
Most sections in this lesson are taken from articles published in Paret, Peter, ed. Makers of Modern Strategy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. Authors and titles of specific articles are given in the headings. Page references within the outline, unless specifically indicated, all come from this work.

I. "The Prusso-German School: Moltke and the Rise of the General Staff," Hajo Holborn

a. Prussian superiority of the 1860s founded upon
   i. Organization
   ii. Peacetime training
   iii. Theoretical study of war

b. Prussian General Staff and army created by
   i. Frederick the Great
   ii. Napoleon
   iii. Gerhard Scharnhorst
   iv. August von Gneisenau

c. Gerhard Scharnhorst and August von Gneisenau were liberal, nationalist reformers trying to rebuild the Prussian army after its destruction at Jena, and, incidentally, to create an instrument for the unification and liberalization of Germany.
   i. Prussian conscription following Jena (1806) created a truly national army by drafting from all classes, not just from the poor.
   ii. This citizens' army remained the subjects of a bureaucratic absolutism
   iii. Following the Congress of Vienna (1815) liberal reforms in the officer corps were abolished and officers once again concentrated in the hands of the Junkers

d. Both men emphasized the theoretical study of war as well as actual battlefield leadership (Scharnhorst died from wounds in 1813)

e. Helmut von Moltke (Chief of Staff 1857-1887)
   i. Well aware of relationship between generalship and statesmanship
   ii. Abstained from active politics and did not question civil authority
   iii. Moltke's military victories were decisive in
(1) Unification of modern Germany
(2) Victory of the Prussian crown over liberal/democratic opposition
(3) Prussian (later German) army remained authoritarian in structure
iv. Masterful organizer
(1) Study of railroads, time tables, mobilization, and concentration factors recognized as crucial to strategic plans
(a) March separately, but fight in concentration
v. Recognized "chance" and "friction"
(1) War is an instrument of policy and fluctuating political aims will force a modification in concentration
(2) "No plan of operations survives the first collision with the main enemy body." [qtd in Holborn, 300]
(3) "Strategy is the art of action under the pressure of the most difficult circumstances." [qtd in Holborn, 290]


a. Continuous strategic-operational sequence combining
i. Mobilization
ii. Concentration
iii. Movement and fighting

b. Leads to Vernichtungsschlacht (battle of annihilation)

c. Direct line of thought and influence
i. Helmut von Moltke the Elder
ii. Graf Alfred von Schlieffen (Chief of Staff 1891-1906)
iii. Hans von Seeckt (Chief of Staff 1919-1926)
iv. Ludwig Beck (Chief of Staff 1933-1938)
v. Heinz Guderian: implementation of combined armored-mechanized forces, spearheaded by tactical air power to achieve strategic envelopment

d. Strategic envelopment, particularly in the form of Blitzkrieg, was devastating within limited theaters of operations
i. Can be defeated by forcing the offensive to operate over wide distances: trade space for time, and keep ample mobile reserves, that is, the strategy of the Russians 1941-1945

e. Moltke's contribution
i. Regarded war as inevitable
ii. Student of the American Civil War, which demonstrated that
improved firepower, transportation, and communications had changed war
(1) Frontal attacks prohibitive in cost

iii. Use superior movement (including mobilization and rail
movement) to concentrate armies and engage an opponent's front
and flanks simultaneously

iv. Confined himself to issuing general orders and allowing
subordinates to handle details

v. Transformed the Prussian General Staff into an instrument
combining local flexibility and initiative with conformity to a common
operational doctrine
(1) Modern era of staff work

vi. "At its best, the Prussian general staff system
institutionalized combat efficiency by ensuring that, in a given
situation, different staff officers, educated to a common fighting
document, would arrive at approximately the same solution for
making the most effective employment of available forces." (301)

vii. Staff was a highly selected, self-conscious elite whose
characteristics were exceptional intellectual ability, hard-work, and
dedication

viii. Swiftly defeated Austria in 1866

ix. Swiftly defeated France in 1871
(1) Experience with the Paris Commune was unsettling:
indiscriminately arming the population can lead to social
revolution

x. After the Franco-Prussian War, his plans envisioned that any
attempt at total victory would stiffen resistance, and so Germany should
effect a defense that would permit diplomacy to achieve a peace settlement

xi. In 1890, in his last public statement, he foresaw that
growing Russo-French strength made quick victory imperative, but,
with rising national passions, future wars could be long, and shatter
social orders

xii. German thinkers could not resolve the conflict between the need
for swift offensive and the capacity for an entrenched defense to inflict
insupportable losses.

f. Schlieffen's Contribution

i. Dominated by need to achieve rapid victory after 1891

ii. Might have looked for diplomacy to reduce Germany's odds, but
held himself to planning and answering questions when asked

iii. Objective of operations is to destroy enemy forces

iv. Envelopment necessary to avoid prohibitive losses

v. Increasingly believed that Germany had to win the initial battle at
any cost

vi. Mobilization plans, once put into effect, were difficult or
impossible to change
Initial military decisions therefore had enormous political and diplomatic consequences

Bismarck's successors made no effort to coordinate strategic planning and foreign policy

Schlieffen Plan: pivot on Metz, violate Belgian neutrality, and envelop French left

(1) Serious operational flaws from the beginning, including the assumption of the availability of divisions not in existence; of troop fatigue and supply, especially on the German right; of brushing away any British intervention; with little margin for "friction"

(2) Original plan had little chance for success

g. Helmut von Moltke the Younger

i. Sought to avoid the post of Chief of Staff

ii. Inherited the Schlieffen Plan

(1) Improved Schlieffen's logistics

(2) Strengthened the center without weakening the right

(3) Added greater potential flexibility to the plan

iii. Failure of the Moltke Plan in 1914 due to the problems of speed, endurance, and command control in an era before vehicles with gasoline engines and caterpillar treads and before radio

h. Evaluation

i. Both the Moltkes and Schlieffen sought a rapid victory by battles of annihilation

ii. By the early 20th century, national morale, social stability, and economic resources increasingly dominate

(1) Resolute governments could suffer a military disaster and continue to fight

iii. "Any war plan based on military considerations alone had become inadequate, and political-military cooperation of the highest order was now essential." (325)