

2010/5/4: Moltke and Königgrätz

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In the morning of the Battle at Königgrätz on 3rd July 1866 Austria was still considered the strongest power of Central Europe, but in the evening of the 3rd July it was Prussia: „Casca il mondo“ - the world collapsed! This classic dictum of the papal minister of state Antonelli summarizes the central relevance of this decisive battle for European warfare in newer and latest history in a nutshell. The political consequences were dramatic: smashing of the German Alliance, territorial rounding of Prussia by annexations and the foundation of the North-German Alliance as a catalyst of the smaller German solution with defensive alliances with the now sovereign South-German nations - and after centuries Austria now had no governmental connection with Germany.

Bismarck and Moltke had become political and military heroes of Small-German-Prussian (military) history because of their action during the short era of the „Unification Wars“. Moltke said in the course of his famous Reichstag-Speech on 14th May 1890: „The era of cabinet wars is over (...) Gentlemen, the war may last for seven or for thirty years, - and he who sets Europe on fire, who is the first to hurl the fuse into the powder keg will be sorry“; he carried on by saying that „the existence of the Reich and maybe the survival of social order and civilization, but at least hundreds of thousands of lives were at stake.“ Critics claimed of Bismarck that he „was capable of action, but he could not create tradition, that he did not create a race of politicians matching Moltke’s officers’corpse, politicians who felt identical with the state and its new tasks.“

The concentration on brilliant operational and tactical command - virtually analogous to the industrial society characterized by division of labour - on the one hand, and the careless political leaders without any higher and integrating Grand Strategy on the other hand, finally led to the culminating catastrophe of the First World War. Whereas Bismarck succeeded in keeping the Bellona trying to achieve „absolute“ with all its destructive forces busy with two neo-absolutist cabinet wars in 1866 and 1870/71, the leading politicians of the Reich dared to „jump into the dark“. This connection which was partially consciously and unnecessarily dissolved made the separation of the military process of professionalization on both tactical and operational terrain from the politically justifiable objectives of the empire so fateful.

