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Rolf Hobson

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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

Blitzkrieg, the Revolution in Military Affairs and Defense Intellectuals

ROLF HOBSON

Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, Oslo

ABSTRACT This article examines the unspoken assumptions behind the ideal image of Blitzkrieg to be found in the literature on the Revolution in Military Affairs. This image has little in common with current historical research into the Wehrmacht's way of war. It is based on an isolated operational analysis of the German victory over France in 1940, a comparison of doctrine which ignores strategic and economic factors, and the removal of the Eastern Front from the picture of Nazi warfare. This image of Blitzkrieg in fact reflects post-Vietnam American warfighting ideals. Taken together with a widespread and uncritical admiration for the Wehrmacht, it raises the question of the extent to which defense intellectuals are disciplined by a methodology designed to weed out bad theory and self-serving assumptions.

KEY WORDS: US Strategy, Think Tanks, Nazi Warfare

During the 1920s, the Reichswehr under Colonel General Hans von Seeckt drew lessons from defeat in World War I which were very different from those of the victors, Britain and France. It sought to develop operational theories which would allow it to escape from the attritional stalemate of trench warfare. A new force structure, combined with new tactics developed towards the end of the war placed a premium on flexibility and initiative. Mobility was emphasised as an alternative to firepower. Mechanisation and motorisation would restore the war of movement, which would once again make it possible to seek victory in decisive encounters. In spite of the restrictions imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty, the unofficial General Staff encouraged doctrinal innovation, tested its theories in manoeuvres

and developed the required new weaponry through its secret cooperation with the Red Army.

The Reichswehr recognised early the potential of the tank and the importance of the new armour theories developed in Britain by Basil Liddell Hart and J. F. C. Fuller. Heinz Guderian introduced them in the German Army. In marked contrast to the hidebound conservatism of the French and British hierarchies, its open-minded military culture put a premium on the intellectual suppleness which fostered innovation. In the course of the 1930s, these tendencies fused in the revolutionary operational doctrine of *Blitzkrieg*, which in its essence entailed the use of independent armoured divisions, supported by airpower, to break through the enemy's lines and force a rapid decision. Britain and France failed to understand the importance of these developments; their armies were stuck in a defensive 'Maginot mindset' which could not conceive of other roles for tanks or planes than that of infantry support. The superiority of German doctrine was demonstrated in May and June 1940. The Netherlands and Belgium were occupied in a combination of airborne and armoured assaults. The world's most powerful army, the French, was utterly outmanoeuvred and defeated in a six-week campaign. France sought an armistice and Britain was expelled from the Continent. In one fell swoop, Germany had come close to establishing a continental hegemony.

The picture drawn in the preceding paragraphs is not that of present-day military historiography. It can be found, with little variation, in the vast outpouring of popular military history over the past six decades, but this will not be treated in the following. The purpose of this article is to identify that particular segment of strategic theorising in which defense intellectuals draw lessons from past conflicts and apply them to what they believe to be the shape of future war.¹ It seeks in particular to identify some of the conceptual roots of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), the leading theoretical concept among American defense intellectuals in the 1990s and the early years of the present century.

¹The 's' in 'defense' acknowledges American dominance in the field. I define defense intellectuals as academically trained theorists who circulate among think-tanks, branching off in the course of their careers into the military, the arms and security industries, universities or administrations. Their work draws heavily on the classics of military theory, uses historical illustrations and applies political science models. Whether or not this specific mix of disciplines is itself *disciplined*, in the sense of being subjected to a rigorous methodology designed to weed out bad theory, is a question this article seeks to raise. Given the astounding lack of studies of the think-tank universe, it can probably not be answered at present.

There can be little doubt that the description of Blitzkrieg given above represents the paradigmatic RMA. It is always cited as an historical precedent in the RMA literature.² More specifically, the elements which came together to produce the German revolution, are identified as the integration of technological change through organisational adaptability and doctrinal innovation. The fusion of these three elements resulted in a vast increase in military effectiveness, and the proof of the pudding was provided by the battlefield victories of 1940. This process can and should be replicated, says the RMA literature, in an American revolution to provide the US military with a superiority which no twenty-first century contender will be able to match.

The RMA interpretation of Blitzkrieg can draw on a large number of historical studies for support.³ But there is also a more recent and

²(For reasons of space, references throughout the article are limited to significant studies or syntheses.) Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Military-Technical Revolution: A Preliminary Assessment* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002 – written 1992), 5, 30; Andrew F. Krepinevich, 'Cavalry to Computer: The Pattern of Military Revolutions', *The National Interest* (1994), 37; James R. Fitzsimmonds and Jan M. Van Tol, 'Revolutions in Military Affairs', *Joint Force Quarterly* (Spring 1994), 24ff.; Eliot A. Cohen, 'A Revolution in Warfare', *Foreign Affairs* 75/2 (1996), 46; Williamson Murray, 'Armoured Warfare: The British, French and German Experiences', in idem and Allan R. Millett (eds.), *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, (Cambridge: CUP 1996), 6–49: 40ff.; Williamson Murray, 'Thinking About Revolutions in Military Affairs', *Joint Force Quarterly* (Summer 1997), 70; Richard O. Hundley, *Past Revolutions, Future Transformations: What Can the History of Revolutions in Military Affairs Tell Us About Transforming the US Military?* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 1999), 11; Clifford J. Rogers, "'Military Revolutions'" And "'Revolutions in Military Affairs'", in Thierry Gongora and Harald Von Riekhoff (eds.), *Toward a Revolution in Military Affairs? Defense and Security at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 2000), 23; Williamson Murray, 'May 1940: Contingency and Fragility of the German RMA', in MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray (eds.), *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300–2050* (Cambridge: CUP 2001), 155; Max Boot, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today* (New York: Gotham Books 2006), 13, 234ff.

³Larry H. Addington, *The Blitzkrieg Era and the German General Staff, 1865–1941* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP 1971), 122ff.; Trevor N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807–1945* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 1977), 212–15, 237–40, 255ff.; Edward N. Luttwak, 'The Operational Level of War', *International Security* 5/3 (Winter 1981), 61–79; Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 1984), 205–19; Williamson Murray, 'German Army Doctrine, 1918–1939, and the Post-1945 Theory of 'Blitzkrieg Strategy'', in Carole Fink, Isabel V. Hull, and MacGregor Knox (eds.), *German Nationalism and the*

growing body of research which questions many of the elements which together make up its image of Blitzkrieg.⁴ Defense intellectuals have ignored the historical revisionism that does not fit their preconceived theories. Indeed, not many of the canonical works on RMAs which refer to past models can be said to meet acceptable standards of historical scholarship, in the very restricted sense that they do not take account of all the relevant scholarly literature, neither do they present reasoned arguments in favour of their understanding of military revolutions, or against alternative interpretations.

This does not necessarily disqualify the theories they advance. If strategy is a separate discipline which draws on historical illustrations and social science models, but asks different questions, it will have a methodology distinct from that of history or political science. Thinking about how to win future wars is not the same approach as trying to find out how they were won in the past and requires different methods. But as strategic theories move further away from the historically verifiable, they move closer to the methodological trap into which defense intellectuals are prone to fall. That is, the tendency to project into the

European Response, 1890–1945 (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press 1985), 71–94; James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press 1992); Robert Michael Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg: Doctrine and Training in the German Army, 1920–1939* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1999); Mary R. Habeck, *Storm of Steel: The Development of Armor Doctrine in Germany and the Soviet Union, 1919–1939*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2003); Robert Michael Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare*, Modern War Studies (Lawrence: UP of Kansas 2004).

⁴Matthew Cooper, *The German Army, 1933–1945: Its Political and Military Failure* (London: Macdonald and Jane's 1978), 113–66. Cooper describes in detail the growth of the 'armoured idea' before the war but emphatically rejects the notion that any revolutionary theory of Blitzkrieg supplanted the traditional strategy of envelopment and annihilation. Michael Geyer, 'German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare, 1914–1945', in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton UP 1986), 585ff.; J.P. Harris, 'The Myth of Blitzkrieg', *War in History* 2/3 (1995), 335–52; Karl-Heinz Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende: Der Westfeldzug 1940*, 2. Aufl. ed., Operationen Des Zweiten Weltkrieges (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1996). Frieser's study is fundamental and an English translation was published in 2005. Azar Gat, *British Armour Theory and the Rise of the Panzer Arm: Revising the Revisionists*, St Anthony's Series (London: Macmillan Press 2000), 83ff.; Azar Gat, 'Ideology, National Policy, Technology and Strategic Doctrine between the World Wars', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24/3 (Sept. 2001), 10; Denis E. Showalter, 'More Than Nuts and Bolts: Technology and the German Army', *The Historian* 65 (Fall 2002), 123–43; Gil-li Vardi, 'The Enigma of German Operational Theory: The Evolution of Military Thought in Germany, 1919–1938', PhD dissertation, The London School of Economics and Political Science 2008.

past the preferred doctrines of the present, and thereafter to read them out of history as lessons applicable to future warfare. The famous *Strategiestreit* between the civilian military historian Hans Delbrück and the Historical Section of the German General Staff centred on this problem.⁵ The officer-historians of the latter believed that Frederick the Great had conducted his wars in accordance with the perennial formula for victory that was envelopment and the destruction of the enemy's force in decisive battle. Delbrück demonstrated that in practice Frederick deviated from this principle so often as to make it unlikely that he actually adhered to it.

In the following, the Blitzkrieg of RMA literature will not be compared with a 'correct' historical interpretation.⁶ But some recent theories about the Wehrmacht's way of war and the fall of France will be presented. They can be mutually exclusive, and all they have in common is that they are drawn from the work of authorities in the field who are not discussed in the RMA literature. A selection among them will be combined into an alternative interpretative permutation very different to that of the RMA Blitzkrieg. The point here is not to win an historical argument, because one side – the defense intellectuals – is not engaged in one. It is rather to use an alternative permutation to uncover some of the unspoken assumptions which inform the war image of US defense intellectuals. These deserve further discussion within the think-tank community, at least if it aspires to be a self-reflective and self-corrective discipline.

During the last 15 years something approaching a scholarly consensus has appeared, to the effect that the Wehrmacht did not have an operational doctrine in 1940, whether it was called Blitzkrieg or anything else. More precisely, there were no official guidelines for the independent, strategic use of the Panzer arm.⁷ Beyond this affirmation, consensus starts to unravel, but there seems to be broad agreement on the following: The Wehrmacht's theory and practice in 1940 grafted the new technology of tanks, planes and radio communications onto traditional, nineteenth century operational ideals, specifically the *Umfassungsschlacht* ('Envelopment battle') that had found expression in the

⁵Raymond Aron, *Penser la Guerre, Clausewitz*, 2 vols., Bibliothèque des sciences humaines (Paris: Gallimard 1976), Vol. I, 122–42, 412–24; Arden Bucholz, *Hans Delbrück and the German Military Establishment: War Images in Conflict* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press 1985); Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: OUP 2001), 371–7.

⁶This is the approach adopted by Stephen Biddle in his critique of Blitzkrieg as a putative RMA, Stephen Biddle, 'The Past as Prologue: Assessing Theories of Future Warfare', *Security Studies* 8/1 (1998), 51.

⁷Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende*, 117.

Schlieffen Plan.⁸ The war of movement was espoused, not as an alternative to firepower but as the preferred option of the inferior power.⁹ British armour theory probably influenced or speeded up the integration of new technology into previously existing operational ideals, but to what degree is the subject of discussion.¹⁰ Without even taking into account parallel developments in other armies, it is possible within the parameters of current research to state, in the words of Gil-li Vardi's recent dissertation, that: 'Ample evidence [...] suggests that the German Army's activities in the 1930s did not fit any of the commonly described characteristics of an RMA.'¹¹

Blitzkrieg was originally a descriptive term which entered currency when foreign journalists and military observers used it to explain Germany's staggering successes in 1939 and 1940.¹² After the unexpected collapse of France in the course of no more than six weeks, however, Hitler and the German military leadership believed that they had indeed invented a new kind of war. As Hitler put it to the head of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW): 'Now we have shown what we are capable of. Believe me, Keitel, a campaign against Russia would be mere child's play [*ein Sandkastenspiel*] in comparison.'¹³ Operation 'Barbarossa' was consciously planned as a three-month Blitzkrieg. With these reservations, historians can justifiably use the term to encapsulate German operational thought, at least during the campaigns of 1941. And in a more general sense, it can help to capture the dynamic of Nazi warfare as an attempt to break the bounds of Germany's constrained resources through conquest and plunder.

Historians may agree on the lack of a German operational doctrine prior to victory over France, but there is much less agreement over the

⁸Karl-Volker Neugebauer, 'Operatives Denken zwischen dem Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg', in *Operatives Denken und Handeln in deutschen Streitkräften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Vorträge Zur Militärgeschichte (Herford, Bonn: E.S. Mittler 1988), 97–122.

⁹Gerhard P. Gross, 'Das Dogma der Beweglichkeit. Überlegungen zur Genese der deutschen Heerestaktik im Zeitalter der Weltkriege', in Bruno Thoss and Hans Erich Volkmann (ed.), *Erster Weltkrieg, Zweiter Weltkrieg: Ein Vergleich: Krieg, Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung in Deutschland* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh 2002), 143–66: 153f.

¹⁰Cf. Gat, *British Armour Theory* and R.L. DiNardo, 'German Armour Doctrine: Correcting the Myths', *War in History* 3/4 (1996), 384–97.

¹¹Vardi, 'The Enigma of German Operational Theory', 183.

¹²F.O. Miksche, *Blitzkrieg* (London: Faber 1941). For the permutations of the term, see George Raudzens, 'Blitzkrieg Ambiguities: Doubtful Usage of a Famous Word', *War and Society* 7/2 (1989), 77–94.

¹³Quoted in Karl-Heinz Frieser, 'Die deutschen Blitzkriege: Operativer Triumph – strategische Tragödie', in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (Munich: Oldenbourg 1999), 192.

causes of that country's defeat. The RMA literature generally takes it as given that the fall of France 'proved' the superiority of German doctrine over French doctrine. Alternative explanations are however available, and one could start by asking whether they might not qualify the importance assigned to doctrine. One could follow up by asking whether a comparison of doctrine which takes for granted the isolation of the operational level does not obscure more than it enlightens.

Doctrine vs. Doctrine

It is now generally accepted that neither side in 1940 possessed a decisive superiority in either men or machines.¹⁴ Yet although the Wehrmacht defeated the French Army (and the BEF), it does not necessarily follow that this represented a victory of doctrine over doctrine. Manstein's *Sichelschnitt* ('the cut of the sickle') took huge risks, and few would deny that the French High Command made some colossal mistakes. As Denis Showalter puts it: 'Even Blitzkrieg depended on the existence of "obliging enemies" who would not only simply make mistakes, but who would make good mistakes.'¹⁵ The two most obvious ones were that General Maurice Gamelin sent his strategic reserve, including his best armoured units, off in the direction of Breda in the Netherlands, and that Allied air units were not used to bomb the longest traffic jam in history, which stretched from the Rhine through the Ardennes to the Meuse.¹⁶ Some authorities link Gamelin's mistakes to French operational doctrine and the defensive strategic stance of the Phoney War.¹⁷ But writers on military affairs tend to underline the importance of human agency at command level, and it might seem somewhat arbitrary to assign responsibility for Gamelin's false moves to an impersonal doctrine or mindset. If we remain at the same analytical level and remove doctrine as the decisive

¹⁴For a survey of recent research, see Joel Blatt, *The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books 1998). Cf. Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende* and Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill & Wang 2000).

¹⁵Denis Showalter, 'Ce que l'armée française avait compris de la guerre moderne', in Maurice Vaisse (ed.), *Mai-Juin 1940: Défaite française, victoire allemande, sous l'œil des historiens étrangers* (Paris: Autrement 2000), 38.

¹⁶Don W. Alexander, 'Repercussions of the Breda Variant', *French Historical Studies* 8/3 (Spring 1974), 459–88; Jeffrey A. Gunsburg, 'Coupable ou non? Le rôle du Général Gamelin dans la défaite de 1940', *Revue historique des armées* 4 (1979), 145–63; Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende*, 106–10, 135; Showalter, 'Armée française', 56.

¹⁷E.g. Philippe Garraud, 'L'idéologie de la "défensive" et ses effets stratégiques: le rôle de la dimension cognitive dans la défaite de 1940', *Revue française de science politique* 54/5 (2004), 796 and 804ff.

variable, German victory could be attributed to the energetic exploitation of the opportunities that arose as the campaign unfolded, whereas French defeat could be ascribed to the egregious mistakes of the Commander-in-Chief.

The Isolation of the Operational Level

But can analysis be restricted to the operational level? Comparing operational doctrines begs the question whether one can justify isolating such a comparison when two such different societies were fighting each other as the totalitarian, Nazi *Führerstaat* and an alliance of liberal, parliamentary democracies.¹⁸ Perhaps victory in 1940 is not the right criterion by which to judge the efficacy of Blitzkrieg as doctrine. After all, for all its putative operational brilliance Germany lost not one, but two world wars – a salient fact which is strangely absent from RMA literature. Perhaps German doctrine even contributed towards those defeats. The German High Command's concentration on operational issues to the exclusion of economic or other aspects of grand strategy certainly did. In wars between industrialised societies, the operational level has to be interpreted within the broader context of the resources available for total war.

Perhaps the French doctrine of *bataille conduite*, or methodical battle, contributed towards the final Allied victory. It has recently been described as representing a necessary adaptation of mass conscript armies to the conditions of industrialised warfare.¹⁹ It was, after all, designed to mobilise superior material resources in a long war and thus suited the wait-and-see strategic stance of the Phoney War that was to allow the British and French to marshal their enormous resources and win the arms race. The danger of an enemy breakthrough was countered by a strategic reserve comprising the best armoured units and the rapid build-up of a modern air force.²⁰ The German way of war could better be described as a race against time to break out of the constraints of its restricted resource base and overheating economy.²¹ It

¹⁸A similar point with regard to the comparison between German and Soviet doctrine is made in Gat, 'Ideology', 13ff.

¹⁹Showalter, 'l'armée française', 54ff.; Douglas Porch, 'Military "Culture" And the Fall of France in 1940', *International Security* 24/4 (Spring 2000), 157–80.

²⁰Gat, *British Armour Theory*, 27–30.

²¹Discussion of the economic pressures and constraints on Blitzkrieg has continued for more than 40 years. A few stepping-stones are Alan S. Milward, *The German Economy at War* (London: Athlone Press 1965), 1–27; Timothy W. Mason, 'Internal Crisis and War of Aggression, 1938–1939', in Jane Caplan (ed.), *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class* (Cambridge: CUP 1995), 104–30; R.J. Overly, *War and Economy in the*

was less the expression of a superior operational doctrine than of a tactical training which encouraged aggression and initiative, in combination with an expansionist ideology and resource constraints, both of which pushed in the direction of unlimited conquest.

The Isolation of the Campaign against France

Certainly, if the object of the exercise is to study the efficacy of Blitzkrieg as an operational doctrine when put into practice, then the French campaign of 1940 is not the best historical example. As Karl-Heinz Frieser has put it, emphatically: '*The campaign in the West in 1940 was an unplanned but successful "Blitzkrieg", whereas the campaign in the East in 1941 was a planned but unsuccessful "Blitzkrieg"*'.²² Or, in Wilhelm Deist's words: 'The attack on the Soviet Union, Operation BARBAROSSA, was actually the only German military effort in the Second World War planned as a Blitzkrieg campaign to be completed within limited time and with limited forces. In accordance with Hitler's aims, it was also planned as a racist war of annihilation.'²³

In other words, if you want to study Blitzkrieg, you have to study 'Barbarossa'. But the Eastern Front gets scant attention in RMA literature. There would seem to be two reasons for this. First, despite Stalin's obliging mistakes and the lack of preparation on the part of the Red Army, the staggering initial success of the Wehrmacht did not bring victory by the end of the year. Blitzkrieg failed, at the operational level because the infantry and logistics could not keep up with the advance of the Panzer divisions. At the level of grand strategy (which can hardly be said to have existed in Hitler's Germany) it failed because the arms output of the economy was not coordinated with the needs of the Wehrmacht. The OKW concentrated on its operational tasks and did not seek to secure the resources it needed even to fight a limited

Third Reich (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994), 177–256; Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Allen Lane 2006).

²²Frieser, *Blitzkrieg-Legende*, 439 (Frieser's emphasis).

²³Wilhelm Deist, 'The Road to Ideological War: Germany, 1918–1945', in MacGregor Knox, Williamson Murray, and Alvin H. Bernstein (eds.), *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* (Cambridge: CUP 1994), 389. Also Bernhard R. Kroener, 'Der 'erfrojene' Blitzkrieg. Strategische Planungen der deutschen Fijhrung gegen die Sowjetunion und die Ursachen ihres Scheiterns', in Bernd Wegner (ed.), *Zwei Wege Nach Moskau: Vom Hitler-Stalin-Pakt Bis Zum 'Unternehmen Barbarossa'* (Munich: Piper 1991), 145.

campaign.²⁴ The High Command thus bore a major share of the responsibility for the failure of its own operational concept.

It also bore a major share of responsibility for the crimes committed on the Eastern Front. This is a probable second reason why Blitzkrieg fans concentrate on the Western campaign. The very same officer corps whose professional ethos is so much admired, built the open-air camps in which three million Soviet prisoners of war died for lack of food, shelter and medical attention.²⁵ They faithfully carried out the order to shoot several thousand political commissars.²⁶ They committed many atrocities during the course of anti-partisan warfare, which was also inextricably caught up in the destruction of Jews and Gypsies on Soviet territory.²⁷ Had the Blitzkrieg resulted in victory in 1941, it would not only have caused the downfall of communism, it would have been followed immediately by the worst genocide ever planned in history: the starving to death of some 30 million people in the North-West of the Soviet Union, who were to be cut off from the agricultural surplus in the South.²⁸ The decision to implement the Holocaust that *was* carried out, has itself been linked to the failure of the Blitzkrieg in the East.²⁹

²⁴Wilhelm Deist, '“Blitzkrieg” Or Total War? War Preparations in Nazi Germany', in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *The Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919–1939*. (Cambridge: CUP 2003), 271–84.

²⁵Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945*, Studien Zur Zeitgeschichte Bd. 13 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1978).

²⁶Felix Römer, *Der Kommissarbefehl: Wehrmacht und NS-Verbrechen an der Ostfront 1941/42* (Paderborn: Schöningh 2008). The war in the East has been the subject of a major research programme recently concluded by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, see Johannes Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer: Die deutschen Oberbefehlshaber im Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg 2006); Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht: Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1944* (Munich: Oldenbourg 2008); Christian Hartmann, *Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg: Front und militärisches Hinterland 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg 2009).

²⁷Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (ed.), *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition 1995); Jürgen Förster, 'Wehrmacht, Krieg und Holocaust', in Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (eds.), *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*. (Munich: Oldenbourg 1999), 948–63.

²⁸Rolf Hobson, *Krig og strategisk tenkning i Europa 1500–1945: samfunnsendring – statssystem – militær teori* (Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag 2005), 296.

²⁹Omer Bartov, 'From Blitzkrieg to Total War: Controversial Links between Image and Reality', in Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (eds.), *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge: CUP 1997), 174ff.; cf. Tobias Jersak, 'Blitzkrieg Revisited: A New Look at Nazi War and Extermination Planning', *The Historical Journal* 43/2 (2000), 565–82.

Nazi Warfare

Several of these objectives were of course ideologically determined by the leadership of the Nazi state; but there is no doubt that the world view of the upper echelons of the German officer corps overlapped with Nazism's hatred of communism, democracy, world Jewry and the Slavic peoples.³⁰ It would require very tricky brain surgery to excise the professional ethos necessary to wage Blitzkrieg from the militaristic world view which waged genocidal warfare.³¹ Indeed, the dovetailing objectives cannot be interpreted as the ideological pollution of professional military thought. Rather, it was the fundamental tenets of German military thought which produced both what is described as Blitzkrieg and what is understood by Nazi warfare: the unquestioned acceptance of war as the necessary arbiter in international affairs, the advocacy of total mobilization for total war, the abdication of responsibility for economic coordination and the concomitant concentration on the operational level of warfare, the integration of operational strategy in campaigns of conquest and plunder. Blitzkrieg was not an alternative to total war, but an expression – or rather the spearhead – of total war.³²

If there was a degree of coherence in Nazi grand strategy, it was perhaps dictated by economic constraints: because Germany lacked the resource base to prevail in a long drawn-out struggle with the economic might of the British and French empires, the United States and the Soviet Union, it had to conquer new territories quickly and plunder their resources to maintain its momentum in further campaigns of conquest. To prevent the collapse of civilian morale, as had happened in 1918, slave labour, food and other raw materials were funnelled back to the Reich to ameliorate the rigours of war.³³ As Götz Aly has

³⁰Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer 2002). For a more nuanced exposition of German views of Russia, see Gerd Koenen, *Der Russland-Komplex: Die Deutschen und der Osten 1900–1945* (Munich: Beck 2005).

³¹Aspiring brain surgeons now have the opportunity to practise on one of the heroes of RMA literature, Erich von Manstein, thanks to Oliver von Wrochem, *Erich Von Manstein: Vernichtungskrieg und Geschichtspolitik* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh 2006). Unfortunately, the greatest hero, Guderian, has not yet received the same treatment.

³²Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War* (London: Allen & Unwin 1983), 163ff.

³³Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge: CUP 1997). The Nazi leadership actually believed in the 'stab in the back' legend which did so much to bring them to power; the loyalty of the German population had therefore to be preserved by plundering the resources of others. For the reality of societal dissolution and military collapse in 1918, and the

recently demonstrated, each individual soldier was given an artificial purchasing power that turned the Wehrmacht into a swarm of locusts all over occupied Europe.³⁴ Military necessity dovetailed neatly with Nazi expansionism and it is pointless – or missing the point – to isolate a sphere of operations full of useful lessons for today from the plunder, the massacres, the oppression and the genocide of the occupation regimes. Nazi Germany was not defeated in spite of its operational successes; it was the military thought that produced Blitzkrieg, which also led Germany to defeat.

The presentation of Blitzkrieg given above, pieced together from the work of scholarly authorities in the field, is merely intended to represent an alternative permutation of elements which are not considered in the interpretation of Blitzkrieg as an RMA. Squaring them off against each other would entail a discussion of the relative merits of traditional military history as opposed to the ‘war and society’ approach, along with other methodological and empirical issues familiar to historians from decades of debate. That has not been the object of the exercise in constructing this alternative. It is rather meant to be used as a foil against which the unspoken assumptions of defense intellectuals become visible.

The Blitzkrieg of the RMA literature, and of maneuver warfare before that,³⁵ is really an American ideal projected backwards into history, and then read out of history as the precursor and precedent of the way in which the United States should preferably wage war. As such, it is an example of the methodological trap into which defense intellectuals occasionally fall. The unspoken assumptions which lead them towards the trap are, first, that war is decided at the operational level by daring generals leading military machines which weld together soldiers and technologically advanced weaponry by means of cohesive doctrine. The moral seems to be: give the generals their head and there will be little collateral damage, no long drawn-out attrition, no need to mobilize the economy or respond to fickle public opinion.

widespread belief that only the former had brought about surrender, see Boris Barth, *Dolchstosslegenden und politische Desintegration: Das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914–1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste 2003).

³⁴Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer 2005).

³⁵Asa A. Clark, *The Defense Reform Debate: Issues and Analysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1984); William S. Lind, *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*, Westview Special Studies in Military Affairs (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1985); Robert R. Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver: Maneuver-Warfare Theory and Airland Battle* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press 1991); Richard D. Hooker, *Maneuver Warfare: An Anthology* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press 1993).

Furthermore, it can be assumed that regime change is easy: it only takes six weeks for an army prepared for Blitzkrieg. Perhaps the conclusion is also drawn, on historical analogy, that the subsequent occupation will be self-financing and entail a modicum of garrison duty, but little of the partisan warfare and reprisals against civilians which can make post-invasion stabilisation so messy. A compliant general can perhaps be wheeled out of retirement to take charge of a quiescent population. It is difficult to know how far the analogy with France in 1940 is assumed to go. There is no speculation on the follow-up to victory in the RMA literature, but perhaps the concentration on the operational means to winning a war quickly, coupled with an aversion to the realities of the Eastern Blitzkrieg after 1941, serve the purpose of making war seem easier, more controllable, more affordable, more applicable.

Other assumptions about the symmetrical nature of conflict may derive from the lack of any credible threat to the United States during the 1990s. Some military professionals have criticised them as a tendency to let capabilities determine strategy in an environment devoid of any realistic scenario.³⁶ Yet they also testify to the hold that the 1940 French campaign has on the imagination. This is how war preferably should be fought, both in the past and in the future, the default option of military bureaucracies.

These unspoken assumptions probably reflect the post-Vietnam reorientation of US military thought towards the operational level of war that Hew Strachan has identified.³⁷ They could also be a specific product of the rarefied atmosphere of the think-tanks, but due to the dearth of studies this can only be the subject of speculation.³⁸ It is hard to explain why the defense intellectual *milieu* has received so little academic attention when it plays so obvious a role in forming American strategic culture and exerts an undeniable influence over both foreign and domestic policy.³⁹ It must represent one of the most powerful, unelected groups within the American polity, and the purposes served by its research should presumably be the subject of public interest and

³⁶Vincent Desportes, *La guerre probable: penser autrement*, Collection stratégies and doctrines (Paris: Economica 2007), 100–14; H.R. McMaster, 'On War: Lessons to Be Learned', *Survival* 50/1 (Feb.–March 2008), 19–30.

³⁷Hew Strachan, 'The Lost Meaning of Strategy', *Survival* 47/3 (Autumn 2005), 33–54; Hew Strachan, 'Civil-Military Relations after Iraq', *Survival* 48/3 (Autumn 2006), 60ff.

³⁸Twenty-five years separate two important studies of RAND, Fred M. Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1983); Alex Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The Rand Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire* (Orlando, FLA: Harcourt 2008).

³⁹An exception is Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel* (Stanford UP 2010).

scrutiny. In any other field, it is assumed – or suspected – that the products of research institutions are influenced by funding, political affiliations, institutional rivalry and individual career structures. In this one, however, their impact on theory can only be guessed at. One insider has compared the quick succession of High Concepts in American strategic debate to the workings of the fashion industry.⁴⁰ If that is a valid comparison, it is also justified to ask what mechanisms exist within the industry to weed out the bad theory that fads and market forces will inevitably produce.

There is also a third avenue which could be explored in future studies of the American image of German warfare. There does seem to be a long-standing and uncritical admiration for the Wehrmacht in defense intellectual circles. Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* is regarded as a classic text; yet it contains some very strange claims about the Reichswehr and the Wehrmacht, intended to demonstrate that the impeccable professionalism of the Prussian-German officer corps had been corrupted by extraneous political influences.⁴¹

In his admiration for the German officer corps, Huntington would not recognise that its military culture had fostered an understanding of operational 'necessity' with disastrous political consequences. This led to calls for preventive war before 1914 and to the militarisation of state, society and economy during World War I. The lessons drawn by professional military thought from that conflict overlapped with the world view of Nazism; it was not polluted by outside influences, as Huntington's ideal type asserted it must have been. The Reichswehr worked to replace the democratic Weimar constitution by an authoritarian government which could better prepare the total mobilisation needed to fight total war, and the Wehrmacht worked hand in glove with Hitler's regime to prepare for it.⁴²

Huntington, however, denied that Nazi and military values overlapped in any way. This was an untenable position, even in 1957.⁴³ He

⁴⁰Colin S. Gray, *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (London: Frank Cass 2002), 17ff.

⁴¹Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP 1957), 99–124.

⁴²In lieu of a vast literature, a succinct synthesis can be found in Klaus-Jürgen Müller, 'Die Reichswehr und die "Machtergreifung"', in Wolfgang Michalka (ed.), *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 1984), 137–51.

⁴³Three fundamental studies published in the 1950s were John Wheeler Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: the German Army in Politics, 1918–1945* (London/New York: Macmillan/St Martin's Press 1953); Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk; das Problem des 'Militarismus' in Deutschland* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg 1954), Vol. I; and Gordon Alexander Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian*

ignored the Nuremberg trial of the OKW and in effect parroted the self-exculpatory, post-war writings of the Wehrmacht leadership. In so doing, he was following in the footsteps of the US Army's Historical Division, which had provided 300 German officers with the opportunity to write their own operational history.⁴⁴

That one of the worst examples of destructive militarism can be portrayed as a paragon of military professionalism, suggests that there is something wrong with Huntington's theory of civil-military relations. That he is still regarded as a classical thinker within some disciplines, suggests that his admiration for the Wehrmacht is common currency, or that they lack a culture of scholarly criticism, or both.⁴⁵ To the extent that reverence for German military achievements continues in defense intellectual circles, it serves only to perpetuate the post-war apologia of the Wehrmacht generals at the very moment the tissue of fabrications upon which they rest is being unravelled by German historians.⁴⁶ If this is symptomatic of the lack of a critical academic culture, admiration for the Wehrmacht and Blitzkrieg may not be the only assumptions in need of revision.

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Army 1640–1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1955). Although Huntington quoted them, he left out the cautionary tale about Prussia being 'an army with a state', as well as the deleterious political consequences of the General Staff's war planning and the militarisation of state and society, and concentrated on the politicisation of the military. On the Reichswehr's contribution to the destruction of democracy, he could also have quoted Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung Der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie*, Institut für politische Wissenschaft (Stuttgart: Ring-Verlag 1955).

⁴⁴Bernd Wegner, 'Erschriebene Siege: Franz Halder, die "Historical Division" und die Rekonstruktion des Zweiten Weltkrieges im Geiste des deutschen Generalstabes', in Ernst Willi Hansen *et al.* (ed.), *Politischer Wandel, organisierte Gewalt und nationale Sicherheit: Beiträge zur neueren Geschichte Deutschlands und Frankreichs: Festschrift für Klaus-Jürgen Müller* (Munich: Oldenbourg 1995), 287–304.

⁴⁵There is a nascent awareness of the problematic aspect of Huntington's treatment of Germany in Williamson Murray, 'Professionalism and Professional Military Education in the Twenty-First Century', in Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider, *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 2009), 134. But it should be noted that Huntington chose to ignore not only the Wehrmacht's crimes against humanity, but also its crimes against democracy.

⁴⁶Kurt Pätzold, *Ihr waret die besten Soldaten: Ursprung und Geschichte einer Legende* (Leipzig: Militzke 2000).

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