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“We March as an Order of National Socialist, Soldierly, Nordic Men”: Ideology, Soldiers and Civil-Military Relations in the Schutzstaffeln der NSDAP



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-H04436
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Klagenfurt, Adolf Hitler, Ehrenkompanie, Foto: Deutsches Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-H04436 / CC-BY-SA

Vermin and serpents creep across the face of the globe, heralding the proliferation of their subhuman counterparts in Europe's most cultured cities.¹ A

¹ Cf. Bundesarchiv NS 31/163 Bl. 13-36, slide lecture, “Das Judentum, seine blutsgebundene Wesensart in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart,” reprinted in: Jürgen Matthäus et al eds., *Ausbildungsziel Judenmord? 'Weltanschauliche Erziehung' von SS, Polizei und Waffen-SS in Rahmen der 'Endlösung'* (Frankfurt/Main, 2003) pp. 152-161. For further examples of racist ideas in official SS publications, see: Reinhard Heydrich, *Wandlungen unseres Kampfes* (Berlin, 1936); Dieter Schwarz, *Das Weltjudentum: Organisation, Macht und Politik* (Berlin, 1939); SS Hauptamt eds., *SS Mann und Blutsfrage* (Berlin, n.d.). On such methods of training in the Allgemeine SS and the other branches of the SS cf. Jürgen Matthäus, “Die ‘Judenfrage’ als Schulungsthema von SS und Polizei: ‘Inneres Erlebnis’ und Handlungslegitimation,” in *Ausbildungsziel Judenmord?* pp. 35-86; Isabel Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”: Das Rasse- u.

swarthy, hirsute man with a waddling gait that bespeaks collapsed arches and unclean living contrasts to a tall, athletic Nordic figure with a lantern jaw, azure eyes and a soldierly bearing. Captured as slides, these images flicker in the half-light before a room of men in black uniforms on a weekend of para-military training in mid-1936. The lecture formed part of a curriculum in the perils of world Jewry and the principles of Nazi eugenics, to which Heinrich Himmler, eager to inculcate Nazi racist ideas in the elite guard of the party, treated the part-time volunteers in the so-called Allgemeine SS in the first years of the III. Reich.²

Perhaps with the lessons of such a slide lecture in mind, as well as having embraced racist ideas and violent habits from whatever source³, the men of the Allgemeine SS on 9 November 1938 later burned local synagogues and bashed in the heads of rather more than a handful of Jewish neighbors and

Siedlungshauptamt d. SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas (Göttingen, 2003), pp. 62ff; An overview of ideology in the armed SS within the history of ideas, European society and civil-military relations is: Bernd Wegner, *Hitlers Politische Soldaten: Die Waffen SS 1933-1945* 5th ed. (Paderborn, 1995), pp. 25-78; and the essays in *Ausbildungsziel Judenmord?*, pp. 21ff; on Nazi ideology at arms and civil-military relations in Germany and Europe in a general sense, there has been an explosion of literature since the beginning of the 1990s: Omer Bartov's, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the III. Reich* (Oxford, 1991) appeared before a German debate of mid-decade on ideology and war concentrated on the so-called Wehrmachtausstellung, cf. Hannes Heer et al eds., *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht, 1941-1944* (Hamburg, 1995); Rolf Dieter Müller et al eds., *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität* (München, 1999); Hamburger Sozialinstitut eds., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944* (Hamburg, 2002); Detlef Bald et al eds., *Mythos Wehrmacht: Nachkriegsdebatten und Traditionspflege* (Berlin, 2001); tendentious and problematic is: Rüdiger Proske, *Wider den Missbrauch der Geschichte deutscher Soldaten zu politischen Zwecken* (Mainz, 1996).

² Once the SS had liberated itself from the SA from late-1934 to 1936, the so-called Allgemeine SS (made up in its majority by part-timers with full time territorial staff cadres) was distinguished from the para-military SS formations, SS Verfügungstruppe, as well as the armed warders of the concentration camp system in the SS Totenkopfverbände and, by 1938, from the Security Police/Gestapo/Sicherheitsdienst (SD) /Police organization. In addition to the sources in note 1, cf. Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP eds., *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP* 5th ed. (München, 1938), pp. 419-427; an excellent wartime analysis of the Allgemeine SS is: Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces, Evaluation and Dissemination Section G-2 eds., *The Allgemeine SS* (n.p. n.d.) reprinted 1985; the best treatment of how the puzzle of SS sub-entities combined as a whole is: Robert Köhl, *The Black Corps: The Structure and Power Struggles of the Nazi SS* (Madison, 1983).

³ Cf. Peter Merkl, *The Making of a Stormtrooper* (Princeton, 1980) pp. 160ff; Richard Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany, 1925-1934* (New Haven, 1984), pp. 33ff; Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York, 2003); Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the III. Reich* (New York, 2004); pp. 217ff; Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York, 2004), pp. 55ff.; Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, 2004) pp. 221ff.; George C. Browder, "No Middle Ground for the Eichmann Männer," in *Yad Vashem Studies, XXXI Shoah Resource Center, The International School of Holocaust Studies, Jerusalem 2003*, pp. 403-424.

fellow citizens. Less than a year after the Crystal Night pogroms, these men – now drafted into the army, or volunteers in the SS-at-arms or the police (itself under Himmler's control) – formed the vanguard of racial annihilation that moved eastward to locales in Poland and thence, within eighteen months, to Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. Here the violence against Jews that began even before Hitler had come to power on the streets of Berlin's fashionable western precincts⁴ and engulfed German places of Jewish worship in late-1938 transformed itself into a torrent of genocide. In the process, the part-time volunteers of 1936 became soldiers of destruction in a world war that contained within it an ideal of a total war of ideology and whose chief goal was racist imperialism on the European continent⁵. The following study analyzes this instance of war and ideology in a single, but nonetheless highly important case. Specifically, how do ideas germinate within society and politics and then become inculcated in para-military and military personnel who then embark upon campaigns of race war and ethnic cleansing? Further, the essay at hand seeks to set the above questions within the field of civil-military relations theory as it has evolved in the last decade. In this connection, the present essay seeks to join to disparate fields of scholarly inquiry in the hope that such a comparison can be fruitful. The latter issue of civil-military theory requires elucidation at the outset.

The study of civil-military relations and modern military institutions in central Europe returned to prominence in the early 1990s with the reform of state, society and arms in central and Eastern Europe⁶. How can this issue of public

⁴ Dirk Walter, *Antisemitische Kriminalität und Gewalt: Judenfeindschaft in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn, 1999) pp. 211-221.

⁵ Among an ever growing literature, see: Götz Aly et al eds., *Vordenker der Vernichtung: Auschwitz und die Pläne für eine neue Europäische Ordnung* (Hamburg, 1991); Christopher Browning, *Der Weg zur Endlösung: Entscheidungen und Täter* (Bonn, 1998); Raul Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt, 1992).

⁶ For two American classics of civil-military relations theory from the era of the early cold war, see: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Harvard, 1957); Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (New York, 1960). In the past decade, Huntington's book became a best seller amid the defense and military reform efforts with the transformation of cabinets, parliaments, and general staffs east of the Elbe, along the Moldau, Danube and Vistula. For the literature since 1989 see, for instance, Mary-Beth Ulrich, *Democratizing Communist Militaries: The Cases of the Czech and Russian Armed Forces* (Ann Arbor, 1999); Andrew Cottey et al eds., *Democratic Control of the Military in Post communist Europe: Guarding the Guards* (Hounds mills, 2002); Istvan Gyarmati et al eds., *Post-Cold War Defense Reform: Lessons Learned in Europe and the US* (Washington DC, 2002); Jeffrey Simon, *Hungary and NATO: Problems in Civil-Military Relations* (Lanham/Boulder/New York, 2003); idem. *NATO and the Czech and Slovak Republics: A Comparative Study of Civil-Military Relations* (Lanham/Boulder/New York, 2004). The most incisive treatment of the theories of civil-military relations since 1989 is: Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*

policy and academic theory be related to the ideology of the SS? Superficially, the two issues appear to have nothing to do with each other; but this impression is misleading when one considers that, since 11 September 2001, certain figures in public life have discovered a predilection for empires and pre-emptive war waged for ideological goals to counter an enemy creed, in turn, possessed of violence to assert its own breathtaking aims of a messianic redemption in blood and fire via the defeat of the West. The foregoing phenomenon lies outside of the scope of this little essay, however, which treats a case study of civil-military relations and war from an earlier epoch of the 20th century and the field of theory and practice of the soldier and the state in a new Europe between 1989 and 2001.

Since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact system of civil-military relations at the beginning of the 1990s, theory in this field – especially as concerns central and eastern Europe – had become absorbed with technocratic, budget-centric issues of democratic processes of government dominated by the accession procedures to NATO within “Partnership for Peace” and what has since become known under the rubric of “security sector reform.”⁷ The latter procedure, which by the June 2004 Istanbul North Atlantic Council summit (in the wake of the alliance Enlargement of April 2004 of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Slovakia) has reached a kind of climax within the epoch that dawned in the fall of 1989 – as opposed to that which exploded in the late summer of 2001.

To be sure, the analysis that unfolds here draws much of its inspiration from the later, violent date in contemporary history. As far as such a technocratic focus of the 1990s on defense management goes, this civil-military effort has surely been necessary to fulfill the needs of policy in a moment of necessity, while central and eastern European have junked the institutions, customs and habits of the Soviet style of civil-military institutions and mastered how NATO procedures operate in peace. What began in the wake of the Soviet military retreat from central Europe, amid the attempt to fill derelict central European

(Oxford, 1997), pp. 1-19. Strachan takes an historical approach but also generalizes about problems of theory and practice of the 1990s as well. Of further note on matters of theory are: Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York, 2002); Michael Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore, 1999).

⁷ On security sector reform as a category of theory in academic civil-military relations and its application to policy in the recent past and present, cf. Andrew Cottey et al. *Introduction: the Challenge of Democratic Control of Armed Forces in Postcommunist Europe*, pp. 1-16 in Cottey et al. eds., *Democratic Control of the Military*, cited in note 6 above. On “Partnership for Peace” and its democratic civil-military dictates, cf. NATO Office of Information and Press eds., *NATO Handbook* (Brussels, 1999) pp. 81ff.; idem. *NATO Handbook*, (Brussels, 2001), pp. 61-95.

defense ministries and general staffs with new faces, bright ideas and best practices, has stumbled into an intellectual dead end. This state of affair grows more extreme as the war against terror, the “coalition of the willing,” and the strategic geography of “old” versus “new” Europe now comprise a zone of contention and possible strategic catastrophe from the Atlantic shores of North Africa, to the Sunni triangle of Iraq, to the Hindu-Kush and far beyond to a site in North America, Europe, Asia and Africa where the disciples of bin Laden and his imitators will next wield their weapons of terror.

The technocratic paradigm of new civil-military relations theory in central Europe that came forth amid the peaceful interlude of the first half of the 1990s has led to a neglect of civil-military relations in war in its wider dimension of the past and present⁸. Instead of asking how ideology and warfare intersect – and what effect such a conjuncture has on soldiers and civilians generally – the analysis of democratic civil-military relations of the last decade tends rather to disregard the worst cases that arise from conflict in favor of legislative routine and the hum-drum programming, planning and budgeting of western defense management. In an effort to smash theoretical icons, some makers of theory have gone so far as to argue that the civil-military past in the Euro-Atlantic sphere has but little relevance to the character of soldiers and civilians in Europe.⁹ In view of the foregoing, a historically informed skeptic may assert, in fact, that theory and practice have drifted into a pernicious present-ism, made doubly problematic by the renewed need, once again for a new generation, to integrate the experience of war into civil-military relations theory.

The revival of crisis as concerns democratic civil-military relations in the here-and-now came slowly and in stages well before the late summer of 2001. Such first emerged in the episodes of the 1991-5 Bosnian war and later in the 1999 NATO aerial bombardment amid coercive diplomacy against the Serbs in ex-Yugoslavia. This trend, however, formed but a prelude once the September 2001 terror assaults on the U.S. east coast ushered in a new phase of U.S.-led “coalitions of the willing” in the punitive expeditions to Afghanistan and Iraq which made the civil-military events of the 1990s appear unproblematic by comparison. Soon there ensued vituperation between heads of state and diplomatic figures in Washington, Berlin and Paris about the ideological parameters as well as the ends and means of the war against terror.

⁸ The Cohen work on national command in crisis and war in western democracies represents an exception, cf. Cohen, *Supreme Command*, pp. 1-15; 225-248, but deals with the highest echelons of command and the political leader as strategist. These themes are important, but the focus herein concerns wars of ideology, empire and paramilitary formations.

⁹ Comments at Swiss DCAF (Democratic Control of Armed Forces) symposium, “Building Expertise,” Geneva, Switzerland, December 2002

A re-thinking of matters of theory and application in this field must arise because wars of ideology, that is to say, wars waged for expansive, even total strategic goals have returned to the scene after the limited campaigns of peace enforcement and collective security of the 1990s. With the passage of time since the first weeks of national solidarity after 11 September 2001, phenomena of stress and strain have become all too visible in US and allied democratic civil-military relations after more than two years of war. The chimeras of easy victory by “transformed,” high-tech forces against bin Ladenists in the Pashtun redoubt and in the face of Iraqi “dead enders” in the Sunni triangle vanished in the face of reverses that began in the summer of 2003 and accumulated in the course of 2004.

These facts demand some modification of civil-military relations theory in the face of the war-torn present. At the same time, amid new thinking about the past century in which the centrality of the Nazi attempt to exterminate Europe’s Jews remains an ever more powerful a phenomenon, without doubt much can be gleaned from this past epoch that also speaks to the unhappy present. Although violent anti-Semitism forms but part of this analysis of nationalist ideology, soldiers and civil-military relations, one can hardly ignore how this central feature of western civilization that has made a striking comeback since 11 September 2001 as hatred and violence against Jews forms an important part of bin Ladenist ideology.

Surely one must take up again the new-old category of Weltanschauungskrieg, or what Jomini called “wars of opinion.”¹⁰ The Axis campaigns of imperial racial conquest in World War II form a natural point of departure. Far from being bloody curiosities of the distant past, the multi-layered interactions of ideology and warfare in World War II continue to reverberate through present conflict, in no small part because the relevant questions, though of pressing importance today, are no longer asked in scholarly or policy-making circles. The latter especially have grown over confident of the political effects of technology in war or have become too focused on a single national experience of the last third of the 20th century past as the basis for strategic thought. While the violent era since September 2001 surely marks a new epoch in the history of war and democratic civil-military relations for the United States, the imperative to comprehend the truths of war and peace that lie beyond the confusion of the present requires comparisons of one case of soldiers and politics to another,

¹⁰ The term is drawn from the seminal work: Helmut Krausnick et al eds., *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen d. Sipo u. d. SD, 1938-1942* (Stuttgart, 1981). On ideology and war in the era of revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare and the implications of same for modern war generally, cf. R.R. Palmer, “Frederick the Great, Guibert, Buelow: From Dynastic to National War”; John Shy, “Jomini”; Peter Paret, “Clausewitz,” in Peter Paret et al eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 91-119;143-213.

even if such an effort may strike some as polemical, for all analysis of war and military power requires just such a comparison.

“Ich bin Soldat¹¹,” thus began Ernst Röhm’s memoirs published four years before his untimely death in July 1934. His end in a Munich-Stadelheim prison cell recalled rather more a Chicago gang-land execution than a hero’s demise on the battlefield, especially when one considers how figures in Hitler’s inner circle, in the regular army and Röhm’s subordinates in the SS joined hands to liquidate the homo-erotic, would-be Gneisenau-in-a-brown shirt and his lieutenants¹². During the rise to power of the Sturmabteilung as the vanguard of the NSDAP from 1921 until 1934, Röhm had helped, in part, to create, and in turn was done in by, what one might describe here as SS ideology.¹³ In other words, to render this concept in shorthand, this creed comprised an integral nationalist dogma of militarism and the citizen-at-arms clad in a berserk mixture of death-cult hocus-pocus, body-beautiful scientific racism, Norse mythology and German romantic notions of the Middle Ages that belied the enormous destructive potential latent in this most aggressive form of Völkisch ideology.

Little in the outward appearance of Heinrich Himmler in the troubled summer of 1934, when he aided Hitler execute the SA Stabschef, would have predicted the violent progress of such ideas in the decade to come. Beyond Röhm’s core ideal of a Nazi militia that would displace the Prussian-German army, the notion that germinated in the mind behind these squinting eyes and pince-nez relied on racial-ethnic-quasi-religious criteria of an elite guard, that is of a new model soldier of a very specific kind – versus dynastic concepts of privilege and duty or liberal ideas of the citizen-at-arms. This concept he carried to its extremity and fused it with a cult of violence via

¹¹ Ernst Röhm, *Die Geschichte eines Hochverrätters*, (München, 1934) 7th ed. p. 9.

¹² On the events of 30 June 1934, see: Peter Longerich, *Die braunen Bataillone: die Geschichte der SA* (München, 1989) pp. 188-219; Heinz Höhne, *Mordsache Röhm; Hitlers Durchbruch zur Alleinherrschaft, 1933-1934* (Reinbek, 1984); Immo v. Fallois, *Kalkül und Illusion: die Machtkampf zwischen Reichswehr u. SA während d. Röhmkrise 1934*, (Berlin, 1994). For the effect of this event on the SS, see: Wegner, *Hitlers Politische Soldaten*, pp. 84ff.

¹³ Wegner, *Hitlers Politische Soldaten*, pp. 25ff.; on the origins of Himmler’s ideas especially as concerns the role of soldiers and proto-Nazi ideology, cf. Bradley Smith, *Heinrich Himmler: A Nazi in the Making, 1900-1926* (Stanford, 1971), pp. 35ff. Also see: Josef Ackermann, *Heinrich Himmler als Ideologe* (Göttingen, 1970); Wegner asserts that SS ideology chiefly reflected Himmler’s thought, as well as the official statements of same in the SS *Publizistik*. The historiography of the so-called collective *Täterbiographien* contains no unitary theory as to how racist ideas were spread and ended up in genocidal acts. Cf. Browder, “Eichmann Männer,” pp. 2-20; Gerhard Paul, *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttingen, 2002); Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitlers Bürokraten: Eichmann, seine willigen Vollstrecker und die Banalität des Bösen* (Zürich, 2000).

romanticism, meritocracy and technocracy on an expanding ideological, institutional and geographical scale. There existed, in Himmler's mind, little difference between internal and external enemies on such diverse battlefields as a Berlin-Mitte street corner, the barracks square of a concentration camp, or simultaneously the rear area and forward edge of combat zone of the Russian front.¹⁴

The additional figures in Röhm's demise as Reinhard Heydrich, Theodore Eicke and Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich or who thereafter profited from his eclipse as Paul Hausser, likewise described themselves in Röhm's soldierly terms at the time and thereafter¹⁵. The more one deepens oneself in the writings of SS figures during the III. Reich and especially in the literature of apologia that emerged after the defeat, which endures with remarkable strength¹⁶, one cannot help but be struck at the manner in which these men in black tunics mimicked Röhm and other brown-shirted soldiers of fortune in their proclamations of self-ethos. That is, to be soldiers of a once-again-mobilized German nation on the march with the spirit of 1914; to undo the wrongs of 1918 on the home front and the international system of states by force of arms; to be seized by the higher moral, political and social truths of the storm of steel; by rage at the humiliation of the war dead by the dictates of peace and an alien form of government imposed by outsiders; to restore the honor of those who had perished between 1919 and 1933 at the hands of the enemy-within and the supporters of same abroad; to wield a preemptive blow against all future foes inside the Reich and beyond its borders; and by the sum of all these deeds, to form a master elite of the Greater German Reich for centuries to come. Thus would be restored a nobility based on superior race to dominate Europe and thereby undo all the ills that had followed since 1789, 1848 and 1917 in the wake of liberalism and socialism. All this and more required a re-foundation of the nation at arms by the elite guard of the party on the basis of total war in the 20th century so as to protect the Führer and Reich against all enemies. The above forms the point of departure for the study that follows.

¹⁴ Wegner, *Hitlers politische Soldaten* pp. 74-75.

¹⁵ On the early military influences on Himmler, see: Smith, *Himmler*, p.47ff; for biographical accounts of Heydrich (a disgraced naval officer), Eicke (an ex-NCO), Dietrich (an ex-NCO) and Hausser (a professional soldier and ex-General officer), cf. Ronald Smelser et al eds., *Die SS: Elite unter dem Totenkopf: 30 Lebensläufe* (Paderborn, 2000), pp. 208-219; 147-159; 119-133; 190-207, respectively; this work contains citations of recent historical works as well as the insight that few of these figures have scholarly biographies worthy of modern standards of research.

¹⁶ For example, Paul Hausser, *Soldaten wie andere auch: der Weg der Waffen-SS* (Osnabrück, 1966); Felix Steiner, *Die Armee der Geächteten* (Preus. Oldendorf, 1971); Wegner, *Hitlers politische Soldaten*, pp. 333ff.

One should, however, scarcely accept at face value Röhm's "I am a soldier," or Hausser's "...soldiers like any other." To be sure armies and soldiers played a central role in the formative biographies of all these men, but in the aspect that these institutions found themselves in the midst of exceptional crisis and change associated with the social and political crisis at the end of the 19th century and the collapse of the international system at the dawn of the 20th century. This crisis of mass politics and war in the machine age included phases of total war, national defeat, civil and social strife amid what finally was an unsuccessful transition to democracy as well as truncated and circumscribed military biographies for the figures under examination here. The foregoing represented but a prelude and a contrast to the development after 1933 of arms and the state in national socialism. Herein the SS played its role of hectic institutional growth and organizational metamorphosis from a tiny branch of the SA in 1925 to a state-within-a-state with the most diverse missions and functions of guardians of racial purity, internal security, as well as paramilitary and military elite formations. All of this transpired in somewhat more than a decade's time. The sum of these phenomena meant that, prior to 1934 and the break-away of the SS from the SA, certain of these figures responsible for the formation of the SS idea of soldiering in its widest sense had often only been peripheral figures in professional military life. That is, their military biographies had not been unlike that of the figure who had made the NSDAP into a national power in the final phase of the first German republic, Adolf Hitler.¹⁷ This assertion does not suggest, however, that professional soldiers, themselves, were invulnerable to the temptations of totalitarian politics. Far from it, in fact. The irony here as concerns the military self-image of Röhm, Himmler and Dietrich resides in this: the domestic and international political forces, which thrust these otherwise marginal figures to prominence in the brief period from the late-1920s until the early 1940s, also finally transformed beyond recognition the traditional political, social and cultural roles of the Prussian-German soldier. This epochal process represents a significant development in 20th century European civil-military

¹⁷ Manfred Koch-Hillebrecht, *Hitler: Ein Sohn des Krieges-Fronterlebnis und Weltbild* (München, 2003), pp. 157ff as well as collective biographies in Smelser et al eds., *Die SS: Elite unter dem Totenkopf*. On the decline of German military institutions as a result of total war and the disappearing barriers between professional soldiers and the people at arms, see: Wolfgang Sauer, "Die Reichswehr," in Karl-Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik* (Villingen, 1955), pp. 205-256; Michael Geyer, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare," in Peter Paret et al eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy*, (Princeton, 1986), pp. 537ff.; idem. "People's War: The German Debate About a Levee en Masse in October, 1918," in Daniel Moran et al eds., *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 124-158; Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Armee und III. Reich, 1933-1939* (Paderborn/1987), pp. 11ff.

relations in the era of integral nationalism, mass politics, industrialized, total warfare and disintegrating societies¹⁸. That is, Röhm, Himmler, Eicke and Hausser's idea of the soldier per force reflected the proliferation of organized violence in the era of machine warfare and in the radicalization of German nationalism at the dawn of 20th century¹⁹. In their fashion, the above figures claimed to be heirs of the soldiers of German unity in the era 1807 to 1918; but, in fact, through their actions, they severely damaged, if not wholly obliterated, the lines of continuity and tradition by force of totalitarian ideology that resulted in a war of racial conquest. To be sure, the above figures can but poorly function in the view of this century, as they once did immediately after war's end as the alibi of a nation; but none can deny that these men essentially destroyed whatever boundaries existed between professional soldier, secret policeman, ideological racist zealot, and executioner. Figures in the SS accelerated a process already ongoing as concerns the union of mass politics, large peacetime armies on the machine model, and the domestic and international consequences of German strategic failure in the era 1916-1918.²⁰

By soldier, these men, in fact, meant "political soldier,"²¹ a phrase that came from the lexicon of the radicalized and leveled German nationalist camp of the 1920s.²² This idea born in the chaos of defeat, civil strife amid the flourishing of fascism and totalitarianism has considerable implications for those interested not only in the history of soldiers, politics and society in National Socialism, but the character of civil-military relations in a more general sense. The concept of "political soldier" of the era 1918-1945 must be lodged against Hausser's apolitical idea – "Soldaten wie andere auch" – and that of other self-serving apologists who grasped at the legacy of "immortal soldierly virtues" within the context of the Federal Republic of the 1950s and early 1960s.²³ With memories all too short, these men sought to forget or to deny

¹⁸ In addition to sources in note 17, on civil-military relations in the age of total war in the first half of the 20th century, see: Donald Cameron Watt, *Too Serious a Business: European Armed Forces and the Approach of the Second World War* (Berkeley, 1975), pp. 31-58; Stig Förster, *An der Schwelle zum Totalen Krieg: die militärische Debatte über den Krieg der Zukunft, 1919-1939* (Paderborn/München, 2002).

¹⁹ Wegner, *Hitlers politische Soldaten*, pp. 36-38. Charles Sydnor, *Soldaten des Todes: Die 3. SS-Division 'Totenkopf,' 1933-1945* (Paderborn/München, 2003), pp. 284-299.

²⁰ Geyer "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare," cited in note 17 above.

²¹ Wegner, *Hitlers politische Soldaten*, pp. 36ff.

²² Ibid. On the radicalization of German right wing thought in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see: Stefan Breuer, *Ordnungen der Ungleichheit: die deutsche Rechte im Widerstreit ihrer Ideen, 1871-1945* (Darmstadt, 2001), pp. 105ff.

²³ Donald Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces* (Princeton, 1988); Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: die Anfänge der*

the core fact that the SS took up the political-soldier, street-fighter/semi-criminal reality of the SA and carried this practice to new locales amid new methods. While the appearance of the latter organization and its diverse facets may have superficially differed from those at its foundation (i.e. racial selectivity, concept of an elite, links to higher social strata) but this violent, street-fight, meeting-hall brawl heritage remained essential to the character of what was to follow in the years 1934-1939 in the further evolution of the SS, even if this heritage was grafted to ideals of racial technocracy, and existing state institutions of power. How could such be otherwise with the events of 30 June 1934 Putsch against Röhm, a kind of big bang of criminal practice present at the creation of the armed SS formations? This collective amnesia about the events from 1934 on operated amid the general re-interpretation of soldierly ethos and civil-military relations which unfolded in the 1950s amid the consolidation of the Bonn republic, the integration of ex-Nazi sub groups into West German society, the altercation over veterans' benefits, and the establishment of the Bundeswehr.

No one has better understood the essential meaning of the "political soldier" as applied to the subject of this essay as Bernd Wegner in his magisterial work on the Waffen SS²⁴. Crucial here is how the reality of the political soldier visible in the evolution of the SS reflected the eradication of what until the era 1890-1918 had been the boundaries between civil society and military institutions; further, the distinction of such spheres has been crucial to the ethics and ethos of traditional German soldiers of the era as well as to theory about civil-military relations into the present.²⁵ While the idea of citizen-in-uniform had antecedents in revolutionary and napoleonic Europe and was championed by European socialists before 1914, Germany's mobilization for total war in the last phase of the conflict and the spread of armed violence at home more generally in the wake of defeat had brought a new reality to this idea after 1916. The sum of these developments represented a milestone in what lay ahead until 1933. In the first instance, after 1918 the founders of the Freikorps had put armed forces into private hands and thus further proliferated the battle line into the streets of the home front, whence it did not vanish even when normalcy came to the first German republic by

Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit (München, 1996); Ulrich Brochhagen, *Nach Nürnberg: Vergangenheitsbewältigung und Westintegration in der Ära Adenauer* (Hamburg, 1994).

²⁴ Wegner, *Hitlers politische Soldaten*, pp.13ff.

²⁵ Wegner, *Hitlers politische Soldaten*, pp. 84ff. Civil-military relations theory since 1989 has made much use of Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Practice of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, 1957), which contains an analysis of German civil-military relations from 1700 'til 1957 that stands a half century behind modern scholarship, cf. pp. 98-124, and hence offers a problematic basis for theoretical analysis in the 21st century. His interpretation diverges sharply from the argument presented herein.

1924²⁶. In the process, as Wegner argues, this vanguard of Nazism greatly aided the formation of a quasi-military “grey zone,” in German society, which became a fertile ground for the later growth of the SS. This grey zone further distinguished itself as a realm in which war and peace also became merged in a state of permanent mobilization against an ongoing threat, even though at a given moment, to an outsider on the corner of the Linden and the Friedrichstrasse, peace seemed to reign in Berlin. In the second instance, as the first German democracy struggled to establish itself, domestic politics increasingly became channeled through para-military echelons as the leading political parties transformed what had been veterans organizations or the like in the era before 1914 into private armies for civil war. In this vein, in the post-war years, in which democratic forces tried to assert their role, various political parties with paramilitary formations resisted them with the idea that pluralistic politics should give way to a “state of front fighters,” or in the view of Erich Ludendorff, a society and state on the basis of the people’s community ala 1914 and the ethical basis of the army as it had existed before 1918.²⁷

The concept of the politically mobilized front-fighter on guard against the enemy-within constituted but one feature of the cosmos of ideas included in SS beliefs.²⁸ To be sure, Himmler and his followers seized upon other concepts that diverged sharply from what is commonly described elsewhere as a traditional soldierly ethos. Such ideas included the Ordensgedanke, that is, the aspiration of SS ideologues to constitute a national socialist knighthood on the pattern of the feudalistic, chivalric orders of the middle ages as well as that of the Society of Jesus of the era of the counter-reformation. The latter entity, in particular, was seen by SS thinkers as an especially dangerous institution because of its resistance to the Nazi march to power and the consolidation of same after 1933²⁹; hence, in Himmler’s view especially, the SS should emulate the Jesuits in their vertical structure, their role as the avant garde for an idea on the march and the subordination of the individual to the whole. Further, the German Order, in its manner from the era of feudal Europe and a society of estates, constituted an ideal for the SS as the embodiment of the unity of statesman and soldier, as well as the union of state

²⁶ On the political conditions in which the Freikorps emerged, cf. Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar, 1918-1933: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (München, 1993), pp.80-82; on their further development, James Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington, 1977).

²⁷ Wegner, *Hitlers Politische Soldaten* As in note 26. On Ludendorff, see: Geyer, “Machine Warfare,” pp. 548-554; Erich Ludendorff, *Der Totale Krieg* (München, 1935), pp. 11ff.

²⁸ Wegner, pp. 40-41.

²⁹ Wolfgang Dierker, *Himmlers Glaubenskrieger: Die SD d. SS u. seine Religionspolitik, 1933-1941* (Paderborn, 2002).

and nation derived organically from the community of race. All this stood in contrast to the civil-military experience of central Europe since 1848, where, to Nazi minds, the dogma of constitutionalism had first weakened and then crippled soldiers in the state. In this didactic vision, the knights of the order, moreover, gave birth to the ethos of the Prussian officer corps about which more is said below. The German Order also anticipated, at least in the minds of SS thinkers, Nazi ideas of the political soldier embarked upon imperial conquest and the spread of order and culture in the eastern marches of the Reich and beyond into the heart of the Slavic zone and the glacis of Asia.

While virile knights and warrior-monks loomed in the firmament of the past, such virtues as loyalty, obedience and bravery as central aspects of the SS idea stood visible in the present for all to see in the regalia of the black corps. In order that an SS Mann never forget his oath as well as his readiness to scorn death, such phrases as “Meine Ehre heißt Treue,” – first coined in 1931 at the time of the Stennes revolt³⁰ – were immortalized by Hitler and subordinate figures responsible for Nazi aesthetics on cap badges, belt buckles and dagger blades³¹. More was in play here with such militaria than costume drama kitsch suited for the movie sets of Babelsberg, however. The SS achieved an utterly modern “brand name” recognition via the use of political symbols of dubious taste, but enormous political power and astonishing endurance well beyond 1945.

The emphasis on soldierly loyalty must be put into a civil-military context of the era 1890-1945, if this idea is to make any sense. In the years before the Nazis came to power, German soldiers in the first republic had celebrated their unbreakable bond to the military world of the estates and dynastic honor as the basis of their claim to power in the state and prestige in society³². The maintenance of tradition as a symbol of the soldierly ethos had been a means to recover from defeat and to re-establish professional standards in an army that had been swallowed up by the vortex of civil war. That is, this doctrine sought to render the self image of the soldier and his ethos a politically exclusive catalog of martial virtues – contrasted to those of the bourgeois or working class and to raise the standards of professional military life amid political turmoil and constitutional upheaval. This cult of military tradition figured prominently in Seeckt’s answer to the half-hearted constitutional

³⁰ Longerich, *Braune Bataillone*, (as in note. 12), pp. 102ff.; Werner Bräuninger, *Hitlers Kontrahenten in der NSDAP, 1921-1945* (München, 2004), pp. 125-150.

³¹ Andrew Mollo, *Uniforms of the SS: Allgemeine SS, 1923-1945* 4th ed. (London, 1991) pp. 1ff.

³² Gustav-Adolf Caspar, “Die militärische Tradition in der Reichswehr und in der Wehrmacht, 1919-1945,” in *Tradition in deutschen Streitkräften bis 1945* MGFA eds. (Herford, 1986), pp. 259ff; Hans von Seeckt, *Gedanken eines Soldaten* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 51ff.

and pluralistic attempt, finally, to impose democratic civilian control upon the armed forces in the first republic. Such an emphasis on the soldierly heritage, and on past and future battle field glories – set off from society and at odds with a parliamentary form of government – all damaged the army. This practice distorted civil-military relations, scarred the ethos of the German soldier and made them more liable to the Lorelei appeal of extremist politics with disastrous consequences. Most important though, this organized political nostalgia for a mythical world within the general soldierly ethos exerted an appeal outside of military garrisons and made its way into such paramilitary organizations as the SA and the SS. Here was added the element of scientific racism and nordic historicism to the existing catalog of martial virtues. In this vein, the claim by Hausser that the armed SS adhered wholly to the same standards as German professional soldiers appears ever more tendentious. To be sure, this line of argument hardly suggests that all German soldiers were criminals and murderers; although, granted what one knows today, surely far too many were, but not all. Such an inflated generalization does violence to the complexity of the historical record and engages themes and scholarship too vast for consideration here in depth³³.

The foregoing might only be of scholarly interest to historians of 20th century central Europe, had not the specter of war of ideology and the shadow of total war of a new, virulent kind reappeared at the dawn of the 21st century. The case of the SS and civil-military relations allows for certain theoretical generalizations of an unexpected kind that might interest those students of war beyond 20th century history. In the first instance, the gravity of the today's strategic crisis and the paucity of insightful analysis all argue for a civil-military reappraisal of the violent present.³⁴ Such an analysis must perforce include an assessment of what can go wrong with the soldier in the state when the boundaries between the sphere of the war waged by of military professionals and defense technologists versus that waged by paramilitaries, free-booters, mercenaries, irregulars, fighters, guerillas, insurgents, and terrorists. Such war gives way to a proliferation of conflict for all encompassing

³³ Among an ever greater literature, cf. Manfred Oldenburg, *Ideologie u. militärisches Kalkül: Die Besatzungspolitik d. Wehrmacht i.d. Sowjetunion 1942* (Köln/Weimar, 2004); Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik u. Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe 'D' i. d. südlichen Sowjetunion, 1941-1943* (Hamburg, 2003); Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius *Kriegsland im Osten: Eroberung, Kolonisierung u. Militärherrschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, 2002).

³⁴ Among older works which looked forward to 11 September 2001 and what might follow, see: Ekkehard Lippert et al eds., *Sicherheit in der unsicheren Gesellschaft* (Opladen, 1997); Philip Delmas, *The Rosy Future of War* (New York, 1995); more recent: Lennart Souchon ed., *Neue Herausforderungen an Operative Führung aus Sicht der Wissenschaft u. d. Streitkräfte in Clausewitz-Information 2/2004* (Hamburg, 2004).

ideological goals and the unintended civil-military consequences of an ever-expanding cohort of combatants of all kinds. That is, the big bang that proliferates nationalist fervor beyond a circumscribed, professionally limited corps of soldiers also eradicates the boundary between external and internal enemies and the traditional battle fields of the past as the definition of war and military ethos is transformed in turn. In a state of permanent ideological war on an imperial scale, the tendency for irregular military formations to wage such war on variegated battlefields, be they at home or overseas, forms an important phenomenon worthy of civil-military reflection. Surely this insight stares back at us from the dead visages of SS men in their glory of the order of the death's head. Our age confronts this trend as did the past.



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In the United States, however, in the midst of the so-called Global War On Terror, reference to the past in the knotted issues of the limits of military professionalism, nationalism, internal war, and irregular military formations generally become mired in polemics that call into question one's patriotism. This phenomenon of name calling hardly casts much light on the needs of the present crisis. Rather, most strategic scrutiny is marred by the assertion, in the first instance, that the present conflict is *sui generis*, and thus comparisons as means of analysis are but scarcely possible. This self-contained argument poorly advances urgent civil-military understanding. Moreover, the body of literature of European civil-military relations that emerged from the enlargement of NATO forms a mediocre point of departure since 11 September 2001, because of its technocratic, essentially peace-time managerial cast of mind had, until recently, been based, overwhelmingly, on the rigors of peacetime planning and executive/legislative interactions.

The civil-military implications of the present crisis have yet to show themselves fully, but to be sure the business-as-usual, defense and security sector reforms of central Europe that characterized the 1990s must branch out beyond the Congressional Budget Office and Planning, Programming and Management System dicta of democratic civil-military relations and security sector reform. Nor do facile and finally pointless contrasts between the strategic ideal of the second world war and the failures of the Indochina enlighten the seeker of strategic truths. Rather, the manner in which nationalism, the proliferation of fighting front into the home front, scientific racism, and the role of declassé soldiers who find a new outlet for organizations violence formed a horrific amalgam. Statesmen, soldiers and theorist must confront a messier, darker and more violence laden frame of civil-military reference as they consider the statecraft, society and the use of arms to defeat bin Ladenist terror on a world wide scale. The Order of the Death's Head stands for the extreme limit of the perversion of military professionalism swept up in imperial ambitions amid a civil war that becomes a world war.³⁵

³⁵ Since the original version of this essay appeared in 2003, several new volumes have emerged with bearing on its subject. As concerns the SS, its leadership, organization, and ideology a number of works appeared of merit. Charles Sydnor's 1977 work on the Totenkopfdivision was translated into German with an updated bibliographical essay, see: Charles Sydnor Jr., *Die Soldaten des Todes: Die 3. SS-Division "Totenkopf" 1933-1945* (Paderborn/Wien, 2002); the collective biography of middle level SS officers is treated in Klaus-Michael Mallmann & Gerhard Paul eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt: Nationsozialistische Täterbiographien* (Darmstadt, 2004); the role of special troops in the Reichsführung SS among the Waffen SS as a whole is contained in Martin Cüppers., *Wegbereiter der Shoah Die Waffen-SS, der Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS und die Judenvernichtung 1939-1945* (Darmstadt, 2005); Peter Longenrich, *Heinrich Himmler: Biographie* (München, 2008) represents the first scholarly biography of the Reichsführer-SS and fills an important gap in the literature; a compendium of omnibus research on the SS, its institutions, ideas and personalities is: Jan Erik Schulte ed., *Die SS, Himmler und die Wewelsburg* (Paderborn/Wien, 2009); a quantitative social historical comparison of the Waffen-SS and the German Army, with due emphasis on the role of ideas and soldiers, appeared by Rene Rohrkampf, *"Weltanschaulich gefestigte Kämpfer": Die Soldaten der Waffen-SS 1933-1945* (Paderborn/Wien, 2010); the first scholarly biography of Heydrich is: Robert Gerwarth, *Reinhard Heydrich: Biographie* (München, 2011); a scholarly examination of the Lebensborn is germane to SS ideology, as well: Thomas Bryant, *Himmlers Kinder: zur Geschichte der SS Organisation "Lebensborn e.V." 1935-1945* (Wiesbaden, 2011). On the era of total war and soldierly ethos and identity, see Matthias Springer, *Landsknechte auf dem Wege ins Dritte Reich?: Zu Genese und Wandel des Freikorpsmythos* (Paderborn/Wien, 2008); Thomas Weber, *Hitler's First War* (Oxford, 2010) turns not only key legends and myths of national socialism on their head, but smashes many icons in Hitler's biography and the Infanterie Regiment List of the Bavarian army; attention to the legacy of the 1914-1918 war and national socialism also emerges in a collection of scholarly chapters in: Gerd Krumeich ed., *Nationalsozialismus und Erster Weltkrieg* (Essen, 2010). Of special interest for the role of Austrian brown-shirts and their integration in the SA and SS located in the Altreich after the ban placed on the NSDAP and its paramilitary organizations by the Dolfuß regime is: Hans Schafranek, *Söldner*

für den Anschluss: die Österreichische Legion, 1933-1938 (Wien, 2011). Useful studies on civil military relations, defense institution building, and scholarly theories on these themes are: Sven Bernhard Gareis & Paul Klein eds., *Handbuch Militär und Sozialwissenschaft 2nd ed.* (Wiesbaden, 2006); Karl-Heinz Lutz et al eds., *Reform, Reorganisation, Transformation: Zum Wandel in deutschen Streitkräften von den preußischen Heeresreformen bis zur Transformation der Bundeswehr* (München, 2010); Aurel Croissant & David Kühn, *Militär und zivile Politik* (München, 2011).