

# Civil–Military Relations and Education of Military Elites: Lesson Learned from the Prussian Army

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## Abstract

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, profound political changes took place in Europe. This included a decline in the credibility given to realist theories that are based on the role of military power. These events led to reevaluation of the liberal theories of interdependence based on a minor role of military power. However, military annexation by Russia of the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine over February and March 2014 and the war on Ukraine launched by Russians, on 24 February 2022, have again emphasized a growing role of military issues in domestic and foreign policies. Thus, defining the place of soldiers in state and society and deciding the proper balance between the soldiers and civilians is not only an adequate challenge, but also a perpetual need. Analyzing traditions is always important for eliminating negative viewpoints and for fostering positive ones. The Prussian model has a lot of to say about all the above.

In this essay, I will trace the evolution of Prussian army and I will demonstrate how its politics was a decisive factor during the absolutist period (1640-1918). Furthermore, I will explain the role of the Prussian army during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933). Here, I will focus more on the critical years of 1932-1933. Finally, I will demonstrate the role of soldiers during National Socialism (1933-1945). Here, my main focus will be on the attempts of the soldiers to take control of the nation in July 1944.

**Keywords:** Prussian Army, Military Education

## 1. Prussian Army during the Absolutism Period (1640-1918)

After the decline of the Holy Roman Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia emerged as the dominant power in central Europe. The Knights of the Teutonic Order Germanized Prussia during the fourteenth century. In the sixteenth century, the Hohenzollern Dynasty that ruled Brandenburg and made Berlin its residence was able to win control over West Prussia, Silesia, and much of the Rhineland and Westphalia.

When the Great Elector, Frederick William assumed the throne in 1640, he was confronted with difficult conditions. Not only Brandenburg was still under foreign occupation, but also country was impoverished (Clark 2006, p. 42). Moreover, the Great Elector understood that the Hohenzollerns could not protect their heritage by continuing to depend upon diplomatic alliances. He recognized that a standing army with an elite officer corps was the key to the development of a powerful state in his remote parts of the Empire (Craig 1955. p. 2). The creation of disciplined fighting force became one of the obsessing preoccupations of his reign. Armaments and tactical training were made based on the best Europeans models placing the Brandenburg army on the forefront of European military innovation (Clark 2006, p. 42).

However, the problem of creating a standing army was closely intervened with politics because the Elector was dependent upon the Estates for the required funds for paying his troops. He eliminated unruly elements from his existing force in exchange of support from the Estates. Thus, the Estates, “grateful for the relief from military anarchy, proved willing to supply the funds necessary to keep this force equipped and even to increase its number” (Craig 1955. p. 3). Moreover, the commissioners for war and finance played a crucial role in developing central power in the administrative level because the general commissioner for war as the highest authority of commissioners was not only the highest civil administrator of the army, but also the supervisor of the fiscal administration of the estates. Therefore, the centralized structure of commissions was an important factor helping the central power in Brandenburg-Prussia to defeat the centrifugal tendencies of the estates. In 1653, the Great Elector was able to obtain the fiscal rights over the local serfs making possible the knowing to some extent of the authority of the estates but weakening the resistance of the feudalism against the Prussian absolutism (Hippler 2008, p. 119). Due to such policies over the Estates, the Elector was able, by 1672, to build a military establishment of 12000 men with the colors (Craig 1955. p. 5).

After 1672, it was the wars between the European Powers that enabled the Elector to expand his army through subsidies, which he exacted from those who wished to ally with him. It is important to emphasize that the Elector, besides radical changes to the old mercenary system, tried to alter the mental outlook of his officers and to persuade them to think of themselves as servants of the state (Craig 1955. p. 7).

The Great Elector’s son (r.1688-1713) recognized the army as the bulwark of his authority. In 1701, when he became King of Prussia, he tried to set up a militia but was confronted with the resistance of the aristocracy and he was not able to build such militia throughout the country remaining the establishment of it in the royal domains (Hippler 2008, p. 119). The Great Elector’s grandson, the Prussian King Frederick William I (r. 1713-1740), following in the steps of the Great Elector, believed that the number of troops he could maintain determined the international position. Thus, Frederick William I more than double the size of his professional army and added a trained reserve of conscript peasantry, forming one of the most efficient fighting units in eighteenth century Europe. He abolished the existing militia organization and decreed the establishment of the principle of universal liability to military service (Craig 1955. p. 9). His efforts to regulate the recruiting procedure concluded with the establishment of the Prussian canton system (Hippler 2008, p. 122).<sup>1</sup> The main innovation of the canton system was the shifting of the personal power relationship between lord and serf toward a structural framework of state controlled. During the reign of the second King of Prussia the armed forces advanced further the processes of administrative centralization and monopolization toward the construction of a Prussian absolutism and, therefore, shaping the structural foundations of Prussia’s constitution as a military state (Hippler 2008, p. 120).

On the other hand, following the reconciliation of the nobility, with the compromising way of his grand father, Frederick William I gains the support of the wealthy landed aristocrats, known as Junkers. Junkers service in the officer corps gave them an aristocratic status. Thus, the canton system and the mobilization of the nobility gave the army a national basis, which it did not have before.

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<sup>1</sup> Peasants, afraid of recruitment, tried to emigrate. The monarchy was forced to react when emigration took a massive form because the depopulation endangered the foundation of the Prussian economy which was mainly based on agriculture. Therefore, unauthorized emigration was outlawed and the *Kanton system*, an empirical combination of the two administrative procedures of enrolment and furlough, was set up.

The next Prussian king, Frederick II (r. 1740-86), known as Frederick the Great, launched a series of wars between 1740 and 1763. These wars proved the army effective for the purpose for which it had been forged. The achievement of the army effected a fundamental change in the European balance of power and established Prussia as a Great Power (Craig 1955. p. 14).

However, the creation of an army capable of providing Prussia with an international status was made only by subordinating the institutional framework as well as economic and social activity to the needs of the army. Thus, created to serve the army, the civil service was governed in accordance with military principles of disciplines. It is understandable that this process required a high degree of centralization. The rigid social stratification and a centralized administration prevented the development of individual initiative and killed energies which might have served the state (Craig 1955. p. 18). It seems that the army was the principal obstacle to development of the energies of the middle and lower classes.

The feeling of superiority was the main reason that even the French revolution failed to be instructive for Prussia. However, the French victories demonstrated the demands of considering a military Enlightenment, which frames a feeling attachment of soldiers to the nation (Hippler 2008, pp. 134-135). The failure to reform and the lack of preparedness after the death of Frederick II, in 1786, led to the army's defeat by Napoleon's forces at Jena in 1806 (Craig 1955. p. 24). The defeat of the army in the battlefield being accompanied with the collapse of military structures and surrendering of fortresses without any resistance shaped the defeat at Jena not only as a military, but also as a moral and political one making clear that the new order had defeated the old regime (Hippler 2008, p. 163).

The apathetic acceptance of defeat was overcome due to the work of Prussian reformers. General Gerhard von Scharnhorst and Baron von Stein, in the years between 1807 and 1813, guided the revitalization of the army and filled "the gulf which existed between the state machine and Prussian people" (Craig 1955. p. 38). Thus, the reformers wanted to break up the old absolutist system, which impeded the exploitation by the state of the social and psychological energies of Prussian society (Abenheim 1988, p. 21). Scharnhorst's intellectual, political and military contributions as a leading figure of a group of reformers in the reorganization of the Prussian Army brought about not only the liberation of Prussia from French domination, but also even the recovery of the Prussia dominant position amongst European states (Schoy 2005, p. 1).

One of the most successful aspects of the Scharnhorst's work was the reform of the officer corps to open them to talented members of the middle class and to make educational qualification the decisive fact in securing a commission. This was essential for preparing officers of superior character and intellect (Schoy 2005, p. 20). The same philosophy was applied by Stein in the reforms of civil government. These reforms were received with favor by the general public and helped reduce the popular bitterness against the state and the army which had been so strong after Jena (Craig 1955. p. 50).

Referring to the technical innovations of the reformers, the most important achievement was the establishment of a new Ministry of War in March 1809 (Craig 1955. p. 52). Thus, military affairs would be integrated with the other aspects of state administration. "This, the reformer believed would also hasten the day when the gulf between the army and civil society would be bridged." (Craig 1955. p. 53).

The reorganized army proved itself at the battle of Leipzig in 1813 and again at Waterloo in 1815. The popular enthusiasm with which these wars were supported was a test of Stein's reforms too. Thus, it

was the army which made possible the recovery of the Prussian status as a Great Power. Nevertheless, the conservatives who believed that the civil and military reform would lead to a destruction of the monarchy regarded these innovations with horror. In the beginning they were powerless but the change of the king's feelings towards reformers in 1815 gave them an upper hand. In fact, it was the international system that shaped a critical attitude of the king towards reformers who embraced nationalistic spirit and championed German unity (Craig 1955. p. 66). The schemes for unifying Germany aroused unfavorable comment abroad. Austria, Russia, and Britain grew increasingly cool toward Prussia. Wishing to retain the friendship with the other rulers, Frederic William became increasingly critical of Gneisenau and his disciples.

From 1814 to 1819, the reaction moved gradually towards triumph. However, in the beginning, the Minister of War, Herman von Boyen, succeeded over the campaign of the conservatives to abolish the Landwehr and to terminate universal conscription. It was the debate over the so-called Carlsbad Decrees<sup>2</sup> that completely shifted the attitude of the king in favor of the conservatives (Craig 1955. p. 73). Opposing the Carlsbad Decrees, Boyen lost his confidence in the king. Conservatives seized the moment and double their attacks upon the Landwehr, with the intention of goading Boyen into some new indiscretion (Craig 1955. p. 74). Thus, conservatives not only exploit successfully the inefficiency of the Landwehr due to the financial restriction, but they also took advantage of the fact that its leaders possessed a nationalistic spirit that might involve Prussia in war with other German states. They persuaded the king to put the Landwehr under reorganization. This reorganization from the Boyen perspectives marked the beginning of the end for the Landwehr. Boyen conception of the enlightened citizen soldier was replaced with the concept of soldiers who focus solely on military matters. Thus, the progress temporally achieved between the army and civilian society was reversed (Craig 1955. p. 75).

Trying to secure a political reform that would have an outcome toward representative institutions, the reformers met forces which proved too strong for them. "Their efforts precipitated a full-scale constitutional crisis which put an end to their influence in the state and delivered Prussia into the arms of reaction" (Craig 1955. p. 71).

The fall of the reformers was succeeded by a period during which the army became the target of popular resentment and during which the plan for a national representative body was replaced with the old provincial estates. In the period between 1819-40, all the efforts of the reformers to reconcile the soldiers with civilian society were destroyed. Thus, the army became again the main barrier to social progress (Craig 1955. p. 81).

The second constitutional battle came in 1848. Popular uprising resulted from the unwillingness of the new monarch, Frederic William IV, to fulfill the expectation which he had aroused. Demands for a new and more meaningful community came from the middle and lower classes. The emigration, the industrial revolution, the conquest of time and space, increased the availability of knowledge and information (Schulze 1996, p. 148). All these factors required fundamental changes. The absolutist government was not able to deal with the situation. This led finally to a revolution in Berlin on 18 March 1848.

The sharp deterioration of the situation in Berlin, persuaded Frederick William to sign in the night of 17 March a document, which, among the others, made clear the king decision to grant a constitution to

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<sup>2</sup> These decrees designed to put an end to revolutionary agitation in all German states.

the nation. One day later, on March 18, the decision of the King was announced from the balcony overlooking the Palace Square by the Prime Minister von Bodelschwingh which made clear that: "The King wishes that a constitution on the most liberal basis should encompass all the German lands" (Clark 2006, p. 311).

The army played a crucial role during the turmoil of 1848. General von Pfuell, who was the governor of the capital and he was also in charge of the whole troops in and around Berlin was in favor of political concessions (Clark 2006, p. 310). However, the political and military leaders were quarrelling with each other for the way how to proceed. The climax was achieved when the chancellor of Austria toppled down after two days of popular disorders in Vienna. Events in Austria influenced the staff around the king to push him for concessions. Even though the king declared, on March 17, the abolition of censorship and a constitutional system for Prussia, the decision for a big rally, in the Palace Square, on March 18 was made (Clark 2006, p. 311). Deteriorating of the situation pushed the king to order pulling of the troops out of the city, therefore, putting himself in the hands of revolution. Such order of forcing troops to withdraw was the most frustrating order that the Prussia army had felt since the defeat at Jena (Clark 2006, pp. 311-312). It was the withdrawal of the troops from the city, on 19 March, which placed the party of constitutional reforms in effective control of events (Craig 1955, p. 82).

Bearing in mind the importance of the army for securing position, the liberals worked to restrict the royal power over the armed forces and to transform the army into an institution with loyalty toward constitution, which they had undertaken to create. The liberals failed to shape the position of the king and the army because of their ineffective work assembly and the ability of conservatives to recover (Schulze 1996, p. 211).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Frederick William considered, like his predecessors, the personal command over the army as an essential attribute of his sovereignty and, therefore, he made clear his unwillingness to make concessions on this issue (Clark 2006, p. 315).

Although the king had intimated publicly that the army would take an oath to the constitution, it was the widespread reaction in military circles that left the army subject only to the king's control (Clark 2006, p. 113).<sup>4</sup> The violent clash on 31 July, in the Silesian town over erratic orders of a local commander resulted in the death of 14 civilians. A motion was prepared for the National Assembly to shape the actions of the officers and soldiers in conformity with the constitution. The national Assembly passed the motion with a substantial majority (Clark 2006, p. 316). The army furious criticism influenced the king to make a policy that concluded on 9 November in a decision to suspending the assembly's meetings until 27 November (Clark 2006, pp. 317-318). A month later the king gifted a constitution which had been passed in silence the critical question of the role of the army in the state. The army reaction influenced the king again and the revised constitution of 1850 left the army subject only to the king's control (Dolman 2005, p. 140).

The events of 1848 further divided the army from civilian society. The officer corps was humiliated on 19 March in Berlin and this had a great impact on their future aggressive relations with civilians. The fear of another revolution influenced the officers to regard the army primarily as a domestic police force.

<sup>3</sup> The liberals also embracing nationalism tried to establish a German nation-state in the form of greater Germany. This attempt failed because of fear for an intervention from the Powers.

<sup>4</sup> On July 1848 a group of officers found a Journal called *Deutsche Wehrzeitung*, with the purpose to combat those who wanted to separate the king with the army.

The second phase of the struggle begun in 1848 restarted in 1860. Taking into consideration the growth of national population due to the impact of industrialization and the dangerous state of international relations (Schulze 1996, p. 215),<sup>5</sup> the prince regent ordered his ministers to submit to parliament a bill aimed at expanding and reforming the army. The evolution of the army reform bill was characterized by a remarkable amount of quarreling within the higher levels of the army. The Ministry of War prepared some proposals making possible an expansion and rejuvenation of line and Landwehr. He also suggested reducing the term of service from three years to two (Craig 1955, p. 139). The ministry's proposals clashed with the main principles of Roon's memorandum (Craig 1955, p. 140).<sup>6</sup> From the Roon's viewpoints, the Landwehr was a false political and military institution that ought to be dismantled and absorbed by the line army. The new Minister of War understood that the Roon's ideas, if implemented, would separate the army from the country.

Being under the influence of Edwin von Manteuffel, the chief of the military cabinet, and from the necessity to expand the army due to the outbreak of the Italian War, the prince regent decided in September 1859 to bypass the Ministry of War (Craig 1955, p. 140). He appointed a special military commission, led by Roon, to prepare a draft of a reform bill. Considering the Landwehr as one of the last remaining achievements of the reform period, the liberals were determined to refuse the bill. In an attempt to put an end to the constitutional dispute, the king called to office Otto von Bismarck in September 1862.

Bismarck's plans to transform Germany into the strongest power in Europe required the resources of the middle class and the courage and professionalism of the officer corps. The implementation of his policy realized a liberal defeat without a retreat to a system of complete absolutism (Craig 1955, p. 173).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Bismarck's determination not to deliver himself to the hands of the reactionary party excluded the possibility of resorting to a domestic Putsch and of seeking to destroy the parliament (Craig 1955, p. 161).

In the wars against Denmark, Austria, and France, in the 1860s, Bismarck fought against the tendency of army's leaders to regard war as their province. It was the Danish war in which for the first time the Prussian politicians exercised control over the military. During this war, Bismarck made clear to army leaders the strong linkage between the evolution of the conflict and the objectives of diplomacy (Clark 2006, p. 346). During these wars, Bismarck seemed to understand Clausewitz's ideas—that the political leaders must determine the objectives of war and exercise the overall direction of its course—better than the soldiers (Craig 1955, p. 181). Bismarck's attempts to establish the principle of civilian responsibility can be seen in his series of disputes with the Chief of Staff, Helmuth von Moltke. Moltke's viewpoint was determined by the concept that once mobilization for war had begun “neither diplomatic negotiations nor political consideration should impede military progress” (Craig 1966, p. 122).

During the Austrian war the chief quarrel between Bismarck and Moltke was related to Moltke's insistence to put borders for politics. He shared the idea that the politics were to be decided before the beginning and after the ends of hostilities, but not in between (Craig 1955, p. 196). Moltke's golden solution was a clear division of function between the politicians and strategists. It is clearly

<sup>5</sup> The victories of French armies and Piedmont at Magenta and Solferino led on 11 July 1859 to the preliminary peace of Villafranca, by which Austria ceded Lombardy.

<sup>6</sup> Being in term of intimacy with the prince regent, Roon sent to him a memorandum in July 1858.

<sup>7</sup> Manteuffel's insistence to undermine the Bismarck's efforts to reach an understanding with the chamber determined Bismarck to secure his removal from Berlin.

understandable that Bismarck's policy during the Austria war—to persuade king to negotiate peace after Napoleon's acceptance of Prussia's acquiring a list of territories—was completely against soldier's viewpoints.

The gradient of soldiers' resentment against Bismarck achieved the highest point during the Franco-Prussia war. In this war, as in all his previous wars, Bismarck was focused on the international situation. His main concern was to avoid the intervention of the other powers before his political fruits had been guaranteed. Thus, after the battle of Sedan and the capitulation of the French emperor, the main problem for Bismarck was finding a capable government in Paris to negotiate peace and to make the essential territorial cessions (Craig 1955, p. 206). Bismarck's efforts to negotiate with Bonaparte were undermined by army leaders. Being uncompromising on the idea of a clear separation between politics and strategy, Moltke regarded matters of Metz's capitulation as his own sphere of competence (Craig 1955, p. 207).<sup>8</sup> Bismarck, who was familiar with Clausewitz's idea of war as an extension of politics with violent means was convinced for the importance of civilian leadership over the military while Moltke insisted on the fact that "in the time of war the military needed to be unencumbered by political constraints" (Dolman 2005, p. 142).

Deterioration of the relations between Bismarck and Moltke reached the climax in the acrimonious dispute over the nature of terms for the surrender of Paris in 1870 (Craig 1955, p. 123). Even though the king in the previous disputes was more supportive toward Moltke, he reversed his position and admitted that this was a matter in which Bismarck's views should prevail. The Chief of the General Staff was unprepared to accept Bismarck's new role. In his memorandum, sent to the king, Moltke made clear that "up till now I have assumed that, especially in time of war, the Chief of the General Staff and the Federal Chancellor are equally competent and mutually independent under the direct command of Your Royal Majesty" (Craig 1955, p. 123). The long period of peace that followed the French war demonstrated that the Moltke's claim was valid.

Taking into consideration the army's victories, which established the second German empire, it is not difficult to understand that the army considered itself as the true embodiment of the national interest. Thus, soldiers considered themselves to be better qualified than civilians to deal with the nation's issues in the military sphere as well as in domestic and foreign ones. Even though the civilian Ministers of the period between 1871-1918 opposed this idea, military leaders succeeded in subordinating all civilian policy-making agencies to its control. In this period, the General Staff pursued two main policies that were successful in countering the liberal democratic goals. First, the general staff was able even with the Kaiser to influence legislature for transferring military matters from the Ministry of War to General Staff. Second, the process of officer selection was shape in a way that picked up those citizens which were loyal to conservative and absolutist ideals (Dolman 2005, p. 143).

In fact, the civil-military relations of the second German empire are very complex. A way to illustrate them is by tracing the relations between the Chancellor and the Chief of the General Staff. Being fully committed to the principle that "the maintenance of monarchical government in Germany depended on the royal power of command being kept free of important restrictions...." Bismarck—worried by the growth of the opposition parties and the rise of the socialism—took the gravest possible attitude toward the Reichstag outburst in 1883 (Craig 1966, p. 125). He responded positively to the proposal of General von Albedyll, the Chief of the Military Cabinet, for relieving the parliamentary situation. The main proposal of Albedyll was to reduce the competences of the War Minister's Office. He further

<sup>8</sup> Bismarck wanted to use the only remained organized force in Metz to support Bonaparte.

suggested that the General Staff be freed completely from War Ministry control (Craig 1966, p. 125). Thus, being responsible only to the emperor, the Chief of General Staff became a potential competitor to the Chancellor in policy matters. Sometime in 1887, during the Bulgarian crises, Bismarck understood his error of 1883 (Craig 1966, p. 127).<sup>9</sup>

During the Second German empire, the soldiers gradually dominated domestic and foreign politics. This domination achieved its climax in the First World War. “In the July crisis of 1917, they claimed the right to demand the resignation of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg because of his views on policy matters” (Craig 1966, p. 129). Thus, at the end of the war the constitutional issue was buried.

## **2. Prussian army during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933)**

As we have seen, the role of the Prussian army during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was crucial to eliminating what can be considered a minimal control of civilians over the military. Even though army did not avoid in 1848 the announcement of the constitution—which recognized the parliamentary responsibility to control the budget—it was able until 1918 to block the parliamentary control over military.

After the monarchy collapsed in 1918, it was normal to expect that the liberals would place effective constitutional limitations upon the military establishment. However, the professional army was able to survive due to a deal with the leaders of the new republic because the birth of republican Germany did not come from a well-organized revolutionary movement. It was more the pressure from outside as the desire to comply with President Wilson’s requirements for peace, and to some extent the fear of Bolshevism, that influenced those in power to move toward regime changing (Wheeler 1961, p. 19). In fact, the revolutionary movement during the winter of 1918 was unstable and internally divided into three groups composed by the largest social democrats, more in the left were Independents SPD and on the extreme were the Spartacists (Clark 2006, p. 403). Therefore, from the beginning, the republican government was faced with revolutionary disturbances and others handicaps. Extreme leftists considered it a bourgeois democracy and called for a proletarian revolution. For those on the right, it was very hard to forget the Hohenzollern dynasty of Prussia, under which the country was united into an empire, and, thus, for them the revolution was disloyalty. The soldiers pretended that the army had not been defeated in the field but had instead been stabbed in the back on the domestic front by the politicians. Considering also the impact of the Versailles treaty—which made the republic liable for reparations to the victors, it is understandable that the republic was very unpopular. Thus, the republican government needed army support for protection against disturbances (Wheeler 1961, p. 20).

Even though the majority of officers were against any compromise with the republican government, the wisdom of the military leaders not only saved the professional army but also gave her the advantage to continue in the old tradition of avoiding parliamentary control. The first quartermaster general, Wilhelm Groener, calculated that being in an insecure position, the republican government would welcome an offer for military support. On the other hand, the officer corps needed governmental authority. This was important for keeping authority over the troops of soldiers’ councils. That being the case Groener, on the night of 9 November, made a telephone call to the new Chancellor of the Reich, Friedrich Elbert (Craig 1955, p. 348). During the call, Groener admitted a conditional recognition of the new regime from the army. Asking for government support in maintaining discipline in the army, Groener offered the army’s aid to the government primarily to combat bolshevism (Wheeler 1961, p.

<sup>9</sup> When Bismarck was trying to avoid the possibility of an Austria-Russia war (which would involved Germany), Bismarck discovered that the General Staff sought to convince the emperor for the necessity of war against Russia.

21). However, the pact was threatened very soon. On 12 December under the pressure of the executive committee, the cabinet issued a decree for the formation of a republican civil guard (Craig 1955, p. 349). Four days later the first national congress of soldiers passed a program, known as Hamburg Points, calling for truly revolutionary policy. The fact that the congress voted this program provoked army reaction. Army leaders forced Elbert to promise that Hamburg Points would not be applied in the field army (Craig 1955, p. 353). Even though the pact of Elbert with Groener was shaped as an alliance of equals only in a couple of days the General Staff was beginning to pressure the government (Wheeler 1961, p. 28). As Groener has accepted “he and Ebert were also agreed on the desirability of getting rid of the Independent Socialists from the Government and of eliminating the Soldiers’ and Workers’ Councils from any position of influence” (Wheeler 1961, p. 25).

Going on with a tit-for-tat relationship, the independent socialists incited the soldiers’ and sailors’ councils in Berlin. It was the end of cooperation between the Spartacists and the Independents, which gave time to the Supreme Command to recover. They successfully cracked down the risings of the Spartacists from 10 January until March (Craig 1955, p. 384). After this, Elbert was able to draft a democratic constitution for Germany. The other partner, Groener, was able to manage the army organization far away from the Hamburg Points. Thus, although the law passed on 6 March 1919 called for an army built on a democratic basis, he applied it in a form which preserved the imperial officer corps (Craig 1955, p. 362). Exploiting the 9 November pact, the army was able in a republican form of government to keep the same social composition of the officer class.

It was the peace terms of the Versailles treaty that influenced the officer corps to break the pact made by Groener on 9 November 1918. At the Treaty of Versailles, participants such as France and Great Britain could not shake the fact that World War I had turned into a zero-sum war. The victors required massive reparations from Germany, including the reduction of the German army up to 100 000 men (Craig 1955, p. 374). It is understandable that the treaty terms gave rise to a movement in the officer corps in favor of rejection of the treaty regardless of the consequences. Calculating that this attitude could break out in conflict and destroy the officer corps, Groener encouraged the acceptance of the treaty’s terms. However, when Army Minister Noske ordered the General von Luttwitz to implement the obligations of the Versailles Treaty the general refused brutally and asked not only for new elections but also for placing himself in the command of the German army (Clark 2006, p. 406). Luttwitz was dismissed from the active army and he, two days after dismissal, launched a putsch in cooperation with the ultra-nationalist activist Wolfgang Kapp (Clark 2006, pp. 406-407). The object of this putsch was to overthrow the existing Berlin government and to refuse the treaty’s terms. The main problem of the generals was their unpreparedness to defend the Republic against attacks from the right. Thus, Seect, chief of the Truppenamt, followed a policy of ‘wait and see’ (Craig 1955, p. 378). While Kapp was able to take Berlin, the government appealed to the workers to defend the Republic. The general strike that followed was the decisive factor in defeating the Putsch.

The Kapp Putsch was a clear demonstration that German military was not equipped with a political program, and, therefore not prepared to take over the government. From the Kapp Putsch the German Army leaders learned the lesson that, “to achieve their aim of reestablishing Germany as a strong military power, they must work through and not against the Republic” (Wheeler 1961, p. 82).

It was the threat from the left that again saved the army from the Elbert government’s retaliation. The period from the Kapp putsch until 1928 can be summarized as the efforts of military leaders to make the Reichswehr an efficient military force. By an adroit combination of passive resistance to, and

skillful evasion of, the restrictive clauses of the Versailles Treaty, the army was able to transform itself into a force which, in quality at least, had no equal in Europe (Craig 1955, p. 382). This transformation of the Reichswehr may be attributed in a great extent the effort of the new chief of the army, Hans Von Seeckt. In building the new structure of Reichswehr, which lasted for six years, Seeckt was encouraged in holding the old traditions.

Referring to the army relationship with the state, Seeckt kept the idea of the army's loyalty to the permanent state. In the era of civil-military relations, Seeckt shared the old idea that the army as a whole had a right to intervene in both domestic and foreign politics. He was very clear for the role of the Army within the state. Seeckt defined the Army as the State within the State (Wheeler 1961, p. 87).

As far as the relations of army with politics, Seeckt shared the same idea as Clausewitz for placing the military on an advisory role. However, facing a new political ambient, Seeckt deviated from the principle of political control. "Seeckt, a monarchist and professor and soldier, had to protect the army's interests in the politically unfamiliar and (among the parties of the left) anti military surroundings of the Weimar Republic". Seeckt, being committed to the state as a whole, but not to Chancellor or cabinet, found it impossible to reconcile Clausewitz theory with army's institutional practices.

The most effective aspect of Seeckt's plan to build the army of the future was his ability to exploit the fruits of industrialization progress and to put the army's development under this rhythm. It was important in his view for the army to engage in joint planning with industry so that mass production of approved weapons materials could be begun at the strategically proper moment (Craig 1955, p. 406).

The army was not affected by the Seeckt's fall. Even though during the debate on the military budget in March 1928 several socialist deputies emphasized the necessity of civilian control over the military, it was political and electoral problems that dominated the issues of army reforms. Thus, the army continued to run its affairs without civilian interference.

The crush of the stock market in the United States at the end of 1929 had a decisive impact on reviving political and economic problems in Germany. Nationalism as a good hunter of economic depression grew rapidly under the flag of National Socialism. On the other hand, the communists became more active on a national scale. "In the face of this threat from left and right, the moderate parties showed no ability to cooperate ... Under the double stress of its economic and its political troubles, the Reich in the early 1930's seemed to be on the point of disintegration or total collapse" (Craig 1955, p. 427).

Taking into consideration the soldier's traditions to regard themselves as the protectors of the Reich, it is not difficult to understand the active involvement of the army leaders in the internal politics of the state. Among the army leaders' numerous interventions in internal politics, the most important for our purposes are the repudiation of Groener's efforts against National Socialism, and their activities during the critical years of 1932-33. Groener and other senior officers of the Reichswehr were clear that National Socialism wanted to destroy the present structure of the state and to replace it with a sort of dictatorship (Wheeler 1961, p. 212). Analyzing the political situation, Groener concluded that National Socialism was a much more dangerous force than communism.

It was the desire of the President and the political climate that determined the appointment of Groener as the Reichswehr Minister. Having a high opinion of von Schleicher's political intelligence, Groener appointed him head of the newly created mediating body between the armed services on the one hand and the Reich's Ministries and the political parties on the other (Craig 1955, p. 431). However, the SA (Storm Troopers or Brownshirts, a paramilitary organization whose methods of violent intimidation

played a key role in Hitler's rise to power) question which, by widening the breach between the Reichswehr and the civilian authorities precipitated not only Groener's fall, but also the collapse of the Brüning government as a whole. SA represented a danger for the Reich and, therefore, the Groener as an educated soldier was fully convinced for his mission to protect the Reich. Being Minister, Groener realized that the best way to dissolve the SA was via a Reich decree. One of the main reasons that impeded Groener from implementing earlier the dissolution of SA was the attitude of officers. Realizing that dissolution would arouse criticism inside the army, Groener spent a lot of energy to neutralize such a criticism (Wheeler 1961, p. 222). He found as the best alternative working to persuade the Allied Powers for the concession to Germany of a measure of rearmament, together with the right of supplementing the existing Reichswehr with a militia of some 200 000 men (Wheeler 1961, p. 229). Increasing the size of the army and basing it on the principle of universal service, Groener thought to create a structure for attracting the youth of Germany. This new body should replace the Nazi para-military formations (Wheeler 1961, pp. 228-229). Waiting for a positive answer from the Powers, Groener planned to extend the Hindenburg's mandate, which ended in March 1932. Yet, he was sure that the new election would involve the nation in widespread disorders and might bring Hitler to power (Craig 1955, p. 444). The possibility of Hitler winning the presidential office strengthened Groener's feeling that the Reichswehr must be secured against the SA before Hitler's victory. However, he did not make up his mind because he still hoped for a support from abroad which would greatly facilitate his actions.

It was the pressure of the Prussian and Bavarian leaders and a lot of facts that the Prussian police possessed that incited Groener to present and approve in government a decree of SA prohibition (Wheeler 1961, p. 239). Groener was confident that he was acting for the best interests of the Reichswehr. He thought that the responsible Reichswehr leaders could better evaluate the threat of the SA to the state than Hitler's promises.

Besides the dirty game played by Schleicher against Groener, in the question of the SA (Wheeler 1961, pp. 240-241), the army commanders showed that it was something strange for them to obey their civilian chiefs. When Groener approved by the Cabinet the decree, on April 13, 1932 for the suppression of the S.A., von Schleicher started to build up deals with the main Nazis prominent chiefs, "whom he assured on April 22 that he had always disapproved of the decree of dissolution" (Wheeler 1961, p. 242).

Incredibly upset by the von Schleicher treason, Groener, without any possibility of receiving any support from President Hindenburg had no option but to resign. After Groener resignation Schleicher told the President that Brüning no longer enjoyed the confidence of the army. Therefore, the Chancellor was dismissed as his Reichswehr Minister (Craig 1955, p. 453).

The main conflict between Groener and Schleicher was in when and how to deal with Hitler. From Schleicher viewpoint it was more important in the beginning to reduce the Social Democrats to impotence and after that to act against the Nazis. On the other hand, considering Hitler as a putative Messiah for a large number of people, Schleicher thought that the best way to deal with him was not to attack directly. One of the Schleicher reasons for precipitating Brüning's fall was his belief that the Chancellor had made a mistake in trying to destroy Hitler by a direct attack, and that this had contributed to Hitler's success in the state elections of 24 April 1932 (Craig 1978. p. 560). From Schleicher viewpoint, an effective way to deal with Hitler was to involve the Nazis in a broader coalition and gradually to cut its power. He was confident that he would be able to split Hitler's party

and bring important elements to his side. It is very important to emphasize that in all his maneuvers Schleicher spoke in the name of the army. Thus, the last unhappy phase in the history of the Weimar Republic, was characterized by the most intensive intervention of the army in domestic politics (Wheeler 1961, p. 244).

The new Chancellor, Franz von Papen gained this position as a consequence of the Schleicher negotiations with Hitler. Offering support for the Papen government, Hitler achieved in return not only the new elections for the Reichstag, but also even that the decree abolishing the SA would be repealed (Craig 1955, p. 456). After that Hitler turned his attention to the forthcoming elections. The increasing violence of the Nazis, as one of the tools of their strategy to win elections had a different outcome. The most salient feature of the elections was that the Nazis lost 2 million votes (Craig 1955, p. 458). Schleicher thought this was the right moment to split the Nazi's party. He was confident that Gregor Strasser, the leaders of the party's political organization, would be willing to join a new cabinet. However, Strasser would not accept to serve under Papen (Wheeler 1961, p. 261). Therefore, the fate of Papen as Chancellor came to an end.

Falling in love with office, Papen made an attempt to secure a workable parliamentary majority or to offer Hitler the position of vice Chancellor. If all this effort would fail, he recommended the dissolution of Reichstag and the cabinet would be rule by presidential decree backed by the army (Wheeler 1961, pp. 262-263). Taking into consideration that the Papen plan would provoke a major political crisis, Schleicher convinced Hindenburg that the Papen scheme would degenerate into a civil war. That being the case Hindenburg considered letting Schleicher try his luck to be the only hope (Craig 1955, p. 461).

During his Chancellorship, von Schleicher continued in the fatal myopic optimism, and the fantastic political ineptitude. He resumed negotiations with Gregor Strasser continuing his manoeuvres to split the Nazi Party. He also made advances towards the Left. Therefore, the failure of Schleicher's chancellorship was inevitable for two following reasons. Firstly, the Strasser defection didn't break up the National Socialist Party. Secondly, Schleicher promises towards peasants through offering them eight hundred thousand acres from the bankrupt estates in the Reich did not find support from the Social Democrats, who kept in mind the coup in Prussia (Wheeler 1961, p. 274).

Without party backing, Schleicher tried to do the same thing as his predecessor. On 23 of January, Schleicher made clear to the President the necessity that Reichstag must be dissolved and that Germany must be ruled, under article 48 of the constitution (Craig 1955, p. 463). Being in the same circumstances as in the Papen case the President had no reason to accept Schleicher's request. Even though the President preferred Papen to be again the Chancellor, it was the Schleicher preference toward Hitler that was decisive.

The reasons of Hitler rising in power are political, social, economic, institutional, constitutional and contingent. Referring to the army's behavior, it was the failure of Republicans to subjects the military to effective civilian control, which gave possibility a carrier officer such as Schleicher to become a major factor in Germany's politics (Turner 1996, p. 167). The planning of von Schleicher suffered from the mistaken belief that Hitler could be made a captive of the Army. Even the president Hindenburg and his advisers strongly believed on the night of January 29 (one day before appointment of Hitler as Chancellor), namely that the Generals were planning a Putsch, in order to keep the Nazis out. Such Putsch was never examined by the leaders of the Reichswehr (Wheeler 1961, p. 285). It is very clear that in 1932 the German Army, which von Seeckt, and after him to some extend even

Groener, had sought to keep free from the cancer of politics, “had become so infected with this corroding blight, that it was forced to admit its own impotence to meet armed revolt within the Reich, or, rather, its unwillingness to fire on the youth of Germany as represented by the SA” (Wheeler 1961, p. 265).

It was the Schleicher failure that paved the way for Hitler. Between the two alternatives: to approve Hitler’s appointment as a Chancellor, or to open the establishment of a military dictatorship, the army didn’t choose the second one for the following reasons: First, the officer corps were tired of the Groener-Schleicher policy of military involvement in parliament politics. Second, Hitler’s policy toward the army did not bring about any animosity. On the contrary, his promises for expanding the army and motivational appeals increased the support for him not only among the juniors but also even among the senior officers (Craig 1978. p. 567). Thus, remaining neutral in January 1933, the army allowed the Republic to be handed over to a man, who was determined to destroy it.

### **3. The role of soldiers during National Socialism (1933-1945)**

Based on the tradition of the German army, it is easy to conclude that in January 1933 most of the generals believed that Hitler would recognize the army’s important influence in political decisions. The generals believed that the army still would be the master of the political situation in Germany and that, if the new leader failed to respect its prerogatives, it would unseat him (Craig 1955, p. 489). It is understandable that if Hitler would try to dominate the army in his first months of his power, the army resistance would be violent. Knowing this reality, Hitler employed the art of ingratiation and seduction before showing his real purpose (Craig 1955, p. 464).

In the beginning like Seeckt, Hitler used the symbols and ceremonies embodied in the cult of tradition to increase the self-esteem of soldiers and to create terrain for implementing his policy. However, the Nazis implemented the old military tradition with their own military elements, which derived from their ideology. It was the artifice of the cult of tradition, and perhaps the army’s wishes to escape from the kind of political intervention professed by Schleicher that can provide explanations for the army attitude towards Hitler until at least 1938 (Craig 1966, p. 134).<sup>10</sup> This viewpoint may explain the army’s willingness to remain passive during the creation of totalitarian state in 1933 and during the purge of June 1934.

After Germany’s withdrawal from the disarmament conference and the League of Nations in October 1933, Hitler began expansion. However, Hitler’s formula of total mobilization and his methods to realize it raised objections even among the soldiers who favored it in 1933. For example, Brigadier Georg von Sodenstern, Chief of General Staff of army group 2 at Frankfurt am Main, wrote an essay in 1938 on “the essence of being soldiers” (Hoffman 1995, p. 107). Even though in his essay Sodenstern declared his support for the unity of National Socialism and so on, he was worried about destroying of these soldiers’ ethos through the massive expansion.

Furthermore, in 1938 soldiers were clarified that the total mobilization was motivated not for strengthening the defense but to go to war. Also, “the most thoughtful of the military leaders saw that it was a form of mobilization that pandered to the worst instincts of the German people [...] and tended to stultify their critical capacity and brutalized their behavior” (Craig 1966, p. 136). For all these reasons, the army leaders considered that this policy must be stopped. Thus, General Ludwick Beck

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<sup>10</sup> Schleicher policy of intervention merely involved the military in a frustrating and apparently endless process of party manipulations and intrigues.

argued for the necessity of resisting the theory of total mobilization. However, in 1939, after Hitler's consolidation as dictator of the country and as supreme commander of armed forces, the military leaders had no space to change the course of Hitler policy.

Without entering in the legacy of their right to resistance, the soldiers in 1939 cannot oppose Hitler for a very simple reason: they had no power. They had doubt for their popular support if they would strike. The military doubts about this had a profound influence in the tactics of resistance movement (Hoffman 1995, p. 137). In this point, the military leaders were right because on those occasions when differences between the military and Hitler became public, the propaganda punished military leaders as unable to understand the revolutionary dynamism of the National Socialist movement. A great influence in the lack of resistance also had the disaster that the expansion brought in the inner homogeneity of the army. The young officers who had been subjected to party indoctrination in school were intolerant about every thing in the past.

All of the above reasons can provide explanations about the doubts and hesitations that affected the military conspirators in 1944. "When all the senior leaders whom Stauffenberg approached in 1942 and early 1943 declined to act, he decided that the colonels had to do something if the generals would not" (Hoffman 1995, p. 283). The unsuccessful coup of the twentieth of July marked the end of the cult of tradition in the German military. As we have seen the impact of the military upon the political life of Germany during Hitler period was minimal. Claus von Stauffenberg's actions can be explained only through the complex interaction of his education, social rank, romanticism and commitment to the living Secret Germany (Hoffman 1995, p. 32).

#### 4. Conclusion

In the actual Germany, the place of soldiers in state and society is shaped by the standards of Western democracy. In the sphere of international politics, the German army is shaped by the future of Germany within a united Europe. However, there are many countries in transition, for which the experience of the Prussian army, more in the sense that what does not need to be done, is a valuable lesson.

The war launched by Putin on Ukraine, on 24 February 2022, as a full-blown unprovoked and unjustified military aggression demonstrates that Putin has achieved a fully control over military. Only on 16 May 2022, a retired colonel Mr. Khodaryonok made clear in the "60 Minutes" talk-show program on one of Russian state television's most popular networks that "the conflict in Ukraine was deteriorating for Russia" (MacFarquhar and Patil 2022). In the 1990s, the Russian military played a key role in Russian politics, through refusing to back the Russian Communists in their attempt, in the August 1991, to overthrow the Soviet President Michael Gorbachev. But, since that time, Putin has been able to increase his scrutiny and punishment over military (Westerlund 2021).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It was not only the sinking of the Northern Fleet's submarine Kursk, in August 2000, which Putin exploit to punish the admirals, but also even strengthening the role of the Federal Security Service (FSB) in scrutinizing the Military.

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