

WORLD WAR-I
THE WESTERN FRONT

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Study Panel (NDC – 2001-2002)
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WORLD WAR-I

Military History Presentations

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“World War-I was the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth. Any writer who said otherwise lied, so the writers wrote propaganda, shut up, or fought.”

Ernest Hemingway

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FOREWORD

Military history is one of the most essential academic disciplines that the military officers need to develop a taste for. It is through this discipline that we can access to a treasure trove of knowledge bequeathed by military geniuses and experts in the art and science of warfare.

First World War (1914-1919) was the first global war, in which colossal resources, both in man and material, were utilized. It involved directly or indirectly the entire world and left unprecedented effects on the whole world. This war was fought on many fronts, but the major theatre of the war was the Central European Continent, known as 'Western Front'. On this front, the most devastating and the fiercest battles were fought. Visualizing the significance of First World War, particularly the Western Front, the military history presentations conducted by the participants of National Defence Course, are being published for the benefit of young military officers.

It is hoped that the series of military history presentations published by this University will help military officers, particularly the young officers, develop a flavor for the subject of military history, which is so essential for a better understanding of military science and art.

Lieutenant General
President National Defence University
Nasser Khan Janjua

PREFACE

In the series of publications of Military History Presentations, the fourth book 'First World War – The Western Front' is being published.

In view of the significance of the Western Front in the First World War, the presentations conducted by a panel of the National Defence Course are being published, so that the readers should benefit from varying perspectives thereof. History, as a subject, neither stales nor loses its relevance in the scheme of learning. Since these presentations are prepared by the seasoned senior military officers, with utmost dedication and involvement, keeping in view the national context, it is our persistent endeavour at National Defence University to share this knowledge with military set-ups.

It is expected that military history books published by this University will receive a wider dissemination, down to the formation and unit libraries, for the use of officers.

There is always a room for improvement in the academic ventures that we undertake. Therefore, any suggestions for improvement by the readers are always welcome.

Editors

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INTRODUCTION

1. World War-I, the first of the great coalition wars of the 20th Century, was an important landmark in the story of evolution of modern strategy. Beginning in the accepted mould of strategic planning, popular since 1870, it soon started fashioning into counter-trends that were altering the very basis of strategic action. These counter-trends were visible even in the South African and Russo-Japanese Wars, but their import had not been fully grasped by the strategists in the intervening years. Despite the fact that the machine gun in these wars had demonstrated its capability, as a defensive weapon of tremendous firepower, French and German military leaders at the outbreak of the War continued to put their faith in the offensive. In fact, they were convinced that new weapons and methods of control, the radio and telephone, actually improved the offensive capabilities of their mass armies. The war plans of the generals misfired at once, and expectations that the intensity of modern firepower would serve the offensive or that the war must be brief, proved horribly false. The new military technologies revealed a terrifying amplification of the hazards and uncertainties of the military instrument, and seriously devalued the notion that war could be a useful or a casual tool of state policy. So much so, that Georges Clemenceau was led to comment, “Modern war is too serious a business to be entrusted to soldiers.”

2. Major developments in the fields of industrial capabilities, transportation, communications and weaponry vastly enlarged the geographic scale of war, yet they stifled tactical and strategic innovation. Military and political leaders groped for ways to adapt to new conditions, incorporate new technologies, restore decisiveness to the battlefield, and bring costs and benefits into proportion. Unwilling and unable to alter their political objectives, participants resigned themselves to a lengthy war of attrition, stalemated by static trench warfare, in which hundreds of thousands of men died in senseless attacks from the beginning of the war until the armistice of November, 1918.

3. It is difficult to identify one primary reason for the occurrence of the First World War. It triggered off due to a number of economic, political, military and psychological factors.

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However, its foundation was laid during the Franco-German conflict of 1870-71, wherein, France suffered a total defeat and lost the provinces of Lorraine and Alsace. Subsequently, France remained obsessed with the aim of re-capturing her lost territories.

4. During the ensuing period, German Chancellor Bismarck continued his efforts to secure peace that Germany had won through cunning diplomacy. He conspired to keep France weak and powerless, and in a constant animosity with the Great Britain. He managed to isolate France and keep friendly relations with Russia. On 2 October 1879, he concluded a defense treaty with Austria, known as 'Dual Alliance'. The French annexation of Tunisia in 1881 prompted Italy to join this alliance and converted it into Triple Alliance. France, alarmed by the audacity and expansionist designs of Germany's new master, Hohenzollern, who took reins of power after the death of his father, Frederick-III, started negotiations with Russia and entered a defence alliance in 1893, giving birth to an opposing alliance.

5. In 1895 a period of German expansion started. The Kaiser's new 'Weltpolitik' (World Politics) was the result of Germany's rapid industrialisation, increase in population, which became increasingly dependent upon foreign trade and, hence, the growth of her merchant navy started. Unfortunately, this meant commercial rivalry with the Great Britain. The hostility shown by Germany towards England during South African War, coupled with Kaiser's policy to brag, gave rise to violent anti-German propaganda in Britain, which was responded in Germany. The reaction of hitherto neutral Great Britain to these developments was predictable.

6. In 1903, Edward-VII visited Paris and his visit initiated a series of agreements that led to a secret military alliance in 1904. Britain also agreed to send an Expeditionary Force to France, in the event of a German attack. This alliance also acted as a catalyst to help arrange a patch-up between the Great Britain and Russia, as France was a common ally.

7. In 1906, Algiers' Conference divided Europe into two hostile camps; the German and anti-German. The British Government was persuaded to shift centre of gravity of the British Fleet from Gibraltar to the North Sea and also to form an alliance with Russia, thus, giving birth to the Triple Entente, to force Germany to fight on two fronts in case of war. Britain's embracing of the new group weakened the old, making Italy a doubtful partner. Hence, Germany was compelled to cling more closely to her other partner Austria, whom earlier she had led. Thus, the alliances in Europe at the start of the First World War were:

- a. Central Powers, including Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Italy (till outbreak of War) and Turkey.

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- b. Entente Powers, including France, Britain, Russia, Belgium, Serbia, Italy and Portugal.
8. In 1914, the political division of Europe was as depicted on the Map 3:
 - a. Germany occupied a central position, having common borders with most of the European countries, like Holland, Belgium, France, Austria and Russia,
 - b. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had control over present day Hungary, Czechoslovakia and most part of Yugoslavia.
 - c. Russia extended up to present day Poland.
 - d. The Ottoman Empire comprised present day Turkey and extended up to Egypt and was controlling the straits of Dardanelles and Mesopotamia
 - e. Africa was mostly under the European colonial domination of different European powers.
 - f. The British Empire had control of large parts of Africa, the South and South East Asia. USA was the only other major power, which did not have overseas colonies, but which could exert her influence in international affairs.
9. Russia aimed at the liquidation of Turkey and the weakening of Austria and Germany. The instrument she intended to use was Balkan States and Straits of Dardanelles. In 1908, Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, prompting Russia to actively sponsor the formation of Balkan League, on the premise that if Balkan States did not develop combined mutual defence; they would be swallowed piecemeal by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This plan was based on the presumption that if Russia could crush Austria and capture Serbia by a protectorate, Germany could be enveloped.
10. Between 1912-1913, Turkey was almost driven out of Europe, due to the two Balkan Wars and the Balkan League lost its efficacy. Germany was seeking special privileges in Mesopotamia and, therefore, opposed the break-up of Turkish Empire. Britain, by partitioning Persia, prevented Germany from advancing a project to build railway line from Baghdad to Tehran and also thwarted the plan of Russia for Trans-Persian Railway. The Turks and the Persians soon learnt about the Anglo- Russian agreement. It was the primary reason due to which Turkey joined the 'Triple Alliance'.

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11. The murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria at Sarajevo ignited the Austrian wrath and she served ultimatums to Serbia with humiliating terms. On 14 July 1914, Austria declared war on Serbia, which in turn, triggered a chain of reaction. Russia mobilised against Austria, France mobilised against Germany, Germany served ultimatum to both Russia and France to stop mobilisation and guarantee their neutrality. Thus, the stage was set for the initiation of the first global conflict.

12. The fundamental causes of the conflict, in the words of Liddell Hart, “can be epitomized in three words **fear, hunger, and pride.**” These were exacerbated by the perceptions of the belligerents (**Map-4**) about political arena, which can be summarized as under:-

- a. The underlying cause was the fears and ambitions of the governing elites of Europe, who took the unfortunate decisions to wage war, particularly that of imperial Germany. Fears were more important than ambitions.
- b. Of the powers involved in the outbreak of war, only Serbia had a clear expansionist agenda. France cherished the hopes to recover the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, but this was an attempt at restitution rather than acquisition. Otherwise, the defensive considerations were of paramount importance.
- c. The states that embarked on the road to war in 1914 wished to preserve what they had. This included not only their territorial integrity but also their diplomatic alliances and prestige. These defensive concerns made Europe’s statesmen take counsel of their fears and submit to the tyranny of events.
- d. The Austrians feared for the survival of their multi-racial Empire, if they did not confront the threat of Serb Nationalism and Pan-Slavism.
- e. The Germans feared the consequences themselves of allowing Austria, their closest and only reliable ally, to be weakened and humiliated.
- f. The Russians feared the threat to their prestige and authority, as protector of the Slavs, if they allowed Austria to defeat and humiliate Serbia.
- g. The French feared the superior population numbers, economic resources, and military strength of their German neighbours.

- h. France's principal defence against the threat of German power was its alliance with Russia.
 - i. The Great Britain feared occupation of the Low Countries by a hostile, economically competitive power, especially one with a large modern navy. But most of all, they feared for the long-term security of their empire. If they did not support France and Russia, their principal imperial rivals, whose goodwill they had been assiduously cultivating for a decade, they would lose their influence the world over.
 - j. Governments feared their peoples. Some statesmen welcomed the war in the belief that it would act as a social discipline, purging societies of dissident elements and encouraging a return to patriotic values. Others thought that it would be a social solvent, dissolving and transforming everything it touched.
13. The book in hand, compiled from military history presentations, has been organized in the following four parts:-
- a. Part-I: Political and National Aims and Strategies
 - b. Part-II: Opposing Plans
 - c. Part-III: Conduct of Operations
 - d. Part-IV: Analysis

PART-I

POLITICAL AND NATIONAL AIMS AND STRATEGIES

National Aims and Objectives of the Major European Powers

1. **Germany.** Germany was the youngest country, which had recently achieved unification. Kaiser William-II succeeded to the German throne in 1889. Born with a deformed arm, his personal schizophrenia came to play its part in his policies. The sagacity and wisdom of Bismarck was lost by Germany in 1890, when the new Emperor dismissed him. The national aims of Germany could be summarized as: -

- a. To preserve the status quo.
- b. To avoid a two front war.
- c. To become the dominant power in Europe.
- d. To support Austria, being its main ally.
- e. To ensure France does not regain Alsace and Lorraine.

2. **The Great Britain.** Initial British aims in Continental matters were two- fold:

- (1) The maintenance of the European equilibrium.
 - (2) Only to intervene in Europe once the equilibrium was physically threatened, otherwise, to maintain a policy of 'Splendid Isolation'.
- a. The British policy was reviewed towards the end of the century and 'Splendid Isolation' came to an end, with the signing of the 'Entente Cordiale' with France

in 1904 and, subsequently, with Russia in 1907, bringing about the formation of the 'Triple Entente'. The Great Britain's main national strategy still remained the maintenance of balance of power in Europe, but its focus had changed from France to Germany. Britain's national aims, thus, became:

- (1) Neutralizing Germany as the major rising power, threatening the European equilibrium.
- (2) Ensuring that German naval programme should not threaten British naval supremacy.
- (3) Guarantee the neutrality of Belgium, Holland and the Netherlands (the Low Countries) to guard against a possible cross Channel invasion.
- (4) Eliminating Germany as a potential economic competitor.
- (5) Ensuring that Russia should not capture the Bosphorus Straits.

3. France. France, after the Napoleonic Wars, stood isolated in Europe. The 'Holy Alliance' and the 'Quadruple Alliance' had been put into effect to guard against French militarism and keep a check on the radical ideas of the French Revolution. French relations with Germany remained strained since the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Problems were magnified by the scope of the Prussian victory in the war and the peace that concluded it. The German annexation of Alsace- Lorraine produced irreconcilable French antagonism, which eliminated any German diplomatic option towards France. The French grand and national strategies were directed towards the following aims: -

- a. End its isolation in Europe.
- b. Regain the grandeur of the Napoleonic and Bourbon era.
- c. Become the dominant power in Europe.
- d. Regain the vanity lost as a result of the Franco - Prussian war.
- e. Ensure that Germany be threatened with a two front war.
- f. Not allow Germany to gain dominance of Europe.
- g. Regain the lost territories of Alsace - Lorraine.
- h. Become leading colonial power like Great Britain.

4. **Russia.** Russia during most part of the 19th Century remained occupied in its eastward expansion or bids to dominate the Bosphorus Straits, by igniting ‘Pan-Slavism’. Tsar Nicholas-II ascended to the Russian throne in 1894. He first led Russia into a disastrous war with Japan and, then, permitted his country to become a captive to an alliance system, which made war with Germany virtually inevitable. At the outbreak of the Great War, Russian national aims were as under:

- a. Tsar Alexander-II had stated that what we would gain from a war in Europe would be that Germany as such should disappear, as it would break up into a number of small weaker states, the way it used to be.
- b. Russia portrayed itself as the champion of ‘Pan-Slavism’ and wanted the Slavic populations to gain independence from the Turks and the Austrians.
- c. To acquire Constantinople from the Turks and, hence, gain access to the Mediterranean for its Black Sea fleets and a short route for commerce.
- d. To satisfy its vanity and prestige lost as a result of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.
- e. Austria-backed by Germany annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908. Russia interpreted it as a German manoeuvre to destroy its position amongst the Slavs; hence, it endeavored to regain that status by humiliating Germany at some stage.

5. **Austria-Hungary.** Austria was a polyglot empire, grouping together the multiple nationalities of the Danube basin. There were numerous fissiparous forces within the empire, especially in the Slavic regions. Known as a weak European Country, Austria in the second half of the 19th century had little influence over Continental European affairs. It was neither a competitor in trade, colonies, commerce or power. Its main interest lay in the preservation of its empire, which was becoming a more and more difficult proposition. The aims and objectives of the Dual Monarchy were:

- a. Prevent her decaying empire from collapsing.
- b. Arrest the fissiparous forces within her borders.
- c. Assert its power in the Balkans.
- d. Absorb Bosnia - Herzegovina within the empire.

- e. Support the Ottoman Empire, as its break-up would lead to similar movements in Austria.
- f. Oppose the 'Pan-Slavism' advocated by Russia.

National and Grand Strategies

6. Germany

- a. **National Aims / Objectives.** German national aims were well conceived, as they were basically a continuation of the aims set by Bismarck. However, Kaiser William-II differed from Bismarck in that Bismarck wanted to consolidate the gains of German unification, whilst maintaining a relatively low profile. Kaiser's volatile personality caused him to adopt a policy of aggrandisement and power projection. This German aspiration led to adoption of such policies and strategies, which brought Germany to the brink of war.
- b. **Actualization of Aims / Objectives.** The tragedy for Germany lays not in its incorrect national aims but in the policies designed to achieve those aims and the flawed manner of its implementation. Most of the policies and strategies lacked statesmanship and were not in accord with the aims; as a result, instead of actualizing the aims, they took Germany far from them.
- c. **The Triple Alliance.** To Germany the most important policy was the preservation of the status-quo and to consolidate the gains of Moltke and Bismarck, brought about through unification. Bismarck's policy was to stabilize the peace that Germany had won and to ensure it, so he set out to win the friendship of Russia. In order to isolate France, in 1879, he concluded with Austria a defense treaty known as the 'Dual Alliance', which two years later was joined in by Italy, thus, the 'Triple Alliance' was germinated. For nearly twenty years that Bismarck led Germany, he practiced the 'Real Politik', he preached with such moderation and subtlety that the balance of power never broke down.
- d. **German Demand for Recognition of its Power.** William-II succeeded to the German throne in 1889. He gave the impression of being immature and erratic. Born with a deformed arm, his personality suffered from different schisms. In 1890, he dismissed Bismarck, refusing to govern in the shadow of such a towering

figure. As against Bismarck's policy of subtlety and moderation what the Kaiser wanted most was international recognition of Germany's importance and above all its power. He failed to understand that the more Germany magnified its own strength the more it would encourage the competing coalitions to build up arms, thereby, disturbing the system of European equilibrium.

- e. **Two Front War Threat.** Germany, having developed by the end of 19th century as the most powerful country of Continental Europe; Its national policy and strategy should have been directed towards the prevention of hostile alliances, which were the only means by which Germany could be defeated. It was Kaiser William's lack of understanding and statesmanship that allowed the Franco-Russian alliance to come about. By 1894, this diplomatic alliance changed into a military alliance and Germany's main strategic aim of prevention of a two front war was nullified.
- f. **Lack of Comprehension of the Real Requirements of Own Security.** The Franco-Russian alliance should have seriously cautioned Germany and its strategies, thereafter, its efforts should have been directed towards ensuring that this alliance would not further be strengthened by Britain, being co-opted into it. Britain in 1890's was still willing for rapprochement with Germany. These attempts failed because of German leadership's persistent lack of comprehension of traditional British policy as well as the real requirements of own security. Kaiser wanted England to abandon its non-committal policy and provide continental type guarantees on treaties. What made this German pressure for formal guarantees so self-reflecting was that Germany did not really need it, because it was strong enough to defeat any potential Continental adversary or a combination of them, so long as, Britain did not take their side.
- g. **Strategies Inconsistent with Aims.** Instead of working towards the attainment of the aforesaid aim, German national strategy and policies worked to the contrary, as is evident from the following: -
 - (1) In 1890, the German Parliament passed a bill to increase her naval strength. This developmental strategy alarmed Britain, as the cornerstone of British policy had been to maintain its naval supremacy.
 - (2) In 1895, when the Jameson raid into the Transvaal failed, causing a great

deal of embarrassment to the British government, Kaiser sent a telegram to Transvaal's President Kruger, congratulating him on repelling the attack. This was a direct slap on the Great Britain's face.

- (3) As late as 1912, there was still a chance of settling Anglo-German differences. Lord Haldane, first Lord of the Admiralty, visited Berlin to discuss relaxation of tension, by offering a naval accord and a pledge that if either of the countries was entangled in a war, in which, it could not be said to be the aggressor, the other would at least observe benevolent neutrality. Germany refused this British offer, being non-committal. The same year the British signed a naval treaty with France, which, in 1914, was also invoked to bring Britain into the War.

7. **The Great Britain**

- a. **Balancer of European Equilibrium.** Since the Congress of Vienna 1815, the Great Britain had contributed to restraint in Continental Europe, by acting as the balancer of European equilibrium. Britain was able to achieve this largely because no single country was capable of dominating the Continent by itself.
- b. **Focus on France and Russia.** Great Britain's foreign policy concerns for most of the Century were focused on France, whose colonial ambitions clashed with those of Great Britain, especially in Egypt and on Russia's advance towards the Straits of Persia, India and China. All these, however, were colonial issues. With regards to European diplomacy, which produced the War, the Great Britain continued to follow a policy of 'Splendid Isolation'.
- c. **Flaw in British Strategy.** The British strategy hinged on maintaining the balance of power in Europe and remained successful because no single European country had the capability to dominate the Continent. After unification of Germany, it progressively acquired that capability. However, Britain was only willing to intervene, when the balance of power was actually under attack and not against the prospects of attack. This flaw allowed Germany to develop to a level, where it became sufficiently strong to upset the balance of power, as it took decades for the German threat to the European equilibrium to become explicit. The Great Britain remained passive towards this development.

- d. **Independence of the Low Countries.** For the past 100 years, the British national strategy for guaranteeing the independence of the Belgium, Holland and Netherlands remained firm. The British aims in this regard were two-fold. Britain would not allow any power to use these countries as a launching pad for a cross Channel invasion. While, simultaneously, it required these countries as a bridgehead into Continental Europe. Their independence had, thus, become a cornerstone of the British policy, a fact, which the German leadership failed to discern.
- e. **Overtures towards Germany.** During the 1890s, the Great Britain felt beleaguered by endless clashes with Russia in Afghanistan and northern China and with France in Egypt and Morocco. These colonial frustrations directed British policy towards improving relations with Germany. German policy makers, convinced that both Russia and Britain needed Germany, thought they could drive a hard bargain with both. Germans failed to realize that as a result of this strategy they might be pushing Russia and Britain closer to each other.
- f. **'Entente Cordiale' with France.** German short-sightedness and insensitivity, especially in rejecting Britain's offer for a diplomatic entente, the Kruger's telegram and the naval bill accelerated the trend of alienation of Germany. In 1900, Britain carried out a review of its aims and strategies, having concluded that Germany had become the main threat to the Continental balance of power, started rapprochement towards France. The result was the signing of the 'Entente Cordiale' with France in 1904, precisely this sort of arrangement for informal co-operation, which Germany had constantly rejected. This treaty of friendship grew into a secret military alliance.
- g. **Formation of the 'Triple Entente'.** Germany used the Morocco crisis of 1905 to demonstrate that British support for France, as a result of 'Entente Cordiale', was either illusory or ineffective. Contrary to German expectations, Britain backed France to the hilt. Instead of weakening the 'Entente Cordiale', it led to the 'Anglo-Russian Entente' of 1907. With the emergence of the 'Anglo-France-Russian Entente' the German encirclement was complete.

8. France

- a. **Collapse of the Metternich System.** France, since the Congress of Vienna of

1814, was an isolated country. Metternich had taken all the preventive measures to ensure that France did not assert its power again over Europe. The Metternich system collapsed as a result of the Crimean War of 1854. This gave France freedom to assert itself. Resultantly, two decades of conflict followed, in which four limited wars were fought and France virtually participated in all three wars and encouraged the other. These conflicts, however, failed to fulfill France's aims and quite contrarily, as a result of these wars, France lost its position of pre-eminence to Germany.

b. **French Inability to Discern Their Security Requirements**

(1) France was uncomfortable with the Vienna settlement of 1814, as it was designed to contain France. It was also against the German Federation, because that too was designed with the same motive. Hence, in 1866 France viewed the Austro-Prussian War, which brought the German Confederation to an end, as a strategic gain. Napoleon Bonaparte-III wrote to the Austrian Emperor, "I must confess that it was not without certain satisfaction that we have witnessed the dissolution of the German confederation, organized mainly against France."

(2) What France failed to realize was that the alternative to the German confederation was not Richlieu's fragmented Germany, but a strong unified Germany. By attacking the Vienna Settlement, Napoleon was converting a defensive obstacle into a potential offensive threat to France's security.

c. **'Entente Cordiale' with Russia.** Having committed the mistake of creating a Frankenstein in its midst and having lost its supremacy to Germany, as a result of the Franco-Prussian War, France at last realized the potential danger. When Kaiser William-II of Germany rejected the Tsar's offer for renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty, France was quick to capitalize on this German blunder and in 1891 signed an 'Entente Cordiale' with Russia, which by 1894 was converted into a military alliance against Germany and Austria. France was, thus, able to attain its two main national aims of: ending its isolation and threatening Germany with a two front war.

d. **'Entente Cordiale' with Britain.** Having achieved its initial aim, French strategy

was directed towards strengthening of the Entente, by inducing Britain into the Alliance. The opportunity was presented, when Germany annoyed Britain through the Kruger's Telegram in 1896 and the passing of the German Naval Bill. France through vigorous diplomacy was able to induce Britain into signing an Entente Cordiale in 1904. Thereafter, it instigated Britain to sign a similar Entente with Russia, bringing about the formation of the Triple Entente by 1907.

- e. **Reluctance to Join a Balkan War.** France had very little interest in the Balkans. Since the origin of World War-I was in the Balkans; France closely watched the events after June 28th, but remained non-committal towards the War. France remained quiescent throughout the crises, as it had no real reason to go to war.

9. Russia

- a. **Russian Expansionism.** Russian expansion in the East continued throughout the 19th Century. To the Europeans, Russia was an elemental force, a mysterious expansionist's presence to be feared and contained either by cooperation or confrontation. Metternich tried the route of cooperation and announced the Treaty of San Stefano, which would emasculate Turkey and create a big Bulgaria dominated by Russia. Both the Great Britain and Austria declared the Treaty unacceptable.
- b. **Congress of Berlin.** As war seemed inevitable, Bismarck reluctantly organized a Congress in Berlin in 1878, in which the Bulgarian crisis was amicably settled. After the Congress of Berlin, Russia blamed its failure to achieve all its aims, not on Disraeli, who had organized the opposing coalition, but on Bismarck, who had managed the Congress to avoid a European war. This annoyance led to disintegration of the three Emperor's League.
- c. **Reinsurance Treaty.** Bismarck's last major initiative was the Reinsurance Treaty between Germany and Russia. Germany and Russia promised each other to stay neutral in a war with a third country, unless Germany attacked France, or Russia attacked Austria. However, William-II refused to renew the Treaty in 1891. This increased Russian anxieties in relation to German designs and, hence, paved the way for Franco-Russian Entente of 1891.
- d. **Re-orientation of Interests towards Europe.** Towards the last decade of the

19th Century, Russian expansionism in the East had reached its maximum limits. In Afghanistan, it had started clashing with British interests in India. In China, it clashed with Britain, Japan and led to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, in which Russia was convincingly defeated. So Russian expansionist interests turned towards Europe. Russia began to eye on the collapsing Turkish Empire for spoils. Austria was not keen to see Russia expand in Eastern Europe. The resultant clash of interests with Austria led indirectly to confrontation with Germany. Tsar Nicholas-II's advisers had promised him that from the shores of the Pacific to the heights of the Himalayas, Russia would dominate not only the affairs of Asia but Europe as well.

- e. **The Quest for Constantinople.** Russia's long cherished dream was the capture of Constantinople. Russian national policy and strategy for the entire Century remained dominated by the desire to control the Straits. Peter Duronovo, a Russian Internal Minister, analysed this aim and wrote, "Even if Russia realised its centuries old goal of conquering the Dardanelles, it would not give us an entry to the open sea, since on the other side there lies a sea consisting almost wholly of territorial waters, a sea dotted with numerous islands, where the British navy would have no trouble in closing to us every inlet and outlet irrespective of the Straits."

Military Developmental Strategies

10. Military developments of the later part of the 19th Century and their impacts were as under: -

- a. The period of colonial expansion coincided with three major developments in weapon power, the general adoption of the small bore magazine rifle, firing smokeless powder, the perfection of the machine gun, and the introduction of quick firing artillery.
- b. The crucial year in the development of the machine gun was 1884, when Hiram S. Maxim patented a one-barrel gun, which loaded and fired itself by the force of recoil. The original model weighed 40 pounds, it was water-cooled and belt fed and 2000 rounds could be fired from it in 3 minutes. It was inducted by the British Army in 1889 and it revolutionized infantry tactics.

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- c. In 1891 quick firing artillery was introduced in Germany. This innovation brought immense fire support for the infantry and cavalry.
- d. In 1885, Gottlieb Daimler devised the internal combustion engine, using petrol as fuel. By the end of the Century, the IC Engine (ICE) had become common, but highways did not exist to allow actualisation of the benefits of motor transport.
- e. The greatest triumph of IC Engine was seen on 17 December 1908 at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, where Oliver Wright flew for 12 seconds. The aeroplane had nominal effects on the First World War, but even Douhet could visualise the effects this Machine was to have on future warfare.
- f. Comparable with the influence of the IC Engine in peace and war, only one other invention of this period challenged it and that was wireless telegraphy. In 1899 Guglielmo Marconi transmitted a wireless message between two receivers and in 1901 sent electro-magnetic signals across the Atlantic over 31,000 kilometers.

PART-II
OPPOSING PLANS

The Salients of Zone of Operation – The Western Front (Map-5)

1. **General Description.** The Western Theatre comprised 300 miles long and 200 miles wide area in Europe with Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and Switzerland as the main countries. At the southeastern end, the Franco-German frontier abutted on Switzerland and after a short stretch of flat country near Belfort, it ran for 70 miles along the Vosges Mountains. Thereafter, it had over 90 miles of plain country, ascending to the difficult Ardennes Mountains. From the lower reaches of Ardennes to the tip of Holland was approximately 70 miles of plain area. The major natural obstacles, fortifications and communication centres in the zone of operations just prior to the War were: -

a. **Germany**

- (1) **Obstacles.** Rivers Rhine, Moselle, Our and Saar.
- (2) Communication Centres. Cologne, Coblenz, Bitburg, Thionville, Morhange, Sarssbourg, Metz.
- (3) Fortifications. Metz and Thionville.

b. **Belgium**

Most of the Southern Belgium is flat and open, forming a natural corridor into France. Entry to this plain from Germany is guided by the chain of fortresses around Liege on the Meuse River. Just south of Liege, raise the rugged hills of the Ardennes forest.

- (1) **Other Obstacles.** The rivers Mass, Sombre, Demer and its tributaries.

- (2) **Communication Centres.** Liege, Namur, Maastricht, Brussels and Antwerp.
- (3) **Fortifications.** The towns of Liege and Namur had been converted into fortresses, which faced Germany.

c. **France**

- (1) **Obstacles.** Rivers Meurthe, Moselle, Meuse, Aisne, Marne, Seine, Somme and Oise.
- (2) **Communication Centres.** Belfort, Epinal, Toul, Nancy, Verdun, Stenay, Sedan, Hirson, Guise, Maubeuge, Amiens, Laon, Reims, Rivigny, Rouen, Paris and the English Channel Ports.
- (3) **Fortifications.** France had developed a comprehensive chain of forts all along their Eastern border. Most important forts were Sedan, Verdun, Nancy, Epinol, Toul and Belfort.

The Evolution of German Plans

2. **General.** The military strategy and the subsequent evolution of war plans are formulated so as to remain within the confines of the National Policy. The formulation of war plans is a dynamic process, as it has to modify itself to incorporate all the changes in the political, economic and military scenarios, which have a direct bearing on the power potential of the belligerents, involved in the conflict. The Schlieffen Plan was no exception.

3. **Effects of Past Concepts, Thoughts, Military Theories on the Schlieffen Plan.** Past concepts, thoughts and prevalent military theories, which influenced the Schlieffen Plan, are as under: -

- a. **Cannae Scheme.** Historians are unanimous in their conclusions regarding Schlieffen's obsession of achieving a decisive victory, based on strategy derived from Hannibal at the Battle of Cannae. In 216 BC Hannibal had annihilated a vastly superior Roman Army, by boldly accepting temporary defeat in the centre, in order to be strong enough to crush the enemy's wings and to encircle his legions. Schlieffen firmly believed that all great commanders had an influence of the the Cannae Scheme. While planning the campaign against France, Schlieffen modified the 'Pincers of Cannae'. In his scheme of manoeuvre, he contemplated

a German right wing eight times stronger than its left wing, the former executing scythe like sweep across the left wing of the French armies and rolling them from the west to the east. When this had been accomplished, then the German centre and left would abandon their defensive role and proceed to complete the double envelopment.

- b. **Battle of Leuthen (1757).** Schlieffen's Plan can also be compared to Frederick's oblique battle order of Leuthen in 1757, where an army of 35,000 defeated 70,000 Austrians. However, forces of Frederick were too weak to allow him the full exploitation of his flanking tactics for a strategy of encirclement. Schlieffen could assemble sufficient strength for the strategy of encirclement for a battle of annihilation, by temporarily ignoring the Russian threat.
- c. **Battle of Ulm (1805).** Schlieffen in formulation of his plan also seemed to have been influenced by Napoleon's battle of Ulm, where his wide wheel bottled up the Austrians and forced them to surrender within six days.

4. **Factors Influencing the Plans Made by Moltke.**

- a. **The Dilemma of a Two Front War.** An operational study carried out in 1859, suggested that in the event of a two front war, Germany should resort to, *"the establishment of one front with a minimum of resources; as rapid and elective a campaign as possible, on the other full might should be brought to achieve the decisive victory and then turn, finally to the recovery of whatever may have been lost on the first front."* As early as in January 1870, Moltke the Elder, the Chief of the German General Staff from 1857 to 1887, maintained that "the political situation indicates that if war breaks out in the future, we shall have to conduct it on two fronts." Moltke appreciated that as the French had a precise war aim, i.e. regaining of their lost territories of Alsace and Lorraine, they would take the offensive, placing their main effort in Lorraine and an auxiliary effort in Alsace, in a bid to retake them. Thus, he realised that the most dangerous situation, which Germany might have to face, was a war waged simultaneously against France and Russia. The German General Staff was, therefore, faced with the possibility of a war on two fronts and the problems of manoeuvre on interior lines, which enacted the critical decision, which of the two adversaries to be tackled first. The evolution of the German plans, on the basis of the above dilemma, took place as follows: -

- (1) During the post Franco-Prussian war euphoria, Moltke considered the German Army capable of conducting an offensive campaign on both the French and Russian fronts simultaneously.
- (2) However, France's rapid recovery by 1873 changed this plan to an attack on France and a defensive posture against Russia.
- (3) **Austrian-German Alliance (1879).** As a result of this alliance and France's construction of a series of fortresses on her eastern front by 1897, Moltke changed his plans to an offensive one against Russia and a defensive one against France. This plan also stipulated abandoning Alsace and Lorraine, if necessary, and retiring to the Rhine with the objective of extending and weakening the French forces. If the French attacked through Belgium, then, German forces would strike north at their flank and lines of communication.
- (4) **Count Von Waldерsee.** He succeeded Moltke and remained the Chief of the General Staff from 1888 to 1890. He adhered to the plans prepared by Moltke, but advocated a transition from a tactical defensive to a tactical offensive on the western front.

5. **Schlieffen's Initial Plan.** Count Alfred Graf Von Schlieffen (1833-1913) was a German Field Marshall and strategist in the true tradition of the Prussian Officers' Corps. He was a professional soldier, who considered political questions beyond his responsibility. Schlieffen took over as the Chief of the German General Staff in 1891. His very first memorandum in April 1891, expressed regret that in the threatened two-front war the decision to attack or defend in the West was not in German hands, since the French fortifications could not be penetrated. A year later in a memorandum of August 1892, Schlieffen wrote, "Germany should defeat first one enemy and then the other, decisively." To achieve his aim of a quick and decisive victory against France, which would enable him to shift his forces to the Russian front, Schlieffen evolved several plans. The decision to attack France first was based on the following factors: -

- a. **France, the More Powerful Enemy.** Since France was more dangerous enemy and her aggressive spirit was also growing steadily, Schlieffen decided to force a decisive victory against her first, before tackling the Russians.

- b. **Germany's Central Position.** Germany's central position ensured geographic separation of her adversaries and she could take the risk of deploying an uneven distribution of her troops to one theatre of war during its initial phase. He selected France to be tackled first because of slower rate of Russian mobilisation.
- c. **Franco-Russian Alliance 1893.** This alliance brought out the following: -
 - (1) That in case of a European conflict, Germany would have to fight a two front war, and it was hopeless for Germany to compete with the Franco-Russian block collectively in numbers. They had to be tackled separately.
 - (2) The Franco-Russian Alliance bound France to support Russia in the event of war between Russia and the Central Powers, hence, an attack on Russia would provoke France to take offensive action against Germany,
- d. **Probability of British Intervention.** Control of France would make the British intervention improbable or ineffective.
- e. **Russian Peculiarities**
 - (1) Vast open spaces permitted the Russians to withdraw into the interior, employing evasive tactics. This implied prolonged operations. A total victory in the East was also not certain.
 - (2) Poor Russian railway communications did not facilitate the employment of large forces.
 - (3) The Russian army was weaker in terms of their organisation, weaponry and fighting qualities.
- f. **Strategic Mobility**
 - (1) The terrain and communications system of France facilitated a quick decisive victory.
 - (2) An offensive against France first permitted the Germans to shift their forces to the Russian front in time.

6. **Schlieffen's Change of Plans upto 1899.** Till August 1887 Schlieffen considered the possibility of a frontal attack through the fortified Franco - German border between Belfort and Verdun. Having realised the futility of a frontal attack and its poor chances of success, the need was felt to turn the flank. Consequently the plan was modified in 1899, to march through the Southern tip of Belgium, with a view to turning the French left flank near Sedan, in conjunction with a frontal attack. The following factors and conclusions necessitated these changes:-

a. Conclusions from Zone of Operation Considered during the Planning

- (1) The French frontier from Switzerland to Luxembourg offered strong natural and artificial barriers to the invader.
- (2) At the Southern end was the Swiss Frontier. Its Army could cause unacceptable delay in the Juva Mountain fortification. The French right flank was, therefore, protected.
- (3) After a short stretch of flat country, known as the gap of Belfort, the frontier ran for 70 miles along the Vosges Mountains. These mountains were densely wooded with a steep eastward escarpment, falling into the Rhine valley and protected the French right flank. Hence, turning of enemy's right flank was rejected.
- (4) Three large rivers, Meurthe, Mobelle and Meuse ran at right angles to the German advance.

b. Fortifications - Their Implications

- (1) There was an almost continuous fortress system based upon Epinal, Toul, Verdun and 20 miles beyond lay the frontiers of Luxembourg and Belgium and the difficult Ardennes country.
- (2) Apart from the strongly defended avenues of advance by Belfort and Verdun, the only feasible gap in this barrier was the Trouee de Charmes between Epinal and Toul, left originally open as a strategic trap, on which the Germans could be first caught and, then, crushed by a French counter stroke.
- (3) An attack through the gaps of Belfort - Epinal and Toul-Verdun would be time consuming and costly.

- (4) An advance through the gap between Epinal and Toul was blocked by difficult terrain. Moreover, an advance through this gap was impossible without the preliminary capture of the fortified position of Nancy and later reduction of Toul fortress.

c. Lack of Room for Manoeuvre

- (1) Schlieffen considered the 150 miles front from Belfort to Luxembourg inadequate for the deployment and manoeuvre of seven German Armies.
- (2) An attacking force, undertaking envelopment between Verdun and Luxembourg would have to cross the Meuse north of Verdun and swing south. Its lines of communication would be vulnerable from Verdun on the inner flank and its outer flank would be exposed to the French reserves.

d. Possible French Military Plans. The French had an advantage from the point of view of rapid mobilisation and concentration. Hence, the enveloping movement had to be restricted in amplitude to enable the German concentration to cater for any of the two possible French decisions: -

- (1) The counter offensive in case the enemy attacked, as soon as his concentration was completed.
- (2) The offensive, if he remained on the defensive behind his fortifications.

e. Political Implications. Schlieffen visualized that violation of such a small part of Belgium would not provoke the Belgians and the British to join the French war effort.

7. Factors Leading Up to the Memorandum of 1905. The following factors led to the final plan: -

- a. Concept of Frontal Attack.** After the Russo-Japan War Schlieffen wrote, "The Russo-Japanese War has proved that mere frontal attacks can still be successful in spite of all difficulties. Their success is, however, even in the best case only small to be sure, the enemy is forced back, but after a little while he renews his temporarily abandoned resistance. The war drags on. Such wars are,

however, impossible at a time when the existence of a nation is founded upon the uninterrupted progress of commerce and industry. A strategy of attrition will not do, if the maintenance of millions of people requires billions.” In Schlieffen’s opinion only a strategy of annihilation could preserve the existing social order.

- b. **Placement of Reserves.** Instead of tying up reserves behind the centre of the front, where they would remain inactive and would not be of assistance in the decisive zone, Schlieffen appreciated that the modern battle would become, more than ever a fight for the flanks. In this fight, that side would be victorious whose reserves are placed, not behind the centre of the front, but at the extremity of the wing. It is impossible to bring the reserves to this position only when the C-in C has discovered the decisive point in the midst of the confusion of the battle zone (i.e. on the flank) from the very beginning of the strategic deployment, and even from the very inception of movements by rail.
- c. **Aim of Annihilation of the Enemy.** The intended envelopment around Sedan would not provide an opportunity of netting the enemy quickly in a battle of annihilation, as the French lines of retreat to the rear remained open. Only by a wide sickle-like envelopment from the north could the French be taken from behind and destroyed. So Schlieffen decided to go through the centre of Belgium in a big wheeling movement.
- d. **Requirement of Concentration / Assembly Areas.** For initiating this great wheeling movement, area up to the defile formed by Brussels–Namur was required for assembly and concentration. Absolutely essential to the plan was the need to make a passage through this defile before an encounter with French, so that the manoeuvre beyond this defile could develop uninterrupted.
- e. **French Obsession with Offensive.** French military thought was totally obsessed with offensive, irrespective of the force ratio. A weak left wing allowed French forces to advance deep, so that they could be trapped and dealt with at the German anvil, as per Schlieffen Plan.

8. **Memorandums of 1905 and the Design of Operation (Map-6).** To overcome the danger of a protracted war and to achieve a supreme decision of the European war through a campaign in France, Schlieffen maintained that it was not enough to force the French Army to retreat into the interior or even to capture Paris. What was needed was the fatal annihilation of the strength of French Armed forces. To achieve this aim, Schlieffen evolved his grandiose plan of a German offensive that was to gain its irresistible momentum from the weight of a powerful German right wing, wheeling through Luxembourg, Belgium and Southern Holland. The famous memorandum of 1905 gave these strategic ideas for a western campaign their classic form. The East was to be guarded by only small forces and up to 7th/8th of the German Army was to be used by the right wing to eliminate the armed might of France, as per the following moves:-

- a. The swinging mass of the right wing, pivoting on the fortified area Metz -Thionville, was to consist of fifty three divisions, backed up, as rapidly as possible by reserve formations of Landwehr and Ersatz, while the left wing comprised only eight divisions.
- b. The German enveloping mass was to sweep around through Belgium and Northern France and, continuing to traverse a vast arc, would wheel gradually east. With its extreme right passing South of Paris, it would then press the French back towards Mosel, where they would be hammered from the rear on the anvil formed by the Lorraine fortress and the Swiss frontier.
- c. Schlieffen's plan allowed ten divisions to hold the Russians in check, while the French were being crushed.
- d. In the South, the plan envisaged luring the French to attack the weak defensive wing and, thus, come out of their fortifications. The Germans were to withdraw by design in front of the advancing French. This planned withdrawal of the left wing promised to aid the German offensive in another way also. The more the French pushed the German left wing back towards the Rhine, the harder it would be for them to parry the German enveloping manoeuvre towards Paris. It would operate like a revolving door - the harder the French pushed on one side, the more sharply would the other side swing around and strike their back. Here lay the subtlety of the plan, and not in mere geographical detour.

9. **Visualisation of Development of Operations and Time Frame.** The plan was to be developed as under:-

- a. Completion of the initial concentration by all the seven armies by the 7th day of mobilisation.
- b. The first stage of the offensive was to reach a line from Verdun to Dunkirk, evolving around Metz.
- c. On the 31st day of mobilisation, Somme should have been reached and Abbeville and Amiens passed.
- d. The next phase envisaged operations against the Lower Seine, the crossing of which would lead to the final stage of the battle.
- e. During the final stage, the German right wing was to turn towards the East and operate South of Paris against the upper Seine, thus, throwing the French armies against their own fortress and the Swiss frontier.

10. **Verification of Plan**

- a. In every summer and autumn, Schlieffen used to carry out extensive reconnaissance of the projected areas of operations, both on the Eastern and Western fronts, to conceive and modify his operational plans. Winters were devoted for war games and map exercises to verify the conceived plans. Having carried out adjustments and modifications, in the light of these map exercises and war games, a memorandum of the finalised plan was issued.
- b. Schlieffen sometimes took situations, which were not probable. He also selected some, which were very unfavourable and difficult, such as a major effort by both Russia and France simultaneously against German frontiers. Very often he took the hypothesis of Germany's main forces being directed against France.
- c. Annual mobilisation due to war games kept railway officials in constant practice and tested their ability to improvise and divert traffic by simulating lines cut and bridges destroyed.
- d. All possible hypotheses, including the least probable and least favourable, were not discarded straight away but were duly considered and analysed. Despite

having made up his mind for a decisive offensive on the Western front, Schlieffen did not give up planning for the Eastern front till the last. He war gamed even how to tackle the Russians in the first go and dropped this plan only on sound conclusions. A two front war and operations on interior lines were, however, discussed and war gamed more often. The final Schlieffen Plan was drawn up only after verifying all the strategic, tactical and logistical aspects of the plan.

11. **The Communication Infrastructure.** Salient features are discussed as below:-
- a. The importance of transportation was realised by the German High Command, as Schlieffen wrote as follows “Railways are now an engine of war without which the great armies can neither be formed, concentrated, deployed nor maintained”. There was, thus, a corresponding development of the communication infrastructure to meet the requirements of manoeuvre. Subsequently, in addition to the nine existing railway lines, four new double tracks were laid between 1870 and 1914. Schlieffen’s manoeuvre plan was itself influenced and modified by the layout of the Belgian railway system. A major consideration for his recommendation to violate Dutch territory was to ensure the forward concentration of his enveloping wing, using the reliable Dutch rail/road communications.
 - b. Schlieffen also analysed the potential of the railway system in a two front scenario. The use of the Belgian and French railways, in conjunction with the German rail/road system, was found functionally easier than a combination of the German and Russian railway systems for speedy transfer of German forces from one front to the other.
 - c. The effectiveness of German railways can be gauged from the fact that 550 trains a day crossed the Rhine bridges. The Hohenzollern Bridge at Cologne alone received a new train every ten minutes during the first fortnight of the war¹. It was due to this vast and excellent railway movement that the great deployment of seven German armies was completed in just six days.
 - d. Sixty percent of the railway construction and operating companies were tasked to work behind First and Second Armies. Besides, on mobilisation, rolling stock to entrain three Corps simultaneously was to be placed at Mainz - Frankfurt.

¹ Hart. Liddel.B.H. History of the First World War (Cassell Ltd), p.78

- e. In Germany the railway system was kept under military control with a staff officer assigned to every line. No track, including a narrow gauge line, could be laid or changed without the approval of the Chief of General Staff.
12. **Analysis of Schlieffen Plan 1905.** Salient aspects are as under:-
- a. **Addressing Primary German Strategic Concern: Two Front Threats.** The Germans were surrounded by a hostile Franco-Russian alliance, whose combined military strength far exceeded their own. In the event of hostilities, the Plan permitted them to deal with these armies separately.
- b. **Correct Identification of Appropriate Centres of Gravity.** Schlieffen clearly recognized that German Army was its centre of gravity, and that the Plan's success depended upon keeping it concentrated and in motion, using the Jominian concept of interior lines. He also recognized that the French centres of gravity were her Armies and her capital, Paris. Encirclement of the French Armies combined with the occupation of Paris would deliver the French physical and psychological blows, from which they were unlikely to recover, particularly with the memory of the Franco-Prussian War still etched in their minds.
- c. **Visualisation of French Reactions.** Schlieffen correctly visualized that the French fixation with offensive would respond to his weak south wing by launching an offensive in Lorraine, in conformity with his design.
- d. **Time and Space Relation (TSR) Framework.** The success of the great enveloping manoeuvre depended on the speed and surprise of the German advance through Belgium. The time factor was essential in the implementation of the Schlieffen Plan, and so was the achievement of superior relative strength ratio. Schlieffen Plan sought time and space relation advantage through enhanced tempo of the offensive, conceived as one continuous process, including mobilization. However, some of the serious impediments, which affected the time and space relation, framework were:-
- (1) The relatively poor Belgian communication infrastructure and its dilapidation because of the execution of a denial plan by the retreating Belgian troops.

- (2) The proportionately large requirement of troops for the envelopment and investment of Paris, not to talk of subsidiary tasks, such as masking other fortresses and securing lines of communications. Schlieffen estimated the requirement to be approximately seven Army Corps for the envelopment and about five for investment of Paris, almost 1/3 of the entire force. Such force was never available to the Germans, which was considered to be the major defect of the entire plan.
- (3) The interior lines of communications, based on the radial nature of railways emanating from Paris, offered the French Forces an opportunity for rapid shifting of troops, and favourably altering the relative strength ratio, as compared to the Germans, who had the difficulty to move through Belgium.
- e. **Selection of Decisive Points.** Schlieffen also seemed to have adequately considered the Jomini's concept of decisive points at both the strategic and operational levels. Strategically, he recognized that he could decisively defeat the French, by massing his forces against the least defended portion of the French frontier, opposite neutral Belgium (the frontier opposite neutral Luxembourg was also comparatively lightly defended, but the geography was not suitable for the conduct of large-scale attacks). Operationally, Schlieffen recognized the importance of key road and rail hubs, such as Liege and bridges spanning the rivers along his line of advance, and securing them was a primary objective for specified forces.
- f. **Operational Balance.** The Schlieffen Plan sought to maintain the operational balance, by strengthening the right wing, by including reserves, which allowed projection of superior combat power to the vital Paris region, while ensuring its security. In seeking to dislocate the balance of French forces, the left wing's baited gambit stratagem aimed at capitalising on the French fixation with the offensive.
- g. **Initial Surprise.** Schlieffen incorporated Reserve Corps with active Corps right at the outset of the offensive, whereby, he was able to increase the number of troops participating in the main offensive. This factor enabled the Germans to achieve surprise.

- h. **Creation of Space through Initial Thrust.** Initial thrust of attack, coupled with allotment of troops to task, was designed to capture maximum territory during initial stage of battle, so that maximum forces could be deployed and full combat power could be generated.
- i. **Logistic Inadequacy.** The Plan failed to adequately consider the difficulties of supporting such a large force over such long lines of communications. Germans were ill prepared to transport the large quantities of ammunition and artillery required for set-piece battles. The momentum required a successful German logistic supply.
- j. **Lack of Politico-Military Integration.** Failing to appreciate the closely integrated relationship between diplomacy and military operations, the plan suffered from these flaws: -
 - (1) **No Leeway for Diplomacy.** Because of restrictions upon the government with regard to time needed to implement mobilization, the diplomats did not have sufficient time to negotiate. The importance of the timetable robbed Germany of freedom to manoeuvre diplomatically.
 - (2) **Indifference to British Reactions.** Schlieffen did not adequately consider international politics and miscalculated the British response. He did not consider the factor of the strength of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), in calculations of the force necessary to complete the envelopment. Further, he naively expected that the complete defeat of France would induce Britain to make peace. This was, however, not more than a hope, since the Prussian General Staff never considered an invasion of England.

Modifications Made in the Schlieffen Plan by Moltke-The Young

13. Moltke the Younger, nephew of Moltke the elder and Schlieffen's successor, retained his plan but whittled away the essential ideas, as he changed both distribution of forces and the scheme of operations (Map-7): -

- a. **Distribution of Forces.** Out of the nine new divisions that became available between 1905 and 1914, he gave only one to the right wing. The main reason for this was the protection of the industrial complex that had sprung up in the

South, and the dependence of these industries on the coalmines in Lorraine. The right wing was further weakened by Moltke, when he withdrew two Army Corps to reinforce the Eastern Theatre. In 1914, a total of 82 divisions and ten cavalry divisions were available for the Western Front. Moltke, though adhering to the Schlieffen Plan in letter, allotted only 61 divisions and 7 cavalry divisions to the Northern Wing². The offensive wing was, therefore, weakened by some 16 divisions and this violated the basic spirit, which was exemplified in Schlieffen's reported dying words, "Make the right wing strong." This deployment effectively nullified the "Revolving Door" concept.

- b. **Difference in Scheme of Operations.** Moltke's scheme of operations differed materially from Schlieffen's conception. He considered the double envelopment as the most decisive form of warfare and even quoted Schlieffen on the issue. In 1912, Schlieffen is reported to have recommended strengthening the German Army for a simultaneous attack along the front from Belfort to the sea³. He, therefore, regarded the enveloping manoeuvre through Belgium merely as a means of drawing the French armies away from the support of their fortified areas. He firmly believed that the French were going to attack in the Lorraine, South of Metz, and his deployment of troops indicated that he was inclined to fighting the decisive battle in this sector, after the right wing had exerted sufficient pressure on French forces in the South.
- c. **Battle of Fortresses.** Schlieffen had planned to deploy the right wing along the Belgium-Dutch frontier. It could, thereby, turn the flank of the Liege forts, which barred the way through the narrow Belgian gateway. However, Moltke decided to take Liege immediately on the outbreak of war, thus, prematurely committing to the costly battle of fortresses.
- d. **Curtailment of Final Objectives.** Reduced in strength and passing through difficult terrain, the German right wing was compelled to turn inwards (South Eastwards) north of Paris rather than after reaching Southwest of Paris.

14. **Political Implications.** Political implications of the plans were as follow:-

2 Neame. Philip .Lt.Col, German Strategy In The Great War (Edward Arnold & Co), p.10

3 Esposito. Vincet J, A Concise History of World War I (Pall Mall Press) p.45

- a. **Breach of Neutrality.** Schlieffen planned for the right wing to be deployed not only along the Belgium but also the Dutch frontier as far North as Crefeld. By crossing the strip of Dutch territory known as ‘Maastricht Appendix’, it would be able to turn the flank of the Liege Forts, which barred the way through the narrow Belgian gateway north of the Ardennes. Schlieffen hoped that German diplomacy might secure permission for this passage through Holland⁴. However, his over-riding consideration was success of the military operation and the diplomatic front receiving scant attention.
- b. **Appreciation of Diplomatic Situation.** Schlieffen calculated that the undisguised deployment of German forces on the Belgium border would alarm the French and make them cross the Southern frontier, so as to occupy the natural defensive position in the Meuse Valley, south of Namur. This would give him the pretext for his own advance through neutral territory⁵. Even if this subtle trap failed, then, he calculated that he would be able to capture Liege in time, to avoid any check of his main advance. He was willing to cut his margin of time so close as to afford German statecraft the fullest chance.

The Evolution of French Plan

15. Background

- a. At the start of 20th Century, the advocates of the offensive on outrance “to the utmost” had gained control of the French military machine. Unable to dispel the humiliating defeat of 1871, they put first and foremost in their plan the re-taking of the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. Their slogans were:
 - (1) “The will to conquer is the first condition of victory.”
 - (2) “Offensive to the maximum!”
 - (3) “Offensive without hesitation!”
 - (4) “The offensive alone leads to positive results.”
- b. In 1911, a spokesman of this school, General J. J. C. Joffre, was designated Chief

⁴ Hart, B.H. Liddell, *History of the First World War* (Cassell Ltd London), p. 70.

⁵ Cruttwell, C.R.M.F.A *History of the Great War*. (Oxford University Press). 1934. P.8.

of the General Staff. He sponsored the Plan XVII, with which France went to war in 1914.

16. **Early School of Thought.** The view of early French school of thought can be summarized as follows: -

- a. The French plans were that of an initial defensive, based on the frontier fortresses, to be followed by a decisive counter-stroke (Map 8). To this end, the great fortress system along the Alsace-Lorraine frontier had been created, and gaps such as the Trouee de Charmes between Epinal and Toul had been left, to 'canalise' an expected German invasion for a final counter stroke.
- b. If the German plan failed, due to lack of courage, then, as mentioned earlier, the French fault was an excess of it. The new doctrine, focusing on attack conducted with utmost elan, inspired the notorious Plan XVII.
- c. The French planners did war game the Schlieffen plans and the possibility of preventive action, by a quick French march into Belgium as soon as the War broke out. Nevertheless, the French planners complacently proceeded to expect the German advance through the difficult wooded mountains of the Ardennes.

17. **The Final French Plan XVII (Map-8).** In the decade before the War, there emerged in France a school of thought under Colonel De Grandmaison and General Foch, which denounced all defensive policies, as being contrary to French spirit and preached an all out offensive, as the only means to wage war. Under their leadership Plan XVII, the Plan in effect when War broke out, was prepared⁶. It specified the concentration areas and the intention to attack immediately. France had planned two major offensives in their plan XVII, one on either side of the fortified areas of Metz-Thionville. The offensive south of Metz was designed to attack directly across the old border of Lorraine and was to be supported by an auxiliary operation in Alsace to provide a strong anchor to the French right on the Rhine. The offensive north of Metz was designed to cut off the rear of the German right flank through Luxembourg and the Belgian Ardennes. To achieve this, the French forces were deployed as follows:-

- a. Belfort to Hirson - 5 Armies.

⁶ Esposito. Vincent.J.A Concise History of World War I (Pall Mall Press). p.47.

- b. Between Hirson and the West, the area was left undefended.
- c. Based on the idea of an immediate and general offensive, the 1st and 2nd Armies were assigned the mission thrusting towards the Saar into Lorraine. On their left, the 3rd Army opposite Metz and the 5th Army facing the Ardennes were given dual tasks. They were to launch an offensive between Metz and Thionville, if the German concentrated west of the Saar. And if the Germans came through Luxembourg and Belgium, these Armies were to attack Northeast against the base of the German right flank.
- d. The 4th Army was held in strategic reserve near the centre, close to Revigny.
- e. Two groups of reserve divisions were disposed in the rear of either flank in the north and south.

Analysis of French Plan

18. Following is a brief analysis of the French Plan:-

- a. **Incomplete Pattern of Operation.** Unlike the Schlieffen Plan, it was not a complete pattern of operation. It specified only the organisational aspect and the concentration areas of the French Army and the intention to attack immediately once concentration was completed.
- b. **Incorrect Hypotheses.** Plan XVII was based on two postulates - that at first the Germans would not bring in reserve formations along with active formations and that the main weight of German offensive would come through Ardennes. Both the hypotheses were wrong as per the following analysis:-
 - (1) **Strength of the German Army.** The German Army in the West was estimated at a possible of 68 Infantry Divisions. The Germans actually deployed the equivalent of 82 Divisions, not counting the 'Landwehr' or territorial forces and 'Ersatz' or reservist troops. The French intelligence counted only 45 active divisions during the concentration phase, a miscalculation by half the German strength.⁷
 - (2) **Incompatible Operational Doctrine.** The French stuck to the offensive

⁷ Hart. Liddel.B.H. History of the First World War (Cassell Ltd), p.71

school of thought, inspite of the imminent threat of a German offensive. In fact, an unreasonable faith was placed in an intangible like the French offensive sprit. It was seen that 80% of the infantry officers were either killed or wounded in the first five months of the campaign.

- (3) **Miscalculation of Place.** Although the French appreciated a possibility of a German move through Belgium, the wideness of its sweep was totally misjudged. The French conveniently thought that the Germans would take the difficult route through the Ardennes, which would help the French to cut-off the German lines of communications.
- c. **Pre-War Preparation and Execution of Plans.** Geographically, and given her developed frontier fortress system, there were good reasons for France to adopt a defensive strategy, but they adopted offensive posture.
- d. **Failure to Assess the Impact of Terrain on the Conduct of Operations.** The Plan ignored the difficulties of the terrain for the French soldiers - the high wooded hills of the Ardennes, intersected by valleys and generally sloping up hills from the French side.
- e. **Weapon System.** The plan also ignored the fact that French artillery was unsuitable for hilly country.

PART – III

FIRST WORLD WAR CONDUCT OF OPERATIONS

Overview

1. On the outbreak of hostilities, military engagements commenced on three major European fronts, the Franco-Belgian Front, the Russian Front (Map-9) and the Serbian Front. War then expanded to include all the global powers. Fronts opened at the Gallipoli Peninsula, in the Dardanelles, in Palestine, and in the Arabian Peninsula. Over the next four years, War was fought with varying strategies on different fronts and in different time periods. On the Western Front, the first year of the war witnessed the battles of enveloping manoeuvres from both sides, whereas, a tactical stalemate persisted during 1915-1917, giving birth to Trench Warfare. However, 1918 witnessed both the opposing camps endeavouring to overcome each other through the battles of encirclements; adopting multiple strategies i.e. space oriented strategy of attrition. Ultimately, the major 1918 offensive culminated the Great War into an armistice.

The Western Front

2. **Initial Deployment and Concentration of Opposing Forces.** The initial concentration and deployment of opposing forces is illustrated in Map-9. The relative strengths were as follows:-

a. **Relative Strength**

(1) **Allies**

| | Infantry | Cavalry |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Divisions | Divisions |
| (a) France | 62 | 10 |
| (b) Britain | 6 | 2 |
| (c) Belgium | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 74 | 18 |

(2) **Germany**

87 11

(3) **Ratio**

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------------|
| (a) Infantry | 1 : 1.2 |
| (b) Cavalry | 1 : 1.8 in favour of Allies |

b. **Commanders**

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| (1) German Army | Helmuth Von Moltke |
| (2) French Army | General Joffre |

War of Movement-1914

3. Battle of Frontiers. The initial battles fought between the French and German Armies along the Franco-German and Franco-Belgian frontiers are collectively known as the Battle of Frontiers. This group of engagements lasted from August 14 until the beginning of the First Battle of the Marne on September 6, 1914. The major operations were as follows:-

- a. **Operations in Belgium (4-20 August).** On August 4, a German task force of about 30,000 men crossed the Belgian frontier and attacked Liege Fort. Some of the fortifications were captured on night 5/6 August. The rest surrendered on August 16. The German 1st Army under Von Kluck and the 2nd Army under Von Bulow poured through the Liege corridor and across the Meuse. Hastily mobilized Belgian field forces were brushed aside, and Brussels was occupied on August 20. The Belgians, personally commanded by King Albert-I, retreated to Antwerp.

b. French Offensive in Lorraine (Map 10)

- (1) The planned French thrust into Lorraine, totalling 19 divisions, started on August 14.
- (2) On 18 August, the 1st Army captured Saarburg and the 2nd Army reached within the striking distance of Morhange.
- (3) Clearly exhausted, the French were ready to inject fresh forces to continue their thrust, but the German Imperial Princes, who commanded armies on the Germans' left (Southern) wing were proving unwilling to forfeit their opportunity for personal glory.
- (4) In total disregard to instructions, they launched counter-attacks, instead of continuing to fall back before the French advance as planned.
- (5) Under pressure from Princes, Moltke diverted to Lorraine the six newly formed Ersatz divisions that had been intended for the right wing.
- (6) The French offensive petered out due to German counter-attack and the French were pushed back to fortified heights on Nancy and behind the Meurthe River.

c. Battles of Ardennes and Sambre (Map 11)

- (1) Awakened to the presence of German Right Wing, the French planned a counter-attack against the German right wing, but under-estimated its strength by almost 50%.
- (2) Joffre envisaged a pincer movement, with two French Armies on the right and the 5th Army, supported by the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), on the left, to trap the Germans in the Meuse-Ardennes area.
- (3) The right-hand claw of the French Pincer (23 divisions) collided with the German 5th and 4th Armies (20 divisions) in the Ardennes and was thrown back.
- (4) The left-hand claw (13 French and 4 British divisions) found itself nearly trapped between the German 1st and 2nd armies on its right (total 30 divisions), and the 3rd Army on its left.

- (5) On August 23-24, the French and British began their retreat, just in time to escape envelopment by the German 1st Army's westward march around their unprotected left flank.

d. **Battle of Mons**

- (1) On August 20, Moltke advised Bulow that BEF would eventually appear in the vicinity of Lille. However, he also confirmed that no disembarkation had been reported.
- (2) Contrary to this false information, BEF had assembled and was set to launch their counter offensive into Belgium.
- (3) On the erroneous information Kluck's 1st Army was asked to change its direction from South West to South. This change led to head on striking of Kluck's 1st Army with BEF at Mons. On August 23 battle ensued, resulting into British withdrawal.

4. **Analysis of Battle of Frontiers**

a. **German Operations.** A brief analysis is as follows:-

- (1) The German counter offensives in Lorraine were against the spirit of baited gambit stratagem, conceived by Schlieffen. They threw the French back onto a fortified barrier that both restored and augmented their operational balance.
- (2) Moltke misread the situation and thought that he had practically won the war. He detached two Corps and sent those to the Eastern front. This further weakened the vital enveloping manoeuvre of Right Wing. This was contrary to the concept of Schlieffen Plan. For this Germans were to pay heavily in ensuing battles.

b. **German 1st Army's Change of Direction.** Reacting to a riposte by French 5th Army at Guise, the German 2nd Army called 1st Army for help. Its commander Kluck made the fateful decision to swing left to roll up the French flank. This change would cause him to pass East of Paris, leaving the French capital and railway hub uninvested. This spelled as an abandonment of the Schlieffen Plan and exposed the German right wing to counter envelopment.

- c. **German Right Wing Weakened.** Confident of quick victory, Moltke prematurely despatched two Corps from Kluck's Army to Russian Front, detached two reserve Corps, initially meant for Right Wing to Left Wing. Coupled with this, the force dissipated for containment of Belgian Army at Antwerp and besieged French fortresses and reduced the might of the Right Wing. With these changes, died the spirit of Schlieffen Plan.
 - d. **French Errors of Conception.** The conduct of the French forces was marred by the error of conception that led to failure on three accounts:-
 - (1) Unreasonable faith was placed on deeply inculcated French offensive spirit, while over-extending the limited offensive capacity.
 - (2) The ground was unfavourable for offensive.
 - (3) The French under-estimated enemy strength by almost 50% and misjudged the main direction of German offensive.
5. **New French Plan.** Joffere improvised a fresh offensive plan with the following salients: -
- a. Swing back his centre and left (3rd, 4th, 5th Armies and BEF) with Verdun as the pivot.
 - b. Draw troops from the right wing to form a new (6th) Army on the left for defence of the Paris region.
 - c. Launch a counter stroke by four armies against the Germans from River Somme-Verdun line.
6. **First Battle of Marne (4-11 September).** On September 4, Joffre set in motion a plan to envelop the exposed German right flank (**Map-11**). Consequently, the battle of Marne raged up and down the Western Front from Verdun to Senlis for seven days and comprised many engagements. Those fought on the right flank of the German offensive unfolded as under:-
- a. On 5 September, the newly formed French 6th Army started its attack from the direction of Paris and forced Kluck's 1st Army to withdraw two Corps from his

left for counter attacks. This created a gap of some 32 kilometres between the German 1st and 2nd Armies.

- b. Exploiting this gap, the BEF and French 5th Army defeated German 2nd Army.
 - c. Alarmed by the situation, Moltke sent a junior officer from General Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Hentsch, to the front with full authority to order retreat, if necessary.
 - d. By 9 September, Kluck's savage counter-attacks had forced the French to fall back on the defensive. Meanwhile, alarmed by 2nd Army's situation, Hentsch ordered Kluck's Army to retreat to Soissons. At this moment, unknown to Germans, French 6th Army was contemplating a withdrawal to Paris.
 - e. The Battle of Marne was over. Kluck's 1st Army successfully re-united with Bulow's forces at the River Aisne on 10th September. The German Right Wing was, thus, re-knitted and stood firmly on the line of the Aisne.
 - f. The battle was the most profound strategic victory for the Allies, as it ended the possibility of Germany winning the War quickly. The Allied nations, with superior resources, had a definite advantage over the Central Powers in a long war. On German side, this marked successful capture of large portion of Northern France that was highly industrialised. The material production of this region helped Germans in sustaining their war effort.
7. **Causes of the German Failure.** While the primary reason for the German failure remains Moltke's irresolute personality and his lack of conviction in Schlieffen Plan, certain other factors that also contributed towards German failure are:-
- a. **Dissipation of Forces.** Moltke failed to adhere to even his own original distribution of force. His diversion of Right Wing forces to peripheral operations (Eastern Front, Left Wing, Siege of Belgian fortresses, etc) caused an early culminating point of the attacking forces before the strategic objective was achieved.
 - b. **Inferior Strategic Mobility.** Owing to inadequate rail network of captured territories, German Right Wing relied on foot mobility around the circumference of the circle, while the French switched troops by rail across chord of the circle.

- c. **Operational Balance.** Premature counter offensive in Lorraine allowed French forces to fall back and regain operational balance. Thereafter, the French could concentrate their strength against the main offensive, using superior strategic mobility and advantage of interior lines.
- d. **Articulation of Command.** Senior military commanders were inexperienced in handling large sized formations, operating over vast space. For communication over large distances, Moltke and Army commanders depended on inefficient wireless communication and occasional visits of staff officers. During the entire campaign the German Supreme Command had distanced itself from the main battlefield, delegating the authority for even the most crucial decisions to subordinate staff. The arrangement proved both inadequate and ineffective.
- e. **Loss of Superior Strategic Orientation.** The strategic objective of Paris was the French centre of gravity. By changing direction to East into Marne Valley, Germans lost their superiority of orientation and strategic direction, while allowing space to the French to re-group and launch a counter-stroke against the German Western flank.

8. **Race to the Sea (Map-13).** The successive operations that took place in September and October 1914 are commonly called 'The Race to the Sea'. But the title is misleading. Neither of the contestants was trying to reach the Sea; each was attempting to envelop his opponent's flank. In mid September 1914, where the Aisne front began to be stabilised, each side began to shift troops from east to west to envelop the other. Anticipating a long war, both sides now engaged in a series of outflanking manoeuvres. This race was made more urgent by the strategic need to capture crucial channel ports on the French and Belgian coastline. This period during October and November 1914 involved heavy fighting, particularly the First Battle of Ypres, where the British suffered 50,000 casualties, protecting a vulnerable salient, but saving the main channel ports by preventing a German break through. Every attempt by either side failed till there was no more flank to envelop. The 'War of Movement' came to an end with the trench barrier extending from Swiss Border to the sea.

The War of Trenches (1915-17) – Stalemate

9. **General.** The stabilisation of front without assailable flanks across the entire theatre of operations led to a deadlock, lasting next three years. Since outflanking manoeuvre was

no longer possible, operations were reduced to attempts to break through the front in the hope of subsequently assuming manoeuvre warfare. Defence, at the same time, sought to improve its resistance through elaborate trench system, which included listening posts, forward trenches, support trenches and even reserve trenches. Deep under ground bunkers were built to withstand most rigorous artillery shelling. The stifled manoeuvre gave rise to battles of attrition and war for next three years was fought, in a sense, without operational strategy, and without decisive results. Tactical actions had only one aim; to regain space for manoeuvre, even if it meant sacrificing millions of lives. The failure of these tactics is visible from the fact that the front established in November 1914 did not move more than 10 miles in either direction, except when the Germans voluntarily withdrew to a shorter line (Hindenberg Line) in April 1917.

10. Since the stalemate era did not bear lasting impression on the outcome of war, therefore, only salient aspects of each year are discussed as follows:-

a. **1915**

- (1) The Germans adopted a defensive strategy on the Western Front to hold their newly won gains and to seek decision on the Eastern Front, through concentration of offensive power.
- (2) Allied forces were compelled to launch repeated offensives on Western Front, mainly to release pressure on Russia and boost Italian morale. All these offensives led to huge casualties without any significant gain.
- (3) The Germans successfully introduced poison gas, as a means to back the defence during their only offensive of the year, the second Battle of Ypres - 22 April 1915 (Map-14). However, they failed to exploit the advantage offered by the break through, due to shortage of reserves and lack of confidence in the new weapon.
- (4) Anxious to avoid heavy casualties, the Allied political leaders attempted at seeking decision through change of theatre and opened new fronts in Asia and Africa. Not much was achieved, except broadening the geographical spectrum of the war.

b. **1916**

(1) **Battle of Verdun**

- (a) In early 1916, the Germans started to attack the French fortress at

Verdun, with the aim to affect massive casualties and lowering the morale of French Forces.

- (b) This attack mirrored a particularly cynical attitude of Falkenhayn. He believed that owing to superior German soldiery, the French would lose three men to every German fell in any engagement. He, therefore, decided to bleed the French Army, while seeking battles at Verdun fortress, which the French for reasons of national prestige would under no circumstances surrender. The terrible losses, he hoped, would incline the French for peace deal.
 - (c) In reality, both the French and the German forces bled white. The German penetration (Map 15) was only five miles, at a loss of 281,000 men. The French losses were 315,000 men.
 - (d) By end December 1916, the French had by and large won back the lost ground.
- (2) **Battle of Somme (Map 16).** In conformity with their overall strategic plan for 1916 and to release pressure on Verdun, the Allies launched an offensive astride the Somme River against the most hardened German defences. Immense preparation was made, including a seven day bombardment.

The battle developed into an even greater struggle of attrition than Verdun. The Allied (Franco-British) offensive made a penetration of 7 miles at a cost of 614,105 casualties. The German losses were close to half a million.

c. **The Year 1917**

- (1) **US Entry in War.** Angered by the German unrestricted submarine campaign, the United States entered the War on Allied side in April 1917. This provided fresh impetus to the Allied war effort.
- (2) **Allied Spring Offensive.** The principal Allied offensive was to be great French attack on the Aisne, preceded by the British attack in the Arras area, to draw German reserves away from the River. The offensive was developed as under:-

- (a) In April, the Allies launched offensive in the Aisne-Arras region.
 - (b) Fore-warned by some captured documents, the Germans withdrew to a new line of defence known as Hindenburg Line, upsetting the Allied Plan.
 - (c) The French attack on Aisne was repulsed with such enormous losses as to cause wide spread mutiny in the French Army.
- (3) **Flanders' Offensive (June-November)** In order to prevent the Germans from exploiting the near debacle of the French and to bolster the sagging morale of their Allies, the British launched an offensive in Flanders in June 1917. The main offensive was launched in July and is known as the Third Battle of Ypres. It was supported by the largest concentration of artillery ever seen in the British history. Details are as under:-
- (a) Having fired 4.3 million shells in a preliminary bombardment, lasting nineteen days (average 160 rounds per minute), the British attacked in most unprofessional manner, believing there would be no living soul to resist their attack.
 - (b) When the shelling stopped, the Germans dragged themselves out of their dugouts, manned their posts and destroyed the upcoming waves of the British infantry, causing the British 57,470 casualties in one day.
 - (c) When the offensive was eventually called off in November, the British were still 3 miles short of their first-day objectives.
 - (d) For the meagre achievements, total losses on the British side numbered 419,654 and the German casualties were around half a million.
- (4) **Battle of Cambrai I. J. Man 20 (November-December 1917).** Daunted by the Flanders casualties, Haig agreed to use tanks, as advocated by some of his less conservative staff, so:-
- (a) On 20th November 1917, the British launched the first full-scale offensive, using 476 tanks en-masse.

- (b) Launched without any preliminary bombardment, surprise was total and the almost impregnable Hindenberg Line was breached to depths of 4-5 miles in some places. The commanders were so committed to the immediate battle that they failed to develop cohesive plans beyond over running the trenches. Consequently, a number of opportunities for exploitation were lost.
- (5) **Misapprehensions about Technology.** Entrenched in their 19th Century concepts, most of the senior officers did not understand the impact of technological innovations like gas and tank on warfare, and were reluctant to experiment these in the field.
- (6) **Flexibility Enjoyed by Defenders.** The enemy occupying defensive positions could not be tied down by frontal attacks, to allow strategic envelopment by wings. The defenders always used the flexibility to their advantage, by retreating to another more advantageous defence line.
- (7) **Mismatch between Strategic and Tactical Mobility.** The attacker's railway based strategic mobility was generally restricted to the railhead. From there on movement was conducted on foot and logistic support mostly based on animal transport. Therefore, dismounted tactical mobility of offense and railway based strategic mobility of defence remained incompatible.
- (8) **Predictable Offensive Operations Benefited Defenders' Reactions.** Defence also benefited from the time advantage gained, while confronting an offensive pattern that was generally predictable and almost invariably compromised surprise. Time gained, thus, benefited defensive reactions, based on strategic employment of railways.
- (9) **Failure to Exploit Tactical Gains.** Tactical successes could not achieve great results in the absence of strategic plans. Both sides failed to harmonise their tactical gains for the achievement of ultimate strategic objectives.
- (10) **Poor Battle Management.** The whole War is a demonstration of a lack of appreciation of logistics and what we today know as 'battle management'.

There was no satisfactory arrangement for logistic support to assaulting troops. Thus, at Somme, the troops, who were supposed to break through the German trenches, were carrying two days' rations on their backs.

The Year of Decision (1918)

11. German Offensive

a. Operational Setting

- (1) With the Russian pullout, reinforcements from Eastern Front increased the German divisions on the Western Front from 146 to 192. This compared favourably with the Allied defending with 173 divisions.
- (2) Ludendorff wanted to exploit this window of opportunity before American manpower could exercise a significant effect. Accordingly, he formed an offensive strategy, based on taking the tactical line of least resistance.
- (3) There was wide spread mutiny amongst the French soldiers, and commanders were endeavouring to quell and restore the combat potential.

b. Conduct

- (1) German Offensive. Russian collapse enabled the Germans to gain numerical superiority. Facing adversity against the increasing Allied resource superiority, with American entry in the War, Ludendorff gambled victory in the German Spring-cum-Summer offensive. It was decided to make a supreme effort to defeat the French and the British before the American could arrive in. Its strategic purpose was to isolate and destroy the British Army, by driving it against the sea. The French Army was to be dealt with subsequently. For a war-winning offensive, the objectives did not stem from a coherent design, as strength was applied against strength i.e. the stronger British sector. The operation was based on accumulation of tactical actions, through which strategic results were sought. Five separate drives were made in March, April, May, June and July. The offensive unfolded as under:-

- (a) Using new infantry tactics, the German offensive was launched on March 21, 1918, to turn the British northwards. A second offensive was started towards south and was intended as a feint.
- (b) While the main in the north was held up, the feint met unexpected success, occupying Soissons and nearly cutting off Rheims (**Map-17**). At their deepest point, the Germans penetrated as far as Chateau-Thierry, only 56 miles from Paris.
- (c) Unfortunately, this operation suffered contingency planning. Ludendorff had not planned on the feint achieving any success, and so the astounding achievements were not exploited due to lack of resources.
- (d) Another German offensive was finally launched but none of these could achieve a break through. By mid summer the German attacks petered out.
- (e) **The Germans suffered 800,000 casualties.** Morale was seriously depressed. Exhausted, the German were forced to surrender the initiative to the Allies.

12. Counter Offensive by the Allies and Foch's Sledge Hammer Strategy

a. The Sledge Hammer Strategy

- (1) **The Strategy.** Foch devised a strategy, commonly known as the Sledge Hammer Strategy, which envisaged launching of series of rapid blows at different points, each aimed at paving a way for the next, all close enough in time and space. Such strategy, it was thought, would seriously hamper the Germans' ability of switching reserves to threatened sectors. The rapid blows were to offset the enemy so much that by series of tactical gains, advantage in strategic terms was to be achieved. Based on this strategy, the outline plan was to reduce three main salients, followed by a general offensive to end the War.
- (2) **Operational Environment.** Marshal Ferdinand Foch became the

Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies. At the crucial moments of 1918, he was asked to foresee and conduct the battle, best suited to Allies. Operational environments were as under:-

- (a) St. Mihiel Salient captured in 1914 by the Germans, dominated Paris-Nancy railway line and prevented any major build-up, to support offensive into Lorraine.
- (b) The relative strength ratio had altered in favour of the Allies, because of large American reinforcements and also because of recent German losses in the offensive and naval blockade.
- (c) Because of the propaganda and blockade, the morale of German soldiers as well as of the nation was at its lowest.

b. **The Second Battle of Marne**

- (1) Foch decided to launch his offensive at a time when German offensive in the Rheims was still in progress. The operation aimed at reducing three German salients, so as to improve the lateral railway communication along the Allied front and facilitate future operations. Foch's first objective was the Marne salient. He planned to attack it from all sides.
- (2) The operations started on 18th July and terminated on 2nd August. The Germans were forced to withdraw from the salient, leaving behind 35,000 prisoners and 650 guns.

c. **Sledge Hammer Blows.** Subsequent operations aimed at eliminating the German salient to allow resumption of a general offensive. A series of blows were delivered as per the following details:-

- (1) The British counter offensive launched by British 3rd Army on 8 August between Somme and Montdidier, against a weakly held segment of the salient, met with limited success.
- (2) Subsequent counter stroke were launched under Foch's direction by French 3rd Army on 10 and 21 August, British 5th Army on 10 August, French 10th Army on 17 August, British 3rd Army on 20th August, British

1st Army in Flanders on 26th August. Ludendorff vacated salient, located south of Ypres before attack of British 5th Army.

- (3) By first week of September, the Germans were driven back to Flindenburg Line and on 12th September American offensive eliminated St. Mihiel salient (East of Verdun).

13. **Final Allied Offensive (Map-17).** The obstructive salients, having been reduced, Foch launched his general offensive on September 26. His objective was to capture the key rail junctions of Aulnoye and Mezieres, thus, preventing an orderly withdrawal by the Germans and leaving them vulnerable to destruction. To execute the plan, a Franco-British pincer was to advance rapidly to Aulnoye from the west, and the French American pincer to Meziere from the South. The Germans avoided pincer and withdrew in fair order. Recognizing the hopeless situation against the massive and relentless Allied offensive, the Germans asked for Armistice, which was granted and became effective on November 11.

14. **Analysis of Sledge Hammer Strategy**

- a. Sledge Hammer strategy led to synergetic application of the Time Space Relation (TSR) factor towards operational synchronisation that dislocated enemy's response capability.
- b. Simultaneous action at various points forced enemy to divert resources for reinforcing the not so critical areas, upsetting his system of forces.
- c. Continuous movement tired out reserves and logistic resources were also dissipated.
- d. Through this strategy, Foch was successful in luring the enemy's forces away from the point of decision, despite his operational compulsions to follow the direct approach.
- e. Superior mobility and resource preponderance are necessary prerequisites for application of this type of strategy.

15. **Analysis of the German Offensive.** The Germans achieved significant tactical victories but failed to achieve strategic objective. Major factors which contributed to their strategic failures are:-

- a. **Poor Operational Strategy**
 - (1) The German operational strategy pitched strength against strength. Abortive efforts to turn the British flanks are the case in point.
 - (2) Piecemeal employment of forces failed to create clear relative strength superiority for any of his offensive drives.
 - (3) The diversionary attacks launched in the south were too extensively spread out in time and space, to produce any accumulative effect, and allowed the defenders to regain balance after each blow.
 - b. **Inflexible Mindset.** Having once set his mind to a plan, Ludendorff could not react to any changes. He failed to exploit unexpected success in Somme, and also continued with offensive long after it had reached its culmination point. Such wastage of effort hastened the inevitable defeat.
 - c. **Strategic Balance.** Ludendorff's system of offensive lacked balance. His armies were too widely displaced to concentrate in the desired TSR framework. Repeated penetration, though tactically successful, caused the strategic disaster by pushing sizeable German force out of their well-established Hindenburg line.
 - d. **Depletion of Reserves.** Additional area brought under control required larger forces for defence, thereby, depleted the reserves. Thus, the bulges of victory actually weakened the defences, making the Germans vulnerable to counter-attacks.
 - e. **Inadequate Tactical Mobility.** The assaulting infantry, after initial break through, quickly outran its road bound artillery and logistic support. The desired exploitation of tactical gains for strategic designs, therefore, could not be achieved in the absence of tactical mobility.
 - f. **Morale of the German Troops.** The prolonged conflict, effective propaganda and miseries of German nation due to naval blockade, eroded the morale of German soldiers at a brisk stride.
16. **Salient Naval Aspects.** While the names of Verdun, Ypres, and Somme have
-
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World War-I: The Western Front

become synonymous with images of death, mud and slaughter, all of these battles were totally inconsequential to the war outcomes. These were only naval battles which were decisive. It was an eventual economic defeat, caused by the Allied blockade that forced Germany to accept the Armistice. Not only were they most decisive in terms of Germany's eventual defeat, but also were crucial in the strategy adopted by the German armies in France.

17. **Maritime Environment.** At the outbreak of World War I, neither the British nor the German admiralty was organised to direct the naval warfare. They were well established to handle logistics but quite unprepared to devise naval strategy or to execute large-scale naval operations. Both nations, therefore, entered War with materially excellent navies but without worthwhile policies, doctrines or the organisation needed to handle them.

18. **Comparison of Fleets.** The strength of the fleets at the outbreak of War was as under:-

| Form of Fleet | British Grand Fleet | German High Seas Fleet | Remarks |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Dreadnoughts | 20 | 9 | Dreadnoughts were the latest ships, which made the other battleships obsolete. Their holding decided the naval capability. |
| Other Battleships | 40 | 22 | |
| Battle Cruisers | 8 | 5 | |
| Cruisers | 58 | 7 | |
| Light Cruisers | 44 | 34 | |
| Destroyers | 301 | 144 | |
| Submarines | 78 | 28 | |

19. **The Geographical Factor**

- a. Due to peculiar geographical formation of the North Sea theatre, the Germans had only one point of exit, which allowed British to enforce a distant blockade with impunity.
- b. The British geography gave them a definite maritime advantage. The location of various ports made a blockade by Germany's forces virtually impossible.

20. **Surface Battles.** Most of these battles took place in the Pacific, the South Atlantic, and the North Sea. The British generally had taken better advantage of these battles despite suffering some disappointments, notably at Coronel (1st November 1914) and Jutland (31st

May-1st June 1916). Overall impact of surface battles was to confine the German surface fleet to North Sea and, thus, become ineffective.

21. **The British Blockade Strategy.** Making use of the geographical advantage, the British Fleet laid a distant blockade of Germany right at the outset of war.

22. **German Response**

- a. The Germans responded to the blockade by launching submarine warfare. However, due to the international pressure, they did not target all the shippings directed to England.
- b. By 1917, British blockade had caused so much hardship that the Germans defied international pressure and announced unrestricted U-boat warfare against Britain. However, it was too little too late and despite heavy attrition to British shipping, the German response was far from being effective.
- c. Unrestricted submarine campaign led to US entry into War on the Allied side and, thus, ensured Germany's ultimate defeat.

23. **Effects of Blockade**

a. **Effects on Germany**

- (1) Effective British blockade continued for four years. It gradually strangled Germany's economic life and caused mass demoralisation
- (2) **Effects on General Populace.** The following statistics reflect the devastating effect of blockade:-
 - (a) The stock of cattle went down by 32 percent, as weekly per capita consumption of meat reduced from 1,050 grams to 135.
 - (b) The amount of available milk was down by 50%.
 - (c) Women's mortality rose to 51 percent.
 - (d) Mortality of children under five years of age went upto 50 percent.
 - (e) Tubercular-related deaths increased by 72 percent.

(f) Malnutrition, smuggling, black marketing and hoarding became widespread.

(g) 730,000 deaths were attributed to the wartime blockade. The suffering caused by surface blockade led some of the Allied historians also to term the blockade “nothing short of a War crime”.

(3) **Effect on Military Operations.** Although the great industrial machine for military hardware was kept running by the resources of captured territories, and German soldiers were relatively well-fed, the hunger of their family coupled with war-weariness lowered the morale so much that in 1918 retreating German troops would grumble to their comrades, going for counter-attacks, “you are prolonging the War, Black socks”⁸.

b. **Effects on England**

(1) The U-boats sank considerable tonnage of Allied shippings and caused serious anxiety in the British leadership in 1917. During October to December 1916, some 300,000 tons of British shipping was drowned and it increased to an alarming 1,000,000 tons by April 1917.

(2) Provision of naval escorts to merchant shipping convoys proved effective and, consequent German U-boat losses rose from 19 in 1915 to close to 151 in 1918, the threat, thus, waned.

(3) The economic loss though considerable, actual effect on public life and Allied war effort was minimal.

24. **Analysis of Naval War.** Some of the high points of the naval warfare are as under: -

a. **Size and Geographical Position.** The Great Britain had the advantage in size of her Navy as well as its geographical position. The Royal Navy had the entire coast of the British Isles, providing multiple sanctuaries

8 Ludendorff’s narrative, quoted by Liddle Hart in “A History of the World War”.

and flexibility, enabling control of the North Sea. The German Navy, on the contrary, was concentrated along relatively a short stretch of the coastline, having limited freedom of movement and action.

- b. German Pre-occupation with Land Strategy. The Germans primarily concentrated on their land strategy, giving scant attention to their fairly potent navy. This is clear from the following:-
 - (1). Plans were conceived in isolation by the respective land and naval forces. Coordination between the two operations might have led the German land forces to secure the French Coast, on line Dover-Calais, thereby, improving the reach of their navy against Britain.
 - (2). The true value of Navy was not realised till three years after the onset of War, when nothing much could be done.
- c. *Guerre de Course*. The concept of Commerce Warfare, by employing submarines, was very well demonstrated by the Germans. The U-boat operations were professionally conducted, which posed serious problems for the British. However, since Britain was totally dependent on sea trade, it did fight the menace of U-boat to bring the losses down to a sustainable level.

PART-IV
ANALYSIS

Strategic Conduct of War

1. **Total War.** Derived from Clausewitz distorted interpretation and fuelled by mass armies, as per Richard Simpkin, the concept of war as an end in itself steadily gained ground at the turn of the century. The First World War is seen as its extreme manifestation, where unprecedented resources were utilized in attaining inflexible aims of total victory, but uninspired by superior policy. A major reason for onset of the First World War was the inability of policy and diplomacy to avert war. The Generals, in turn, failed to force decisions in the battlefield and events slid into a mutually destructive tactical deadlock, with the antagonists seeking total victory. As per Ken Boot, the Great War is an example of strategy, in the narrowest sense, usurping policy. Military necessity came to dominate other considerations. As per AJP Taylor, “First World War was imposed on the statesmen of Europe by railway time tables”. In an eagerness to seek decision, there was a remarkable disparity between the ends pursued, the price paid and the results obtained.

2. **Strategic Conduct of War- Germany.** The German strategy was flawed on account of pre-eminence accorded to the military strategy in resolving a much broader strategic issue that they confronted. While acknowledging the operational brilliance of Schlieffen Plan and the superior German conduct of war, its disregard of the wider strategic implications ultimately pitted the immense resources of the British Empire and United States against Germany. Strategic deficiency, thus, incrementally widened the schism between the ends and the means.

3. **Strategic Conduct of War-France.** The French national strategy drew advantage of the alliance system to limit the damage, incurred by its otherwise poor strategic conduct of war. Its military strategy remained flawed, as it addressed its key strategic problem -

defeat of Germany—by exposing its material and qualitative inferiority through ill-considered offensives.

4. **Strategic Conduct of War—Britain.** The Great Britain employed its traditionally significant maritime power to positively influence the outcome of the War. Its land strategy incrementally dominated the French theater, though it remained deficient in operational conduct. The fact that strategic conduct of war is derived from the regional and global environment and that it should be conceived in totality, including application of the exterior manoeuvre, it should not be lost sight off.

5. **Alliance System.** The alliance system, that underpins the strategic conduct of the war, is seen as being largely responsible for extended attrition. As the contending power could draw on the alliance resources to overcome vulnerability and prolong conflict, like the Germans sustaining Austro–Hungarian war effort and Britain and, later on US, salvaging France.

6. **Higher Direction of War.** It generally remained poor owing to ineffectiveness of institutional efficacy created for this purpose, military pre-eminence in policy-making, inadequate comprehension of military matters by policy makers and inability in furnishing superior policy. Britain can be cited as one exception, where maritime strategy stemmed from rational policy goals.

7. **Inter-Service Coordination.** It also generally remained deficient, owing to ineffectiveness of institutions created for this purpose, particular service dominance in defence related policy-making and due to poor higher direction of war. Again Britain stands out as an exception, where maritime strategy lent material support to the land effort in Europe.

8. **Strategic Indirect Approach.** Maritime blockade had the effect of influencing the outcome of the war through strategic in-directness. Its effectiveness was accentuated by propaganda and it created conditions for the inner implosion of Germany to occur, despite startling operational resilience of its armed forces. As Bloch had aptly commented, “your soldiers may fight as they please; the ultimate decision is in the hand of famine.”

9. **Strategic Versus Tactical Mobility.** The strategic mobility is the mobility, when not in battle, and tactical mobility is the ability to move forces into the zone of operations and shift reserves, using the available communication infrastructure. Movement, when engaged in the battle, falls in the purview of tactical mobility. First World War, for the first time, exposed the critical balance required between tactical and strategic mobility as follows: -

- a. **Strategic Mobility.** On the German side the General Staff had developed an elaborate and efficient system of railways to suit the imperatives of the Schlieffen Plan. The plan itself was modified keeping in view with the layout of Belgian and Dutch railways, which was fully compatible with the German railways and the limits of lateral expansion of forces were determined by the Brussels-Lille railroad network. The French and Belgian railways were better suited for quick shifting of forces, compared to the Russian railways. Schlieffen, largely dictated by this factor, decided to first deal with France in a lightning campaign and, then, to turn towards Russia, which by then would not have fully mobilized. The Allies enjoyed a superior strategic and tactical mobility, due to their efficient railroad communication and domination of the sea routes by the strong British Navy.
- b. **Tactical Mobility.** As opposed to the more efficient strategic mobility, tactical mobility was confined to infantry marching speed of the soldiers. The speed of the German offensive, when launched, was so slow that the French not only managed to execute an organised withdrawal but also quickly shifted their reserves to meet the up-coming offensive. The German enveloping manoeuvre failed because of lack of tactical mobility and break-through operations which could not succeed because the defender, making use of superior mobility, could concentrate his reserves to plug the gaps, resulting in failure of attacks. The superior tactical mobility of the Allies allowed them progressive extension of their flanks towards the channel ports, which Germans could not out-manoeuve. The tactical mobility was further slowed due to pulverization of earth, because of unending artillery shelling, wire entanglement, the trenches and bad roads.
- c. This unique and desperate relationship between increased strategic mobility and diminishing tactical mobility had a profound impact on operations. The outflanking manoeuvres failed, and breakthrough attempts stalled, to the great disappointment of staff which had grasped neither the importance nor the possible effects of tactical mobility. The manoeuvres degenerated into a war of attrition (Verdun and Somme); people started comforting themselves that they were wearing down the enemy reserves. Foch finally conceived the ideas of manoeuvre by a succession of supported pockets. The Germans frustrated by lack of strategic exploiting force, found an answer in the tank-aeroplane teams,

the heart of Blitzkrieg, which in 1940 could be achieved in three weeks, what the Germans could not do in four years of World War I.

10. **Importance of Logistic Support.** This war, for the first time, highlighted the increasing dependence of larger armies on logistics. During the war, failure of logistics to keep pace with the size of the armies and progress of the operations contributed to the failure of Schlieffen's Plan. When in 1914 Germans reached near Paris, they were in the words of Liddell Hart, "*Ripe for defeat by the long marches on an empty stomach*". At this point in time, the German marching mass had over-burdened their means of supply to its culminating point and the only available communication artery was not capable of sustaining the formations of the right wing. Imagine, if the strength of the right wing had remained as initially planned, the magnitude of the problem would have further aggravated. The German logistic staff had failed to ensure adequate means of communication for the transportation of supplies. The final victory of Allies was essentially a cumulative effect of poor logistics on the side of Germans and its abundance on the side of Allies.

Operational Strategy

11. **The Aim Versus the Means.** The overthrow of the enemy is the aim of war, destruction of hostile forces the means. Accordingly, the objectives of war could either be force oriented or space oriented, and their attainment only a step towards the realisation of the ultimate objective. Commanders on both sides planned and aimed at the destruction of opposing forces to the exclusion of all else, wrongly equating it with the actual aim. Schlieffen, influenced by Clausewitz, believed that, "the destruction (annihilation) of the hostile forces is the most commanding purpose of war". An indirect approach that could dislocate the enemy's system of forces was either ignored or under-estimated. In August 1914, the undefended Channel Ports were not captured by the Germans and they also missed the opportunity of seizing Paris and wheeled inward short of it to strike at the French forces. Thus, it became a story of missed opportunities for the Germans, who were obsessed with the idea of destruction of forces. The Allies on the other hand also senselessly persisted in costly attacks against the well entrenched Germans in the Western Theatre, rather than adopting an in-direct approach by way of seizing Dardanelles to open the supply route to the munitions starved Russians or purposefully apply pressure through Balkans against Austro-Hungarian empire. The importance of strangulation of armies as against the impracticability of their physical extermination was not fully grasped.

12. **Strategic Posture**

- a. The German had prudently decided upon appropriate postures in various sectors and theatres of war, in consonance with the dictates of the Schlieffen Plan. They were strategically on the defensive in the Eastern theatre but on the offensive in the Western theatre. However, within the Western theatre, Schlieffen had planned offensive posture in the north and defensive posture in the centre and Alsace-Lorraine Sector in the south. Moltke retained the Schlieffen's idea but varied his emphasis during the conduct, by giving resources and permission to Prince Rupprecht to attack in the South.
- b. The French, in their Plan XVII, laid emphasis on their offensive cult than on any thing else. Forces were distributed almost equally along the Franco-German border to attack all along the front. Little did they realize that if one wanted to be strong everywhere, one would be weak everywhere. Later during the conduct, they realized this weakness and strengthened the Paris Garrison and created Sixth Army for an enhanced defensive posture.

13. **Centre of Gravity**

- a. The French centre of gravity was correctly identified by Schlieffen. He understood that Paris was not only the seat of power, but an important communication centre as well, capture of which could create political, psychological and physical paralysis of the enemy, as it would force a battle on reversed front unto him. Consequently, it would have facilitated the annihilation of the French Army. By resorting to inward wheeling by 1st Army, to seek destruction of the French forces, the German missed the opportunity of seizing their strategic objective, which was also the centre of gravity. This blunder by Germans sealed the fate of the Schlieffen Plan.
- b. The French failed to identify the German centre of gravity. Steeped in the cult of an all out offensive, without correctly identifying the centre of gravity, the French Plan XVII was doomed to failure. The French were also obsessed by the notion of the recapture of Alsace and Lorraine and, therefore, wasted their resources against the German's bait. The French offensive on 15 August 1914 in Lorraine Sector by First and Second Armies against Sixth and Seventh Armies of

Germany and counter offensive through Ardennes on 24th August by Third and Fourth Armies against Fourth and Fifth Armies of the Germans were blatant exhibitions of strength against strength, but without any superiority, typifying only the directness of approach.

14. **Balance**

- a. Balance was sought to be achieved by Germans through speedy concentration (7 Armies in 6 days), ensuring security, creation and accentuation of relative strength superiority at the point of decision and subtle interplay of strategic effects. This was done by the following:-
 - (1) Schlieffen had planned to secure line Brussels-Namur as quickly as possible, not only to create adequate space for own forces, but also to deny it to the French, for their possible counter offensive.
 - (2) During the operation itself, security of the left wing was to be ensured by a system of fortifications to compensate for its weakness in strength.
 - (3) Security of the right wing was in-built in such a decisive relative superiority of forces that it could reach its objective inspite of enemy's resistance and reactions.
 - (4) South was kept deliberately weak to lure the French in the Alsace-Lorraine sector, to further accentuate the imbalance of French Army by committing their forces.
- b. However, the conduct reveals setting in of an element of early imbalance in the German forces, caused by lack of strategic reserve with the right wing. This can be attributed to faulty vision of Moltke, who modified the plan. This imbalance was further accentuated by:-
 - (1) Reduction of strength of the right wing from 7:1 to 4:1.
 - (2) Employment of forces for tackling of garrison at Antwerp, Liege and Namur.
 - (3) The subsequent arrival of British Expeditionary Force in September 1914.

- (4) Dispatch of two Corps and a cavalry division to East Prussia, all at the expense of right wing.
 - c. The French were initially well balanced, east of Meuse, with their Fourth Army centrally placed in reserve to reinforce either the north or Lorraine-Alsace sectors. Their launching of all out offensive, however, brought an element of imbalance, which was restored after the failure of their offensive and counter stroke. The Allied situation in the North, however, was precarious, where the French were unbalanced, until the creation of Sixth and Ninth Armies, which re-introduced measure of balance in their forces.
15. **Culminating Point.** A Clausewitzian concept, closely related to the balance in a system of force, every offensive sooner or later reaches a point beyond which operations risk over-extension and, therefore, a defeat. Culminating point of German forces was marked by Battle of Marne. At this stage Germans lacked sufficient troops in the right flank, to carryout original manoeuvre. The milking of 11 Division from the right wing, lack of logistic supply and counter offensive by 5th and 6th Armies of French, which affected the unity of command and relative strength situation, all contributed to hasten the offensive culmination point of the Germans. The French now were poised to exploit the 30 miles gap between 1st and 2nd German Armies.
16. **Strategic Orientation.** The superiority of strategic orientation achieved by Germans in the formulation of Schlieffen Plan has already been discussed. Here a view will be taken of the French side. The French had opted for a defective strategic orientation, by having their main defensive effort East of Meuse, while the main German offensive effort materialized from the North of Ardennes through Belgium. This was a serious strategic error and the one most difficult to rectify. This was, however, greatly re-deemed by:-
- a. Gallieni's strike to unhinge the First German Army through 30 miles gap North of Paris.
 - b. Creation of Sixth French Army, as a reserve for strengthening the defense of Paris and attacking the exposed western flank of the Germans.
 - c. Foch's counter stroke, which decisively turned the battle of Marne in favour of the French.

17. **Strategic Effect.** The desired main effects of the Schlieffen Plan were the dislocation and paralysis of enemy's system of forces by the capture of his centre of gravity, thereby, disrupting his balance. The desired auxiliary effects were to cause the enemy to disperse his resources before the main effect could be achieved. These desired effects were to be achieved through combination of a defensive posture in the South and an offensive posture in the North. The in-directness of Schlieffen Plan was not in its geographical detour alone, but actually rested in the auxiliary effects to be created by the weak left wing of nine divisions, which were aimed at luring the French for attack in Lorraine, thereby, dissipating her resources in a wrong direction. The strong right wing of 53 divisions was to create the main strategic effect by bold and swift manoeuvre to capture Paris, forcing the French to an unexpected change of front. Moltke wrongly perceived that the right wheel through Belgium was aimed at drawing the French away from fortified defences in the South. His deployment indicated that he expected the main decisive battle in Lorraine, a negation of spirit of Schlieffen Plan. The clash of opposing centres of gravity and the relative strength superiority resulted in a disastrous outcome for Germany.

18. **Strategic Surprise.** The Germans, in their plan, aimed at achieving strategic surprise and the French were out to get surprised by the failure of their intelligence and proper appreciation of the situation. The following points will substantiate this view point:-

- a. Speed and mode of initial assembly of German forces (7 armies in 6 days).
- b. Selection of unexpected direction through Belgium, in accordance with the wideness of enveloping sweep.
- c. Unexpected strength of right wing, through inclusion of reserve formations in the offensive forces.
- d. Failure of French intelligence to correctly assess the quantum of Right Wing. They visualized 45 divisions, whereas, Germans actually mustered up a strength of 53 divisions.
- e. French expected the German offensive through Ardennes.

19. **Articulation of Command**

- a. The problem of lack of experience and ability of the senior leadership

in handling large forces, due to poor articulation of command, had been glaring. Instead of promotion by seniority, German system tended towards staff control and left the power in the hands of youthful general staff officers. This system had grave weakness and from it came the grit in the wheels, which not infrequently marred the otherwise well oiled working of the German war machine. To add more to this, Moltke distanced himself from the main battlefield, by remaining at Coblenz and Luxembourg. He relied more on the visits of his staff for the exercise of command, which proved ineffective. The army commanders (many of them being Princes) took even major decisions without the concurrence of Supreme Command. At one stage, Kluck, commander 1st Army, not being in communication with Moltke, so re-adjusted his positions as to create a 30 miles gap between the 1st and 2nd Armies, to protect his right flank. This negated the principle of the unity of command.

- b. The magnitude of forces in the offensive and defensive efforts made the job of single commander more trying and taxing to control. This problem became more glaring due to the weak personality of Moltke and his domineering field commanders. Had Army Group Headquarters been instituted in the hierarchy of command for the control of operation, the situation probably would have been different.
- c. The Allies also lacked unity of command between the French and British forces and the French commander faced difficulties in employing the latter. For instance, the British Commander, Sir John French, insisted that the BEF be initially located at Antwerp, despite the disagreement of the French Commanders. During the battle of Marne, Gallieni failed to convince the British commander for a united action, which could have proved disastrous for the Germans. In May-June 1918, when Germans reached only about 37 miles short of Paris, Marshal Foch wanted BEF to move South and strengthen the defences of Paris but this was not agreed by the British Commander Haig.

20. **Interior and Exterior Lines.** Germany was on interior lines against Russia and France put together, a situation, which it gainfully exploited through an extensive railroad

network. With regard to Germany's offensive against France, seen in isolation, she was on exterior lines, at least as related to enveloping manoeuvre from the North. The French forces were operating on interior lines as such, Allies could switch forces, plug gaps, improve posture and concentrate rapidly in Paris, due to shorter lines of communication. The French were also able to concentrate their forces to counter-envelop the German exposed flank, forcing it to recoil. The German strategic envelopment on exterior lines aimed at bringing a superior force against the enemy's relatively weaker and unguarded Western Wing. The success could be guaranteed, if it had completely out-flanked the enemy in the North and enveloped Paris from the West, creating enormous physical and psychological effects. However, before reaching Paris, their right wing wheeled inward, which was a strategic folly. All these factors militated against the very spirit of Schlieffen Plan and manoeuvre on exterior lines.

21. **Effects of War on Evolution of Operational Concepts.**

- a. Importance of national Policy vis-a-vis military strategy assumed its rightful place within the ambit of national strategy.
- b. Brilliance of strategy could achieve nothing without a successful battle, thus, place of tactics vis-a-vis strategy was amply highlighted.
- c. Handling and movement of large formations, within a specific time and space, became an art in itself.
- d. Aerial reconnaissance, as a mode to gain information, acquired added value.
- e. Command and control of large forces, widely dispersed, became easy due to new and better means of communication like telephone, radio-telegraph, automobiles, aeroplanes, etc.
- f. Communication centers were to become vital strategic objectives.

22. **Conclusion.** First World War serves to highlight numerous lessons in the realm of grand strategy, national strategy and operational conduct of war. It inspired operational theories and practices that continue to shape the way conflicts are fought today, like strategic employment of air power and land strategies, aiming at physical and psychological incapacitation of the opponents. This war was a total war, which resulted in re-drawing the maps of the most part of the world (**Map-18**), which impacted the world at large.

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