

General Friedrich von Bernhardi (1911)
Deutschland und der Nächste Krieg. [Germany and the Next War, translated by Allen H. Powless - 1912]



Friedrich Adolf Julius von Bernhardi (November 22, 1849 - December 11, 1930) was a Prussian general and military historian. He was one of the best-selling authors prior to World War I. A militarist, he is perhaps best known for his bellicose book Deutschland und der Nächste Krieg (Germany and the Next War), printed in 1911. He advocated a policy of ruthless aggression and complete disregard of treaties and regarded war as a "divine business". [Wikipedia]

General Friedrich von Bernhardi's (1849-1930) writing reflects a widespread belief among the educated, non-socialist middle classes that Germany deserved more influence and respect, in accordance with its economic power. In describing war as "the extension of politics by other means," Bernhardi repeats the dictum of Prussian Major General Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831). War was increasingly seen as inevitable, especially after England and France established an entente in 1905. [GHDI Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918 The Inevitability of War: General Friedrich von Bernhardi (1912)]

Introduction:



All the patriotic sections of the German people were greatly excited during the summer and autumn of 1911. The conviction lay heavy on all hearts that in the settlement of the Morocco dispute no mere commercial or colonial question of minor importance was being discussed, but that the honour and future of the German nation were at stake. A

deep rift had opened between the feeling of the nation and the diplomatic action of the Government. Public opinion, which was clearly in favour of asserting ourselves, did not understand the dangers of our political position, and the sacrifices which a boldly-outlined policy would have demanded. I cannot say whether the nation, which undoubtedly in an overwhelming majority would have gladly obeyed the call to arms, would have been equally ready to bear permanent and heavy burdens of taxation. Haggling about war contributions is as pronounced a characteristic of the German Reichstag in modern Berlin as it was in medieval Regensburg. These conditions have induced me to publish now the following pages, which were partly written some time ago.

Nobody can fail to see that we have reached a crisis in our national and political development. At such times it is necessary to be absolutely clear on three points: the goals to be aimed at, the difficulties to be surmounted, and the sacrifices to be made. The task I have set myself is to discuss these matters, stripped of all diplomatic disguise, as clearly and convincingly as possible. It is obvious that this can only be done by taking a national point of view.

Our science, our literature, and the warlike achievements of our past, have made me proudly conscious of belonging to a great civilized nation which, in spite of all the weakness and mistakes of bygone days, must, and assuredly will, win a glorious future; and it is out of the fulness of my German heart that I have recorded my convictions. I believe that thus I shall most effectually rouse the national feeling in my readers' hearts, and strengthen the national purpose.

THE AUTHOR.
October, 1911

Full text (English) at: <https://archive.org/details/cu31924031165206>

More from Bernhardi: [GHD] - as previous]

If we look [. . .] at the position of Germandom in the world, we must admit with a bleeding heart that the political position of the German Reich in no way corresponds to the cultural worth of the German people and the economic importance of Germandom abroad. [. . .] If we are thus in a less favorable situation as a continental power, our position in the world is threatened to the same degree; indeed, it is still impossible to speak of the German Reich as having a genuine world standing as such. Even though the economic importance of Germandom has become quite significant all over the world (under the umbrella of the political respect that our wars of unification have won for us), we are still not able to assert ourselves as a world power anywhere, and there are but few places on the earth where Germandom can develop freely and independently, namely in the few colonies that we acquired back then with England's consent and still possess today.

This colonial possession, however, does not correspond in any way to our importance as a people of culture, nor to our economic needs, nor to the numerical size and developmental potential of our people. Moreover, given the way political power is distributed today, relations with our overseas possessions could be cut at any time and we would be incapable of defending ourselves against it. If, by contrast, we examine the colonial empires of England, France, and even small Belgium, we recognize clearly that we were shortchanged when the world was divided up, not without our own grievous fault. [. . .]

War is the extension of politics by other means and at the same time the most effective, if most dangerous, instrument of politics. Indeed, it even has to be said that the possibility of war as an extreme measure is a necessary precondition of politics. One cannot conceive of politics at all without the possibility of invoking arms under certain circumstances. Between states that cannot accomplish a peaceful accommodation of clashing interests, there is, in fact, no other measure of power than war, and merely imagining the detrimental consequences of war would bring a state to relinquish part of its most precious interests in favor of an adversary.

[. . .]

It is also imperative to reclaim for war its moral justification and political importance in public opinion. Its great significance as the mightiest promoter of civilization must be generally recognized in accordance with its worth. We must come to understand that in a genuinely cultured nation, economic and personal interests alone must never be allowed to be the only ones; that it is not the external but the moral goods that are the true cultured goods worth striving for, and that making sacrifices and enduring suffering in the interest of a great cause elevates man more than does the enjoyment and greedy pursuit of the sensual goods of this world; in short, that war for idealistic purposes or for the self-affirmation of a noble people should be described not as barbarism, but as the highest expression of true culture, and as a political necessity in the interest of biological, social, and moral progress. [. . .]

In these results, however, lies the biological importance of war for the progressive

development of mankind; for it is clear that the forces that bestow superiority in warfare, namely above all the spiritual and moral ones, of the kind that flourish only in a vital people, are at the same time those that make possible a progressive development of culture. It is precisely because they contain within themselves the elements of progress that they grant victory, which expands the vital people and creates more favorable living conditions and enhanced influence. Without war, however, it would be all too easy for the inferior and degenerate races to overpower the healthy, germinative elements through sheer size and the power of capital, and a general decline would be the inevitable outcome. In selection lies the creative power of war. Because it and it alone brings this about, it becomes a biological necessity, a regulator in the life of mankind, which cannot be dispensed with, because without it the result would be an unhealthy development that would rule out any advancement of the species and thus also all genuine culture.

Source: Friedrich von Bernhardi, *Unsere Zukunft. Ein Mahnwort an das deutsche Volk* [Our Future. A Word of Warning to the German People]. Stuttgart-Berlin, 1912, pp. 22 ff., 54, 56, 60.

Original German text reprinted in Willibald Gutsche, *Herrschaftsmethoden des deutschen Imperialismus 1897/8 bis 1917* [The Ruling Methods of German Imperialism, 1897/8 to 1917]. East Berlin, 1977, pp. 153-54.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

A contemporary review: [Literary Review 4th May 1912]

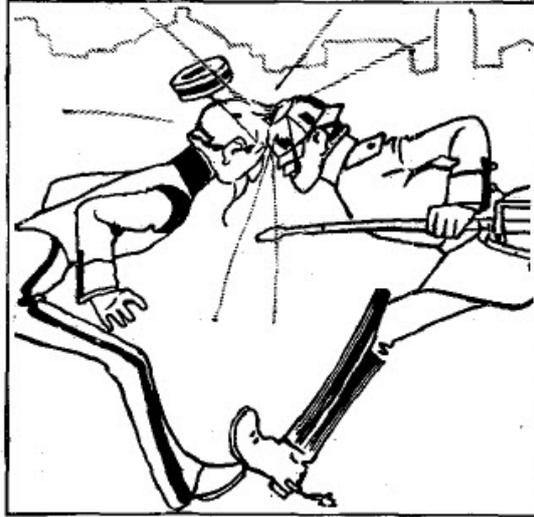
A VERY INFLUENTIAL military writer of Germany declares that Germany must win her place as a world power through warfare. This is General Bernhardi, who in his new volume on "*Deutschland und der Naechste Krieg*" ("Germany and the Next War") practically throws down the gauntlet to Europe, and to England in particular. Never has the policy of Berlin been proclaimed so clearly and so fearlessly. The General's book gives a candid expression of the view that his country must fight its way to predominance regardless of the rights and interests of other people. This accepted authority on current strategical and tactical problems describes the peace movement as simply "poisonous." In one chapter he discusses



THE PROGRESS OF PEACE. —Pasquino (Turin).

“The Right to Make War.” A chapter follows on “The Duty to Make War.” The peace propaganda of foreign Powers he denounces as sheer hypocrisy. He even advocates aggression

and invasion. "The duty of self-assertion," we read, "is by no means exhausted by the mere repelling of hostile attacks. It includes the need of securing to the whole people which the State represents the possibility of existence and development," which he interprets as meaning "the right of conquest." "Might is right," he thinks, and this can be decided only by war. "Wars which were deliberately undertaken with statesmanlike intent were always productive of the happiest results," he believes. A country may initiate a war for its own "highest purposes," in which case it may employ means which are unjustifiable in an individual. On this point we read:



ENGLAND AND GERMANY ARE GETTING TOGETHER.
—Fischietto (Turin).

"It has, however, to be considered that the relations between two States must often be regarded as a supprest state of war which for the moment is being carried on only in peaceful competition. Such a state of things justifies the use of peaceful means—cunning and deception—just as war itself does, because in such a case both parties are prepared for the use of such means. On the whole I believe that a conflict between personal and political morality can be avoided by clever and prudent diplomatic behavior, if one is perfectly clear about the goal which one desires to reach and always remembers that the means which one employs must ultimately correspond with the moral character of this goal."

Coming down to the specific enemies that Germany must be prepared to attack, the General remarks:

“We must always keep in view the possibility of war with England, and take our political and military measures accordingly without regard for any peace manifestations of politicians, publicists, and Utopians.”

“In one way or another we have got to settle with France, if we desire to obtain elbow-room for our world policy. That is the first and most unconditional requirement of a healthy German policy, and, as French hostility can not be disposed of once and for all by peaceful means, it must be done by force of arms. France must be so completely overthrown that she can never again get in our way.”

This writer proceeds to discuss in the clearest and most matter-of-fact way “the coming naval war with England.” He states his position as follows:

“The conception of our naval duty points directly to the fact that it is the English Navy which must give the measure of the extent of our armaments for naval war. War with England is probably the war which we shall first have to fight out. The possibility of victoriously repelling an English attack must therefore guide our war preparations, and, if the English continue to increase their Navy, we can not avoid following them even beyond the limits of our existing Navy Law.”

Lord Esher, who is considered in England one of the highest authorities on military matters, speaks in the *London Times* with something like horror of the German general's gospel of blood and iron, saying:

“It is hardly conceivable that after 2,000 years of Christian teaching, and in the midst of a people from whom have sprung some of the loftiest thinkers and some of the greatest scientific benefactors of the human race, such opinions should find expression. They emanate, too, from a soldier hitherto held in the highest respect by all who have studied war as an odious possibility, and not as an end desirable in itself. No one could have supposed that such ideas so crude and juvenile could have survived the awakening processes of recent times.”

Other posts of possible interest:

- [Felstead, S.T. \(1920\) German Spies at Bay](#)
- [Hearne, R.P \(1908\) Aerial Warfare & \(1910\) Airships in Peace and War](#)
- [Sleeman, C.W. \(1880\) Torpedoes and Torpedo Warfare](#)
- [Bloch, I.S. \(1900\) Modern weapons and modern war](#)
- [Repington, A. \(1910\) New Wars for Old](#)