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DEFEATED BUT STILL A FACTOR? THE ROLE OF GERMAN ARMED FORCES IN THE TRANSITION FROM WAR TO PEACE, 1919-1923

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Abstract

The transition from war to peace was for Germany after the Armistice in the West a slow and painful process. Against the background of the current model of the four factors required to underwrite a stable peace – disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, security sector reform – it is worthwhile taking a broad view of the challenges for the country and its armed formations between November 1918 and November 1923. The principal challenge was that both the government and the defeated armed forces had limited agency, so were constantly reacting to events rather than shaping them. The insecure borders in the East meant that a significance prerequisite for peace was missing. The instability of the early post-war period led to first demobilization but followed by the phenomenon of remobilization through the creation of numerous armed groups to secure the eastern borders and combat Communist uprisings. The failure to demobilize politically and psychologically created the basis for the underground Reichswehr and continual attempts to evade the conditions of the Versailles Treaty.

Keywords: German armed forces; war to peace transition; Versailles Treaty; uprisings; disarmament; demobilization; reintegration; security sector reform

The question of postwar military transitions has always been a central topic in German military history and, especially, for German military historians. In the case of the defeated German Empire, which agreed to an Armistice which came into effect on 11 November 1918, the transition from war to peace was a highly complex and confusing challenge, both for the Germans and for the victorious allies – Great Britain and France, in particular. It can be observed, nonetheless, that surprisingly little attempt has been made by historians of modern German history to consider it within a broader conceptual framework. If we begin with some of the current literature, and statements from the United Nations, relating to strategies in peacekeeping and state-building interventions, we discover that the aim in order to secure peace is often perceived as *disarmament*, *demobilization*, *reintegration* and *security sector reform*.[1] The Versailles Peace Treaty sought to achieve at least three of these goals, while reintegration of former soldiers was to be the task of the new Weimar Republic, officially constituted on 11 August 1919, thereby ending completely the existence of the German Empire and the monarchy as an institution.

The attempt to pacify Europe, and remove Germany as a military threat, was however a serious challenge for the victors. This was due, above all, to the continued role of German armed groups, some regular, some irregular, in the years 1919-1923. The Versailles Treaty sought the disarmament and demobilization of German forces and, by implication, also "security sector reform" (even if more by implication than design), in other words, there was an effort to disband the Great German General Staff, hinder weapons production and, overall, prevent Germany regaining its great power status for the foreseeable future. The aim of this paper is not to consider all the four factors, today generally considered to be essential to ensure the transition from war to peace, rather to consider briefly the factor of German armed forces (not, it should be noted, "the" German armed forces) in the period 1919-1923 and what general observations might be made about the transition from war to peace, especially in relation to disarmament and demobilization. There were so many different types of forces that it will only be possible in this paper to provide an overview of the subject before arriving at some general conclusions.

The Versailles Conference 1919 and Intact German Formations

One of the immediate challenges for the Allied representatives at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919 was the continued existence of armed German formations. A specific

1 .These four concepts are dealt with in considerable detail, for instance, in the following works: Alan Bryden and Heiner Hänggi (eds.), *Security Governance in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (London: DCAF/Transaction Publishers, 2005); Robert Muggah, *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War* (London: Routledge, 2009; Alan Bryden and Vincenza Scherrer (eds.), *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and Security Sector Reform* (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2012); Mark Sedra (ed.), *The Future of Security Sector Reform* (Waterloo, ON: CIGI, 2010); Michael Miklaucic and Melanne A. Civic, *Monopoly of Force: The Nexus of DDR and SSR* (Washington DC: NDU Press, 2011).

Sub-Committee on Limitation of Armaments met for the first time on 29 January 1919. Their initial task was to try and estimate the quantity of weapons still in German hands. Major-General Thwaites representing Great Britain stated that he thought that there were over a million rifles, 50,000 machine-guns and 12,000 artillery pieces still in the possession of German units. Brigadier-General Nolan, representing the United States estimated that the Germans were still in possession of 633 aircraft, while General Weygand stated that the lack of German demobilization was holding up the demobilization of Allied armies because the German forces still held a certain combat potential. The main challenge was the German divisions stationed in the East which, as of 6 January 1919, were thought to number a total of eighteen.[2]

Two days later, the three senior officers met again to consider some revised figures, this time estimating a minimum of 600-700,000 German personnel still serving, with 8,000 field guns (including anti-aircraft weapons), and 2,500 heavy guns. There were also somewhere between 4-6,000 trench mortars, around 1,300,000 rifles in the hands of front-line troops, but a likely total of 3,500,000 to 4,000,000, including those at home in Germany and in weapons depots. The British estimated 450 naval aircraft to be still intact, as well as dirigibles, but there was a lack of knowledge as to how many aircraft might have been produced after the Armistice. It was noted that the numbers arrived at did not include Russian war material which had fallen into German hands, considered to be a "considerable quantity."[3]

For the military delegates at the Peace Conference, it was decided that it was their task to agree upon the quantity of the following armaments which Germany would be allowed to retain in heavy guns, field guns, machine-guns, automatic rifles, rifles, aircraft (including airships), tanks, gas, and gas masks. It was suggested that to ensure compliance, British, French and American experts needed to assess "the amount of materials manufactured or in the course of fabrication now existing in the enemy's country." Germany was to be prevented from resuming the manufacture of war materials. An Inter-Allied Committee for control of German armaments was proposed, with relevant sub-committees so that the necessary expertise would be available. In the case of German non-compliance, both the British and French representatives proposed "coercion" in the Ruhr area.[4]

The Committee was relatively quick at providing an estimate of the maximum strength of the German Army, considering 25 infantry divisions and five cavalry divisions as adequate to protect the country's borders. The total number of arms was proposed at 1,000 heavy guns, 1,575 field guns, 3,825 machine guns, 4,500 automatic rifles and 412,000 rifles. The idea was floated that in the case of non-compliance, the

2. National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (TNA), FO608/267, fol. 183-187, Telegram. Field-Marshal Weygand to General Nudant, President, Inter-Allied Armistice Commission, 29 January 1919.

3. TNA, FO 608/267, fol. 235-237, Annex 1, General Weygand's Report. Notes on the estimates of resources in Men and Material in the German Army on February 1st, 1919.

4. TNA, FO 608/267, fol. 238-243, Annex II. Conclusions of the Sub-Committee on German Armaments.

occupation of the right bank of the Rhine could be considered an option. But the author of a memorandum argued that he was unable to agree to such a proposal because it might constitute a violation of the Armistice agreement.[5] The Committee was also very precise in laying down what they considered to be the normal strength of a German division. For an infantry division: 12,000 rifles, 108 heavy and 144 light machine-guns, 45 trench mortars, 48 field guns and field howitzers, 332 heavy guns. In the case of a cavalry division, there were to be 6,000 rifles or carbines, 72 heavy machine guns and 12 field guns.[6]

The problems of peacemaking as seen through the lens of disarmament were highlighted in a meeting on 2 February 1919, the second meeting of the Committee on the Limitation of Armaments. General Bliss from the United States "pointed out the gravity of the situation in the event of Germany not acquiescing in the terms offered her. War would ensue, and the Peace Conference would automatically dissolve." Marshal Foch added to these voices, stating that "… if demobilization was proceeded with, and it was found that Germany was rearming, in spite of control and inspection, there would be no means of coercion available to stop such rearming."[7] Interesting is that during the Third Meeting of the Committee, General Sir Henry Wilson noted that, "he understood it was the intention to weaken Germany by disarming her in order to hasten Allied demobilisation."[8] Here we see evidence that demobilization exists in a direct relationship between the victor and the vanquished: the victor may be more anxious to demobilize than the side which has been defeated.

There were two further elements to the challenge of demobilization: on the one hand, the perceived "bad faith" on the part of the German authorities; on the other, the unrealistic attitude of the Allied and Associated Powers. This emerges from a meeting held on 11 February 1919 at Marschal Foch's Headquarters, where representatives of Britain, America, France and Italy presented a report to the Supreme War Council. It was a litany of complaints about German non-compliance with the terms of the Armistice. There had been a failure to repatriate soldiers from Alsace and Lorraine, while the German authorities had not provided information on the numbers still serving in the Germany Army. There were further complaints around German behaviour in Poland, while a separate Convention signed between the German Government and the Ukrainian authorities was contrary to the conditions which had been laid down by the Allies. There were also violations of the naval conditions of the Armistice agreement, among them breaking up submarines instead of turning them over to the Allies. While the German authorities sought to explain examples of their non-compliance as down to the political crisis at home and insoluble transportation difficulties, the Allies considered

5. TNA, FO 608/267, fol. 244-246, Annex III. Memorandum.

6. TNA, FO 608/267, fol. 249, Annex V, Normal Allowance of Arms for German Units.

7. TNA, FO 608/267, fol. 250-253, SECRET: Limitation of Armaments in Germany. Meeting of February 2nd, 1919.

8. TNA, FO 608/267, fol. 256, Third Meeting of the Committee on the Limitation of Armaments, 5 February 1919.

much of it due to "willful default," although it was conceded that some clauses were open to interpretation.[9]

There were certainly practical difficulties for the German military and civilian authorities. Yet, at the same time, up until mid-January 1919, there was a moral agony at being forced to reach the inevitable conclusion that the war was not only lost, but that the armed forces had in fact no option but to agree to capitulate. Hindenburg had noted on 17 January 1919 that it would still be possible to reconquer Posen and defend the frontiers in the East, but that there was no chance of defending against a serious offensive in the West. The following month, the High Command was still optimistic about reconquering Posen. It was the situation in the East, however, which contributed in considerable measure to the willingness of the High Command to allow the creation of armed units, including the *Freikorps*, even if the disturbances at home were also a significant factor.[10]

The finalized military clauses of the Versailles Treaty, signed on 28 June 1919, began with clause 159, which stated: "The German military forces shall be demobilized and reduced as prescribed hereinafter." (Article 159). The Great General Staff was to be dissolved. By 31 March 1920, German forces were not to exceed seven infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions. (Article 160). Within three months of the Treaty coming into effect, the number of effectives was not to exceed 200,000. Likewise, by 31 March 1920, the total number of effectives was not to exceed 100,000. (Article 163) The manufacture of arms, munitions, or any other weapons of war, could only be carried out in factories with the approval of the Governments of the Allied and Associated Powers. (Article 168) The importation of war material was forbidden. (Article 170)[11]

The Allied internal military discussions in Paris demonstrated some of the problems of the transition from war to peace. This was not only the case when it came to the Entente. When the Cabinet of Philipp Scheidemann decided on 20 May 1919 to accept the military restriction of 100,000 men, General Hans von Seeckt was not consulted. He protested furiously a few days later, complaining that 100,000-man army would be inadequate to provide security on Germany's borders but also internally. Wilhelm Groener, head of the *Oberste Heeresleitung*, supported Seeckt's position, arguing that accepting such a compromise would have a negative impact on the volunteer units, which would say that they had restored order only to be left in the lurch by the government they had

9. TNA, FO 608/249, fol. 5-12, Conclusion of Committee assembled in Accordance with the Decision of Supreme War Council on 10 February 1919, 12 February 1919.

10. G. Schultze-Pfaelzer, *Hindenburg: Peace-War-Aftermath* (Glasgow: Philip Allan, 1931), 183-184; Boris Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Desintegration: Das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2003), 233-241.

11. Treaty of Peace with Germany (Treaty of Versailles). Treaty and protocol signed at Versailles June 28, 1919; protocol signed by Germany at Paris January 10, 1920, https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/treaty_of_versailles-112018.pdf. [accessed 31 August 2024].

helped save.[12] This point now brings us to the role of the *Freikorps* formations, both in the Baltic region and inside Germany. Their employment was of central significance in the difficult transition from war to peace.

Freikorps Formations in the Baltics

The Free Corps formations in the East were a very varied collection of units. Among them were paramilitary formations which fought in the Baltic States. Following the surrender (indeed, in some cases, units were not far from collapse) of German formations on the Western Front, the German occupation regime in the Baltic States began to fall apart. Many soldiers simply wanted to return home as the armed forces began to demobilize. On 6 January 1919, Bolshevik troops captured Vilnius. In Lithuania, indeed across all three Baltic states, the progress of the largely Russian Bolshevik Red Army could not be stopped without recourse to Allies. In February 1919, the new Lithuanian Army possessed a mere 4,500 soldiers. German troops still stationed in Lithuania were open to Bolshevik propaganda, but really only wanted to return home. On 22 December 1918, Erich von Falkenhayn, Commander-in-Chief of 10th Army, reported to Berlin that he would be unable to halt the advancing Red Army unless he received reinforcements.[13]

In January 1919, the People's Commissioner for the Army and Navy, Gustav Noske, agreed to appeal for volunteers for the conflict in the Baltic region. While the recruitment campaign was aimed at former officers and NCOs, younger soldiers were also attracted by the opportunity for adventure, to earn money and to escape from the desolate atmosphere in a defeated Germany. What emerged was a peculiar phenomenon: on the one hand, dissatisfied soldiers were returning home, while on the other fresh recruits for the anti-Bolshevik struggle began travelling East. The speed with which this process occurred is surprising – by late January 1919, the remnants of Falkenhayn's 10th Army had been replaced by 4,000 volunteers consisting of three regiments and a separate battalion under the command of General Walter von Eberhardt. At the same time, the German forces were not prepared to join Lithuanian offensives since their orders from Berlin were to remain in defensive positions. Some volunteers were prone to selling their equipment and others had little real intention of fighting.[14]

Another aspect of the German presence in Lithuania was the appearance in the city of Kaunus of a Military Mission sent by the Entente. German soldiers were now placed in the position of having to salute British and French officers as well as the British

12. Gerhard W. Rakenius, *Wilhelm Groener als erster Generalquartiermeister. Die Politik der Obersten Heeresleitung 1918/19* (Boppard a.Rh.: Boldt, 1977), 204-205.

13. Tomas Balkelis, "Deutsche Freiwilligenverbände in Litauen 1919," *Annaberger Annales* 27/2019: 88; Peter Lieb, "Der deutsche Krieg im Osten von 1914 bis 1919," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 65 (2017): 465-506.

14. The following paragraphs draw on these sources: Balkelis, "Deutsche Freiwilligenverbände," passim; Tomas Balkelis, "Demobilisierung, Remobilisierung: Paramilitärische Verbände in Litauen 1918-1920," *Osteuropa* 64, no. 1 (2014): 197-220; Bernhard Sauer, "Vom ‚Mythos eines ewigen Soldatentums': Der Feldzug deutscher Freikorps im Baltikum im Jahre 1919," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 43, no. 10 (1995): 869-902.

and French flags. But the strange position of the German forces was underscored in a completely different manner when they were invited to the opening ceremony of the new Lithuanian Military Academy in Kaunus at the end of May 1919, to the horror of the British and French officers. This said, there were frequent examples of tensions and clashes between German and Lithuanian soldiers. Some German soldiers attacked and murdered both Lithuanian soldiers and civilians, with over 12 dying at the end of June 1919. The Lithuanian government demanded the withdrawal of German troops. In the middle of July, the German formations from Saxony were evacuated to Prussia; some remnants joined Freikorps units in Lithuania.

A further curiosity of this period of German "remobilization" was the 2nd West Corps which consisted of 5,000 soldiers, composed of White Russians and German volunteers. This unit operated together with two German *Freikorps* under the command of Karl von Diebietsch and Karl von Plehwe. They were defeated in a battle against the Lithuanian Army in November, but thereafter began a campaign of plunder and arson in northern Lithuania. On 22 November the Lithuanian Army finally defeated the volunteer West Army and recaptured the city of Radviliškis.

Although German volunteers had captured Riga on 22 May 1919, Estonian and Latvian combined units defeated a German Freikorps in central Latvia on 22 June. On 5 August 1919, the Entente threatened Germany with economic sanctions if the *Freikorps* units were not withdrawn from the Baltic region. At the Ende of August the German government was forced to order the evacuation of the volunteer units. While many of the *Freikorps* troops refused to comply, with the result that they joined the West Army, the defeat on 11 November 1919 at the hands of the Estonian-Latvian combined force essentially ended the activities of the German forces in the Baltic states, so that by December 1919 all German forces had been evacuated from the Baltic region.

It should not be forgotten, either, that in early 1919, German troops were still stationed in Southern Russia, even engaging in limited cooperation with the Entente intervention in Russia.[15] This particular case illustrated the logistical practicalities of transporting German troops home in order that they could be demobilized, suggesting that there were genuine practical difficulties in demobilization which the Western Allies were apt either to ignore or underestimate.

As a final point, one of the consequences of the German experience in the Baltic was the vast memoir literature and the myths which emerged in the immediate years thereafter. Those who had fought in the region developed their own particular culture of memory, almost a subdivision of the literature emanating from the Free Corps movement. Many of these memoirs, but also novels, contained a glorification of violence and antisemitic statements; they became especially popular after the NSDAP take-over

15. Kurt Fischer, *Deutsche Truppen und Entente-Intervention in Südrußland 1918/19* (Boppard a.Rh.: Boldt, 1973), 117-144.

of power in 1933. An outgrowth of the memoir literature were two volumes from the official history of German troops and *Freikorps*, published on the instructions of the *Reichskriegsministerium*.[16]

Free Corps Formations in Germany

The activities of the Free Corps movement in Germany parallel in some ways the emergence of the units sent to fight in the East, most notably in the Baltic States. While they were organized by the Reichswehr Ministry, they also had a volunteer and unofficial, or at least semi-official, character which differed somewhat from those surrounding the units sent eastwards shortly after the conclusion of the hostilities in the West. The great paradox of these volunteer units is that, on the one hand, they guaranteed the survival of the fragile German Republic (although some historians have called this interpretation into question), but on the other hand their semi-legal, and outright illegal, activities contributed ultimately to the fall of the Weimar State at the hands of the National Socialists. The scale of the volunteer movement, if we can call it that, is quite remarkable.

By May 1919, there was at least half a million men under arms in 150 different volunteer units and other types of formation, often described as government troops, or to use the term painted on an A7V tank during the Spartakus Uprising in Berlin in 1919, "troops loyal to the government". By the end of 1919, the number of these formations had doubled. These volunteer units were referred to by different terms, such as *Volkswehr*, *Bürgerwehr*, *Selbstsschutzeinheiten*, *Einwohnerwehr*, *Sicherheitswehren*, or, in English, People's Protection Units, Citizens Protection Units, Self-Defence Formations, Residents Protections Units, and Security Formations, even if they were sometime quite similar in character and armament.[17]

The motivations among these various volunteers were often very different. Some workers in poorer districts of large cities joined para-military groups as a form of self-defence measure, as did many in more rural areas who feared marauding demobilized soldiers or Bolsheviks. Other young men, in some cases from the navy, joined in the hope of chalking up enough military experience to support a later application to join the postwar armed forces. There was also the feeling among many that support for the new Republic would be repaid by the government through an energetic opposition to the "dictates" of the Versailles Treaty, or at the very least some form of military organization would be created. The Border Protection Force East (or, *Grenzschutz Ost*) was founded

16. Kriegsgeschichtlichen Forschungsanstalt des Heeres (ed.), *Die Kämpfe im Baltikum nach der zweiten Einnahme von Riga. Juni bis Dezember 1919* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1938). It is interesting that in the preamble to this volume, it was noted that War Historical Section of the Army had tried their best to avoid becoming involved in the differing views over the events in the Baltic (p. v).

17. There is a huge range of sources on the *Freikorps* movement. Among the most useful are, for a brief overview, Rüdiger Bergien, "Die Soldaten der ‚schwarzen Reichswehr'," in Christian Th. Müller & Matthias Rogg (eds.), *Das ist Militärgeschichte!* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013), 83-102, Barth, *Dolstoßlegende*, 229-254, and still Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik 1918-1920* (Boppard a.Rh.: Boldt Verlag, 1966).

on the other hand, for the very specific task of protecting Germany's eastern territories from the newly created Polish State. There was little political dispute at the time over this issue.

The range of emotions and motivations have been summarized by some historians under the heading of "disappointment," referring to the lost war, economic problems and the lack of employment. This led, for example, to the mutiny by members of the Brigade Ehrhardt in the Baltic region on 13 March 1920; likewise, this is given as an explanation for the failed Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch of 1920. It also leads us to a further point in any survey of the German volunteer formations: the differences in the length of time such formations were allowed to remain in existence. Often this was less a question of what the authorities wished for and much more one of whether a unit wanted to be demobilized or not. In the Eastern regions of Germany, there was for example considerable resistance to the "disarming of the population" due to fear of Polish attacks, which led to protests following attempts to collect weapons. On 3 December 1920, the *Reichskommissar* for Disarmament, Wilhelm Peters, announced that regions adjacent to Poland would not have to return their weapons, which was a clear breach of the Versailles Treaty.

A further problem was that attempts to abolish certain *Freikorps* groups proved difficult. Thus, following the Kapp Putsch in mid-March 1920, an official attempt was made to dissolve any Free Corps which was not officially part of the *Reichswehr* establishment. Members of these groups, however, adopted the simple expedient of creating "associations," known as *Arbeitsgemeinschaften*, many of them heading to the Eastern provinces to find work, either as groups or individuals, but often maintaining their identity and keeping their weapons. In many cases, the previous structure of Frei Corps units was preserved almost intact.[18]

Yet the delay in demobilization was not simply a matter of a disgruntled population. The so-called "Black Reichswehr" was largely directed by General Hans von Seeckt, the Chief of the Army High Command, and the Chancellor, Joseph Wirth, who sought to make use of paramilitary formations, for instance, in the third Polish uprising in May 1921 in Upper Silesia, or during the occupation of the Ruhr by the French through acts of sabotage. Part of the motivation here was one of pragmatism, yet at the same time by directing paramilitary groups towards actions which were in the interests of the government, this kept them away from more dangerous activities – or so the theory. Former officers were usually the link between such groups and the Reichswehr leadership, allowing at least some plausible deniability.

It is the case, however, that while the "underground Reichswehr" continued after 1923, it found difficulties in recruiting members to a degree which had not existed before. This turbulent postwar period had seen the communist uprising in Berlin,

18 . Jun Nakata, *Der Grenz- und Landesschutz in der Weimarer Republik 1918-1933. Die geheime Aufrüstung und die deutsche Gesellschaft* (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 2002): 127-133.

5-12 January 1919, further Communist uprisings in Germany in March and April of the same year, not to mention the Munich *Räterepublik* which lasted from 7 April to 2 May 1919. It saw the failed Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch from 13-17 March 1920, and further Communist disturbances in other parts of Germany, including Saxony. The period of internal turmoil was largely ended when Hitler's attempted Putsch in Munich on 8/9 November 1923 failed, even if the French occupation of the Ruhr, which had begun on 11 January 1923, lasted until 25 August 1925.[19]

In short, the four years immediately following the Great War saw extensive Free Corps activity, with many of the units acting with extreme brutality. It has been estimated that a total of 365 such Free Corps formations existed in the Weimar Republic in the period under examination here. One estimate is that 75% of the members were no older than 25 years of age. The problem was that their continued existence severely hindered any sense in society that demobilization had taken place, thus severely hindering the transition from war to peace.

Conclusion

Within the context of the opening reference to the four elements now broadly considered as essential for a successful transition from war to peace – *disarmament*, *demobilization*, *reintegration* and *security sector reform*, if we take a few steps back in the case of the German Republic from 1919 to 1923, there are several broad observations which can be made. While these may appear obvious to those who know German history, it is nonetheless useful to place them in a more politically neutral context to extract some general lessons regarding the transition from war to peace. The first of these is that a successful transition requires settled borders and some degree of stability in neighbouring countries, a prerequisite not present in this period.[20] These conditions were clearly not present. This itself had an impact on the decision-making at the Versailles Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. The scale of unpredictability across Europe forced the negotiators and peacemakers, or peace-enforcers to put it provocatively, to make many compromises, many of which were largely unavoidable due to the chaotic and unsettled situation across Europe.[21]

In terms of disarmament and demobilization, which is the principal focus of this paper, it should be obvious that this largely failed. While the Versailles Treaty demanded that Germany give up or destroy its remaining tanks, for example, a demand which was fulfilled, the phenomenon which occurred was one of accelerated demobilization as a result of the defeat which the Imperial German Army suffered on the field of battle, yet

19. See Table 1 below for an overview of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary activity, 1918-1923.

20. See here Robert Gerwarth, "The Central European Counterrevolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria and Hungary after the Great War," *Past & Present* 200 (2008): 175-209.

21. See here Alaric Searle, "An Armistice without Peace? The 'Failed' Versailles Settlement in Europe, 1919," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 141 (2021): 188-222.

followed by a surge in reliable units being created through a process of remobilization which was assisted by the German authorities, albeit also as a result of strong pressure from below. Fear of a return to civilian life, unemployment, resentment at the lost war, and a range of other emotions and factors, drove men, and especially young men, towards the volunteer formations. While the Weimar Republic undertook, in fact, many measures in an effort to reintegrate its former soldiers into society, there was a huge challenge.

While the German Army had been defeated in the field in 1918,[22] Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg sought to disseminate the myth of the "stab-in-the-back." Although this was politically a potent message later seized upon by the National Socialists, there was a more serious problem which lay elsewhere. This was the remobilization challenge of the years 1919-1923: this not only delayed serious demobilization (both physically and, more importantly, psychologically), it also created a landscape of military experience which offered examples of military achievements and, in the minds of some, genuine successes. German troops had got as far as Riga in 1919, several Bolshevik uprisings had been suppressed. Indeed, in Berlin in 1919, using military vehicles, tanks and armoured cars, order had been restored – violently, yet through modern means which ran against the wartime views of some officers in the High Command during the First World War;[23] and, there had been the start of the Ruhr resistance movement against the French in 1923. It was these military activities which acted as later enablers for the "stab-in-the-back" myth; they lent the previous myth of Ludendorff a new level of credibility. This created a psychological world among veterans which was very different to the rebellious, mutinous soldiers and sailors in late 1918. Moreover, many young men who had been too young to participate in the Great War were suddenly presented with the opportunity of military activity: in their minds, they were being "mobilized" for the first time.

Furthermore, as is well known, the politicized activities, at their worst culminating in political murders in this period, laid further foundations for later radical political groups, creating a climate where veterans of all political persuasions maintained paramilitary forces which subsequently contributed to the downfall of the Weimar Republic. Moreover, the way in which it, up to a point, had become necessary for Weimar's politicians to agree to the Free Corps movement, which in part involved clandestine activity, created an environment in which clandestine rearmament became much more likely. Although the Versailles Treaty made it largely impossible for the German Army and Navy to breach

22. Wilhelm Deist considers it a realistic estimate that in the final weeks of the war between 750,000 to 1,000,000 men refused to go to the front or into action. The disappearing combat value of German units on the Western front is well-documented. Wilhelm Deist, "Verdeckter Militärstreik im Kriegsjahr 1918?" in W. Wette (ed.), *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes* (Munich: Piper, 1992), 160.

23. For an explanation of why many German officers rejected the tank in the First World War, only to change their minds in the postwar period, see Paul Fox, "'A New and Commanding Breed': German Warriors, Tanks and the Will to Battle," *War and Society* 20 (March 2011): 1-23.

agreements regarding heavier weaponry, at least until the 1930s, an infrastructure and a series of networks was created which facilitated more serious breaches of the treaty later.

While it can be argued that there was some security sector reform conducted by the new constitutional state due to the Versailles restrictions, as well as disarmament, the hurdles for a smooth transition from war to peace were extensive. The disarmament of soldiers did not occur to the degree necessary, demobilization was counteracted by remobilization, and even "first-time mobilization," in the period 1919-23. For those who had not fought in the Great War, they were militarily and psychologically mobilized. Regardless of the reasons for a lack of immediate demobilization, the result was that create civil-military forces were unleashed which made security sector reform and reintegration insufficient to facilitate a transition to a peaceful German state which had genuinely demobilized. The lack of psychological demobilization meant that the nation gradually acquired a hunger for rearmament under the pressure created by the National Socialists (the NSDAP), former *Freikorps* soldiers and other "veterans" of the years of turbulence 1919-1923.

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Table 1

Revolutionary and Counter-Revolutionary Activity, 1918-1923

Event	Date	Outcome	Casualties
October Revolution, Kiel Mutiny	29 Oct. - 9 Nov. 1918	Establishment of Soldiers' and Sailors' Councils; Fall of German Empire	On 3 Nov., 9 protesting sailors killed in Kiel
Spartacist Uprising in Berlin	5-12 Jan. 1919	Defeat of Communists	17 Freikorps KIA, 130-180 Communists & civilians killed
Bremen Uprising	10 Jan. – 4 Feb. 1919	Defeat of Communists	81 deaths, incl. 24 govt. troops
Berlin March Battles	3-16 Mar. 1919	5 Freikorps units employed; defeat of insurrection	Killed: 75 Freikorps, 1,200 insurgents & civilians
Würzburg Soviet Republic	7-9 Apr. 1919	Defeat; preceded by rising of Soldiers' Council of 2nd Bavarian Army Corps	Killed: 29 in total
Bavarian Soviet Republic	6 Apr. – 3 May 1919	Violent suppression by Freikorps; extrajudicial killings	Killed: 606. Subsequently, 1,200 Communists and anarchists executed
Silesian Uprisings	16 Aug. 1919 – 21 July 1921	Polish & Polish Silesians fought German Police & other units	2,500 killed or executed in first uprisings
Reichstag Plot	13 Jan. 1920	Overreaction of ex-Freikorps members	20-40 protestors killed by security police
Kapp Putsch	13-18 Mar. 1920	Attempt to overthrow German Revolution; 2 Freikorps participated: General Strike caused failure of Putsch	In Hamburg 4 soldiers killed, 8 others executed, 13 civilians injured; in Berlin 12 civilians killed, 30 wounded
Ruhr Uprising	13 Mar.- 6 Apr. 1920	Left-wing workers' revolt in response to Kapp Putsch	Killed: 208 Reichswehr, 41 Police, 273 Freikorps, over 1,000 rebels & civilians
March Action	17 Mar. – 1 Apr. 1921	Failure of KPD uprising in Lower Saxony	35 police & 100 civilians killed; 3,000 insurgents arrested

Küstrin Putsch	1 Oct. 1923	Units of Black Reichswehr protested against end of passive resistance in Ruhr	Among Putschists, 1 killed, 7 wounded
German October 1923	Oct. 1923	Defeat of Communist uprisings in Saxony, Thuringia and Hamburg	In Hamburg, 17 dead & 16 wounded among soldiers & police; 21 killed & 175 wounded among insurgents
Beer Hall Putsch	8-9 Nov. 1923	Failed attempt by Hitler & NSDAP to overthrow the government, with some Reichswehr support	15 insurrectionists & 4 police killed, with 12 wounded

Author's short CV

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