

Abstract: From Versailles via Paris to Moscow Strategic options and perspectives of the German Reich in the mirror of national power politics (part 1)

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A strategic-political analysis of the general set-up of the international system and of the entirety of the interweavings of the dynamic "European concert" between the First and the Second World War reveals an apparent paradox when looking at the "dark continent" in the "era of extremes": In spite of its defeat in the First World War and its political and military curtailment by the Versailles Treaty, the German Reich was able to gain a power-politically dominant position between the "Eiffel Tower" and the "Kremlin" within a period of 20 years. This position exceeded the one begun with great symbolism in the Mirror Hall of Versailles in 1871, when the German Empire was proclaimed. Against a backdrop of the search for (dis-)continuities in the foreign policy of the German Reich, it is to be demonstrated how it was able to gain a both hoped-for and feared position of leadership on the continent, although the internal and external political, idealistic and ideological basic alignments varied, and divergent security-political approaches were made use of in a dynamic environment. Complementary to this one has to ask to what extent military plannings followed the strategic options of national power politics, or whether they developed dysfunctional dynamics by fading down the necessary interlocking of political, (arms-) economic and military aspects on the substrategic-operational level. This could happen because the acceptance of a new strategic general set-up was refused the same way as the merely serving function of the military instrument, strategic "space" matters were reduced to the operational factor "terrain", war-historical "lessons learned" concepts were reduced to positive experiences, and own operational leadership behaviour superiority was set as a basic constant factor. The defeat of 1918 confirmed the conviction of the general staff that Germany could not win a prolonged war of wear and tear. Then and now the cornerstones of German military thinking were surprise, centres of gravity, encircling, annihilation, inner line, fighting in inferiority, and strategy, and later on together with the belief in the rapid winning of battles in order to dodge enemy capacities. In addition to that, the breakthrough as a prerequisite for a successful encircling, which had been vehemently disputed in the Empire, gradually moved into the focus of operational attention. Slowly one began to grasp the breakthrough, in combination with the following operational encircling, as a continuous operation. Because of the conditions of the Versailles Treaty the Reichsheer did not have the military means at its disposal, such as tanks and aeroplanes, which would have been necessary for implementing this operational way of thinking. This situation, however, was to change only a few years later.

