and Day Publishers, 1978; reprint Lanham, MD: Scarborough House/Publishers, 1990), 285-311.
- ¹⁶Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 595.
- ¹⁷Department of the Army, *The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations 1940-1942* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1955), 14.
- ¹⁸Ibid., 11.
- ¹⁹Alfred Rosenberg was a member of the Nazi Party and Hitler's Racial Policy Officer. He was designated as the Reichsminister for the Occupied Eastern Territories in Russia. Reichsminister Hans Heinrich Lammers was one of Hitler's ministers for Reich Defense and was a prominent figure in matters concerning national defense and policy issues.
- ²⁰Office of Military Government for Germany (US), Office of the Director of Intelligence, *Himmler's Files from Hallein* (Washington, DC, 1945), 1.
- ²¹Ibid., 2.
- ²²Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (New York, NY: Quill, 1979), 174.
- ²³Albert Seaton, *The Russo-German War 1941-45* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 58.
- ²⁴Ibid., 54.

CHAPTER 5

BARBAROSSA'S FALLOUT

After situation conference, farewell by the Fuehrer: My nerves are worn out, also his nerves are no longer fresh. We must part. Necessity for educating the [German] General Staff in fanatical faith in the idea. He is determined to enforce his will also in the Army.¹

Last journal entry of General Franz Halder, 1942

In September 1942, in the midst of the German summer offensive, Hitler's frustration with the course of the war resulted in the replacement of the Chief of the General Staff. The Russian campaign had continued one year longer than originally planned and indications, contrary to Hitler's insistence, showed the Russians capable of continuing the fight. Despite the professionalism and expertise of the German General Staff in operational planning the Wehrmacht was incapable of successfully accomplishing the objectives set forth in Directive No. 21. Simply put the German Army was not prepared to conduct an ideological war against Russia in June 1941. The political desires of Germany's leaders exceeded the capabilities of the German armed forces and the result led to the failure of Operation Barbarossa.

The rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party changed Germany and the General Staff failed to recognize the significance of these changes. As previously discussed in chapter two the traditional role of the General Staff between 1801 and 1888 was to provide the necessary military advice to the political leadership and experts in campaign planning.² Yet during times of war friction developed between the political and military spheres concerning their relationship with each other. The unification wars from 1864-1871 best illustrate this friction.

Bismarck's decisions during this period demonstrated the importance of close interaction between the two spheres in order to achieve Prussia's national objectives. Despite Moltke's protests, Bismarck subjected the operational objectives and military methods to achieve them to political review and correction. He insisted the military subordinate itself to the political, regardless of the impact on military operations.³

Moltke viewed military affairs as the purview of the professional soldier, not the politician. His focus remained only on the military aspects of the campaign. When asked by the Crown Prince of Prussia in 1867 about his level of knowledge concerning the current political climate of the time, Moltke responded "I have only to concern myself with military matters."⁴ This statement reflected Moltke's views concerning political and military interaction. Valuing the role of the political leadership to chart the course of the state, Moltke believed political influence should not interfere with military operations.

Bismarck recognized the potential of the military losing control of the conflict due to the introduction of technological advances such as the breech loading needle gun and steam engine. Therefore political boundaries were required to help the military maintain focus and restrict the methods used to achieve objectives. Moltke did not share this view with Bismarck and urged the Prussian Crown Prince to allow the military a free hand during the campaign.⁵ Yet despite his protest the Crown Prince followed Bismarck's recommendation and limited the military options available to Moltke. Bismarck's view on the potential of war was similar to Clausewitz's theory on the absolute nature of war.⁶

Regardless of the success Bismarck's policies had during the unification wars, Germany's military leaders continued to pursue avenues that de-emphasized political-military relations. Future Chiefs of Staff, such as Schlieffen, focused on the practical aspects of applying military power.⁷ Due to the military distancing it from the political sphere and the departure of Bismarck, Germany entered World War I with a military which had mastered the technical aspects of their profession, but did not understand political consequences.

Following the defeat of the German Empire, the General Staff had the opportunity to re-examine the lessons learned from the war. However instead, Seeckt chose to focus on the scientific aspects of warfare and not political-military relations. Seeckt's views concerning the political affiliation of his officer corps hampered any attempt to examine the military's relationship with political institutions.⁸ This resulted in neutrality of the German military during the Kapp Putsch in 1920 to overthrow the Weimar Republic and again during the rise of Adolf Hitler in 1933.⁹

In the wake of Adolf Hitler's rise to power the general staff was unprepared to challenge his policy making decisions because they lacked an understanding of the political climate. Despite the efforts of a few officers, the General Staff was incapable of persuading Hitler to change the course of his foreign policy.¹⁰ Undeterred Hitler proceeded to institute policies which led Germany to war by 1936.

The Wehrmacht's early successes during 1936-1938 strengthened Hitler's resolve and made any further attempts by the General Staff to affect national policy much more difficult. Despite the misgivings of his military leadership Hitler remained determined and began preparations to wage an ideological war against Russia.

As 1940 transitioned into 1941 the influence and importance of the German General Staff eroded. Hitler's marginalization of senior military advisors meant they did not have a significant part in plotting Germany's future. The change in the political landscape of Germany during the 1930s altered the fundamental interaction between the military and political spheres. A disconnect between desired political end state and military capabilities resulted.

Ultimately the German General Staff failed to grasp the true intent of Hitler's policies and the impact they would have on military operations. The lack of understanding of Hitler's political end state for Russia led the General Staff to make several incorrect assumptions concerning the nature of fighting on the eastern front. These false assumptions proved fatal for operation Barbarossa.

The German General Staff approached the planning for Barbarossa just as they had done with the previous campaigns against Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and France. Without considering the impact Hitler's racial policies would have on the campaign plan, the General Staff failed to assess the correct lines of operation (LOOs).¹¹ This resulted in the staff's failure to identify, and therefore target, the correct enemy centers of gravity. As a result the Wehrmacht failed to achieve strategic success during Operation Barbarossa.

Hans Delbrück best illustrated the impact of allowing a gap to emerge between desired political end states and military capabilities. In this case the gap existed between the German General Staff's perception of the conflict and Hitler's desired direction of the war. The German General Staff did not align the organization along lines which supported Hitler's ultimate strategic vision. As a result Hitler increasingly distrusted the

organization and continually replaced his most able commanders with party loyalists. The staff's historical aversion to involvement in the political sphere further alienated them from Hitler's inner circle of advisors and did not allow them to shape Germany's foreign policy.

As the campaign progressed the impact of divergent political objectives and military actions began to weaken the German forces.¹² Hitler's actions to assume the role of Commander in Chief of the Army, efforts to micromanage the war, and eventual decision to replace army units with Waffen SS stemmed from this divergence. The problem worsened as the General Staff realized the gap had formed and proceeded to plan for future operations after the failure of Barbarossa. The German General Staff's inability to align military efforts against Russia with Hitler's strategic objectives meant they would follow Napoleon's lead and grind their army to exhaustion on the eastern front.

What can our military leaders learn from the General Staff's experiences during Operation Barbarossa concerning the relationship between the military and political spheres? First the importance of identifying the intended end state, either specified or implied, is critical to achieve strategic victory. Since the political leadership defines the end state, it is the military's responsibility to understand it thoroughly. Only with a clear understanding of the national objectives can our military leaders identify the correct lines of operation to conduct military campaigns.

The German General Staff generally believed they understood Hitler's intentions for conducting operation Barbarossa. They developed a concept of operations for the eastern front based on their previous experiences in Europe and assessed the enemy's

military as the key center of gravity. However, the German General Staff failed to grasp that war in Russia would not have the same characteristics as previous conflicts therefore they needed to refine their approach to campaign planning.

In describing how the strategist should approach an operation Clausewitz wrote:

The strategist must therefore define an aim for the entire operational side of the war that will be in accordance with its purpose. In other words, he will draft the plan of the war, and the aim will determine the series of actions intended to achieve it: he will, in fact, shape the individual campaigns and, within these, decide on the individual engagements.¹³

The German General Staff should have produced a campaign plan which was “in accordance with” the purpose of the war.¹⁴ Hitler desired to wage an ideological war to fulfill his goal of gaining living space for the German people. He chose to treat the Russian population harshly and consequently eliminated any chance for them to provide assistance to the Wehrmacht. This decision in turn shaped the nature of the conflict and compelled the Russians to fight for cultural survival. This had the affect of prolonging military operations and the German campaign plan did not account for such resistance.

Clausewitz’s quotation suggests the type of war should dictate the necessary actions required to achieve victory. In this light, if the General Staff had grasped Hitler’s intent, they could have planned for an attritional based conflict. LOOs should have emphasized endurance and sustainment of forces rather than speed of maneuver and territory gained.

As our military leaders plan for future campaigns against potential adversaries the hardest question for them to answer is, “what is the desired end state?” In today’s contemporary operating environment (COE) more than ever the answer has both a political and military component. The political end state may not always be made clear

or may change during the campaign. This will affect military operations and therefore must be thoroughly understood by military planners. In addition our military leaders need to incorporate themselves into the decision making process when the political leadership is considering military action.

It is not sufficient for our military leaders to only be concerned with the application of military power. Political objectives significantly impact military operations, as the Germans discovered during Barbarossa. These political objectives can lead to failure if the military's lines of operation do not align with them. As Clausewitz wrote the desired end state will dictate the necessary actions the military must undertake in order to set the conditions for victory.

The difficulty our strategic military leaders have and the German General Staff never solved, is aligning lines of operation with the political end state. Recent military experiences during Operations Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom have proven the U.S. military's dominance during major combat operations. However, achieving success during stability operations has proven challenging for our military planners.

Stability operations are not a new form of conflict. American forces have conducted this form of warfare since the Mexican-American War 1846-48, we have just forgotten the lessons learned from them. Military leaders need to not only understand the political dynamics of the COE but also to incorporate them into campaign planning in order to achieve strategic success. This will allow them to identify the correct LOOs dictated by the nature of the conflict

Because of its size and capabilities the U.S. Department of Defense will continue to provide the bulk of assets for the war on terror. In order to gain the necessary understanding of the complex political dynamics surrounding our current fight our COCOMs need to have an active involvement in foreign policy decision making. Their expertise and knowledge in their AORs is critical to gain the necessary understanding of the political climate within the region. Furthermore our civilian leadership needs to acknowledge the importance of including them in the decision process in order to insure the desired end state does not exceed military capability.

Intangibles such as the affect of cultural and societal differences on operations are difficult to model or predict. Yet, these are the areas that can alter the nature of conflict therefore they pose the greatest challenges for our political leaders to understand when considering military action. The COCOMs have the knowledge and expertise to help mitigate these challenges.

The German General Staff neglected their responsibilities to develop the required military-political relationship to succeed on the eastern front. If our military leaders fail to develop the necessary military-political relationships and insure campaign plans support the national objectives; we run the risk of misjudging the operational environment and relearning what the German General Staff concluded in May 1945.

¹Franz Halder, *The Private War Journals of Colonel General Franz Halder*, ed. Arnold Lissance (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), 1530.

²Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, CO: Praeger 1953), 15.

³Ibid., 92.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Peter Paret et al., eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 289.

⁶Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, NY: Praeger 1953), 91.

⁷*Ibid.*, 311.

⁸*Ibid.*, 239.

⁹John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics 1918-1945* (London, England: St. Martin's Press, 1953), 87-88.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 324.

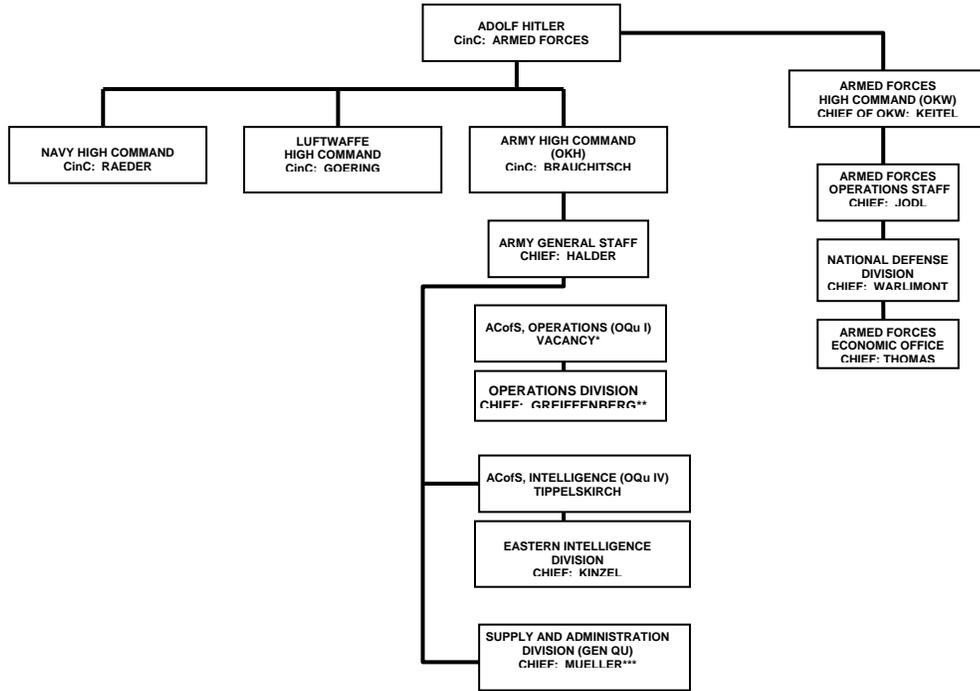
¹¹Department of the Army, *The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations. 1940-1942* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1955), 6.

¹²Franz Halder, *The Private War Journals of Colonel General Franz Halder*, ed. Arnold Lissance (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), 1274.

¹³Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 207.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

ILLUSTRATIONS



* GENERAL PAULUS WAS APPOINTED TO THIS POSITION ON 3

** AILING; REPLACED BY GENERAL HEUSINGER IN OCTOBER 1940

*** REPLACED BY GENERAL WAGNER ON 1 OCTOBER 1940

Figure 3. German Chain of Command (1 July 1940)



Figure 4. Eastern Front

GLOSSARY

Blitzkrieg	Lightning or quick war
Chef Der Heeresleitung	Chief of the Army Command
Einsatzgruppen	Para-military units under the command of the SS
Ermattungsstrategie	Exhaustion warfare or Attrition strategy
Heer	German Army
Kriegsführung	War Direction
Kriegsmarine	German Navy
Kreiskommissars	District commissioners for defense
Lebensraum	Living space
Luftwaffe	German Air force
Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei	Nazi Party
Panzer	German armored tank
Reich	Realm or empire
Reichsarchiv	Department of state archives
Reichsleiter	High political office in the NSDAP
Reichsminister	Minister position within the German political system
Reichswehr	German Military Defense Force, 1919-1935
Rüstungsamt	German War Economy and Armaments department
Rhineland	An area encompassing both west and east sides of Rhine River in Germany
Truppenamt	German Troop Office (also known as the German General Staff)

SS or Schutzstaffel	Military arm of the National Socialists Movement
Oberkommando der Heeres	German Army High Command
Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine	German Navy High Command
Oberkommando der Luftwaffe	German Air Force High Command
Oberkommando der Wehrmacht	German Armed Forces High Command
Operation Seelowe	German campaign plan to invade England
Waffen-SS	Combat arm of the Schutzstaffel
Wehrmacht	German Armed Forces

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