

*A Tale of Iron and Blood: How “Iron and Blood”
Evolved into “Blood and Iron”*

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Bismarck's "Blood and Iron" Speech (1862) is one of the more famous political speeches in the history of Germany and of the world. This speech was made by Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) to the Budget Commission of the Prussian Parliament in 1862 in an effort to convince the Parliament to approve an increased military budget on behalf of the king. In his effort to persuade the Parliament into increasing the military budget, Bismarck deliberately presented a dark view of European affairs and expressed his belief that only through a strong military could Prussia and Germany's security and interest be secured:

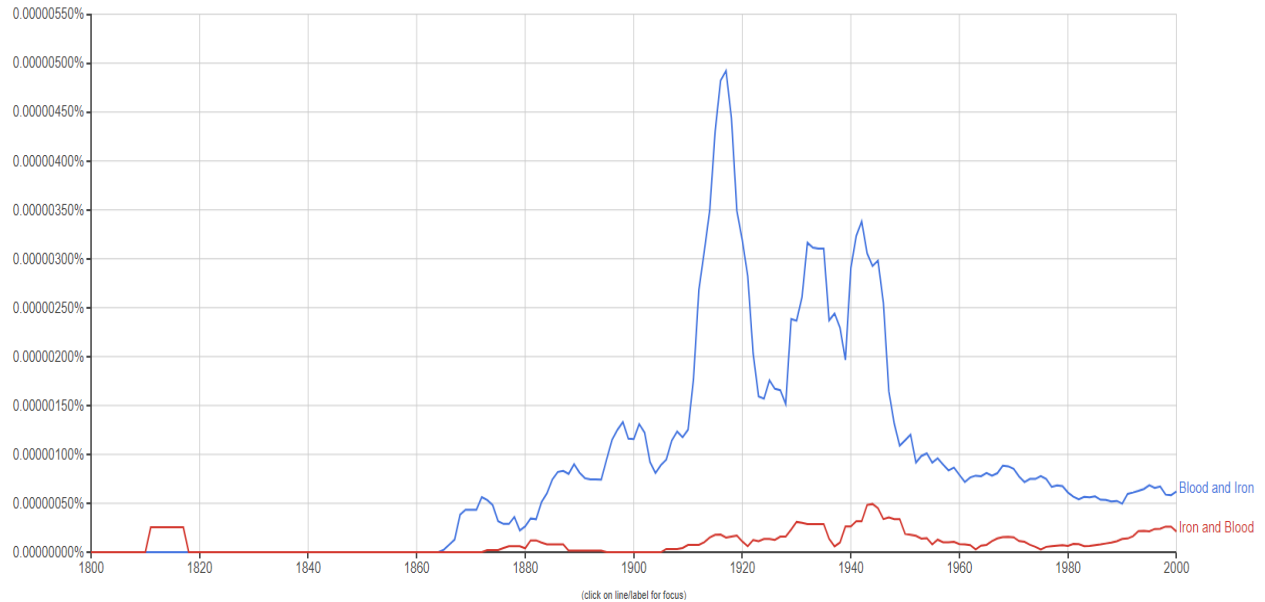
*"Prussia's borders according to the Vienna Treaties [of 1814-15] are not favorable for a healthy, vital state; it is not by speeches and majority resolutions that the great questions of the time are decided – that was the big mistake of 1848 and 1849 – but by iron and blood."*¹

This statement conveyed the most essential and powerful idea from Bismarck, and thus named this speech after the phrase "Blood and Iron." While the records of this speech suggest that Bismarck spoke of his idea as "Iron and Blood," the world today seems to primarily refer to this speech as "Blood and Iron". This source exploration attempts to explore and explain how the phrase was reversed. Since newspaper was the primary form of media during the 19th century, it was most likely to be responsible for the popularization of terms and phrases, therefore it is the focus of this research. By examining English newspapers around the time when the speech was made and reported, alongside with Ngrams statistics and the trend they indicate, this paper seeks to demonstrate that the popularization of "Iron and Blood" as well as "Blood and Iron" was closely related to Bismarck's speech, and the reversal from the original "Iron and Blood" into "Blood and Iron" is likely to have taken place in the early 1870s, as my examination of newspaper articles suggests.

¹ Otto von Bismarck, "Excerpt from Bismarck's 'Blood and Iron' Speech (1862)".

I started out with searching the keywords “Iron and Blood” and “Blood and Iron” on Google Ngrams in both English and German, and the results are provided below:

English:



German:



As demonstrated, the phrase “Blood and Iron,” has almost always been used more commonly than “Iron and Blood” in German as well as English. Therefore, it seems possible that “Blood and Iron” could be a phrase that had long been popular independent of Bismarck’s speech. However, the diagrams show that both orderings of the phrase in both languages had hardly ever been used before the 1860s (the speech was made in 1862), then slowly but steadily popularized during the next few decades, fully brought to their apex during WWI and again during WWII. This trend occurred in both orderings of the phrase in both languages, making it obvious that the usage and popularization of either “Iron and Blood” or “Blood and Iron” were closely related to Bismarck’s speech. Searching newspaper database for “Iron and Blood” and “Blood and Iron,” I found that these phrases almost always occur with and only with German/Prussian politics and Bismarck’s name attached, which further undermines the possibility of their popularization independent from Bismarck.

I turned my focus specifically to English newspapers published in the first decade after Bismarck’s speech was given. The earliest publication that I found was an article called “Prussia” from Times of London by its correspondent in Berlin on 11 May 1865, 3 years after Bismarck’s speech.² Being a correspondent in Berlin, the author of this article observed the period of internal struggles among the various German powers and compared Bismarck’s vision and activities in a unified Germany to those of the previous liberal reformers with similar goals. Making the distinction between Bismarck and his liberal predecessors, the author refers to Bismarck’s “Iron and Blood” as his departure from liberalism in the German state-building project. Given that the correspondent was in Berlin, the political heart of Prussia, his usage of the

² OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT, “Prussia.”

phrase “Iron and Blood” can be considered representative of the popular ordering of the phrase at that time.

The next newspaper article "Is Peace Possible?" was also from the Times of London in 1870, an exchange between the author and his German friend supplemented with his own political commentary.³ This article corresponds to the surge of the popularity in Bismarck's “Iron and Blood” politics as the Franco-Prussian War was waged. Despite author's sharp criticism against Prussian aggression, he nonetheless recognizes Bismarck's genius statesmanship and views it as a crucial demonstration of a world now run by “Iron and Blood” politics. As stated, “Iron and Blood” was still being popularly used up until this point. More importantly, this news article was the earliest one I found that directly attributed the doctrine of “Iron and Blood” to Bismarck's speech and went so far as to directly quote him, further reinforcing that the popularization of the phrase was intimately linked to Bismarck's 1862 speech.

“Germany, on the other hand, is ruled by a statesman who declared early in his political career that questions of state policy were to be decided ‘not by majorities or minorities in Parliament, but by iron and blood.’”⁴

While the article “Is Peace Possible?” sufficiently shows that the popularization of “Blood and Iron” doctrine was almost entirely due to Bismarck rather than a long-existing literary or rhetorical usage, it also shows that such popularization stem specifically from Bismarck's speech in Parliament. However, what the correspondent was claiming to be a word-for-word quote from Bismarck's speech was quite different from the one on GHDI, the first excerpt quoted at the beginning of this paper. The GHDI source quoted Bismarck's speech along the line of “it is not by speeches and majority resolutions... but by iron and blood,” whereas the Times of London

³ SCRUTATOR. "Is Peace Possible?"

⁴ SCRUTATOR. "Is Peace Possible?"

correspondent quoted it as “not by majorities or minorities in Parliament, but by iron and blood.” At first glance, it might be a translation issue. However, “speeches and majority resolutions” and “majorities or minorities in Parliament” were not merely different terms used to describe the same concepts, but rather quite different phrases that pointed to distinct institutions and activities. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the translation was responsible for the multiple distinct versions of the same speech. This conclusion, however, would suggest that there may have been some technical errors in the reporting of Bismarck’s speech, making it not perfectly precise.

The earliest instance that I found the usage of “Blood and Iron” was in the September 1870 issue of *The Punch, or the London Charivari*, in which a satirical poem starting with “ ‘By Blood and Iron,’ quoted Bismarck,” and went on with a recapitulation of the Prussian wars in the previous years and bitter criticism of the deaths it caused, all in a satirical tone⁵. Although it remains unclear as to who composed this poem and I could find nothing about the poet, it is apparent that he/she took “By Blood and Iron” as the literal order in which Bismarck spelled out his words in 1862. While this reversal to “Blood and Iron” could have been done in the efforts of improving the rhythm, it was not the case with this poem:

*By “Blood and Iron”, quoth Bismarck,
 “Must Germany be Made:”
 And with blood and, iron his mark
 On Germany he has laid:
 And in France’s flank, too, is mark
 Of his keen two-edged blade.⁶*

⁵ The Punch, or the London Charivari.

⁶ The Punch, or the London Charivari.

While I fully recognize that I am not an expert on English, poetry, or their practical implementation in 1870, the reversal of “Iron and Blood” in this poem appears to me to have made no difference in relation to its rhythm. Considering the technical errors shown to have occurred in the reporting of Bismarck’s original speech and the fact that neither the term “Blood” nor “Iron” fit the rhythm of that part of the poem, the author may have quoted another, different version of Bismarck’s speech. Since we see multiple different versions of Bismarck’s direct quotes in English that put “Iron” and “Blood” in different order, the reporting errors would provide a sufficient explanation as to how “Iron and Blood” changed into “Blood and Iron.” However, this still does not explain why this shift in popularization from the former to the latter occurred. Another important thing to consider is that Punch was a London newspaper, which was located in the same city as Times of London, the publisher of the articles mentioned above. This shows that the changing of phrase from “Iron and Blood” to “Blood and Iron” was unlikely due to regional/geographical differences.

Very interestingly, Times of London itself also started to make a complete transition to using the phrase “Blood and Iron” in 1870-1871 as well. The very first Times of London article that I found to contain the usage of “Blood and Iron” was "The Negotiations For Peace," an 1871 article on the peace negotiations in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War.⁷ And the phrase “blood and iron” was recorded to have been spoken by the French leader when he was arguing that the Prussians had already reaped enough benefits from the war according to the doctrine of “Blood and Iron.” This opens up a possibility of the reversal of “Iron and Blood” in translation or in a miscommunication. However, as I attempted to search relevant topics and keywords in French, nothing was found on Ngrams. While my own ignorance in French language hinders me

⁷ "The Negotiations For Peace."

from further exploration, this article further reinforces the probability that the popular reversal of the phrase “Iron and Blood” occurred around the early 1870s.

"The German Official Account Of The Franco-German War*," although being published in the Times of London in English, was originally a German official document released 10 years after Bismarck's 1862 speech.⁸ For those who have the expertise and are interested in locating the original German official account on which this report was based, it was *The Franco German War*, 1870-1871, a report produced by German Official Account at the Topographical and the Statistical Department of the War Office (unfortunately, I was not able to acquire or locate the original document in German). Surprisingly, this document discussed Bismarck's policy in “Blood and Iron,” considering that no one should know better than the German state about the speech given by its own chancellor at its own parliament. This seems to manifest the popularization of “Blood and Iron” over “Iron and Blood,” further evident that the reversal of the phrase occurred sometime between 1870 and 1871.

⁸ "The German Official Account Of The Franco-German War.*."

Annotated Bibliography

Otto von Bismarck, "Excerpt from Bismarck's 'Blood and Iron' Speech (1862)". Reden 1847-1869 [Speeches, 1847-1869], ed., Wilhelm Schüßler, vol. 10, 1928. Bismarck: Die gesammelten Werke [Bismarck: Collected Works], ed. Hermann von Petersdorff. Berlin: Otto Stolberg, 1924-35, pp. 139-40.

Relevance: This is an excerpt from one of the most famous speeches by Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) to the Budget Commission of the Prussian Parliament in 1862 in effort to convince the Parliament to approve an increased military spending on behalf of the king. In his speech, Bismarck stressed the importance of the "German Question" and argued that its solution would necessitate Prussia to be a power state instead of a liberal one.

OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT, "Prussia." Times [London, England] 15 May 1865: 12. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 1 Nov. 2018.

<http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=ucsantabarbara&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=CS201629871&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>

Relevance: Reported during a period of internal struggles among the various German powers, this report compared Bismarck's vision and maneuver in a unified Germany to those of the previous reformers with similar goals in mind. The reporter thought that Bismarck was taking on the same task to build a new system that would unify and incorporate the various German states as his liberal predecessors and was quite successful at it. However, the new state lacked the liberal, republican, democratic characters with strong belief in an "iron and blood" doctrine and usages of military means.

SCRUTATOR. "Is Peace Possible?" Times [London, England] 15 Nov. 1870: 4. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 1 Nov. 2018.

<http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=ucsantabarbara&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=CS67677039&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>

Relevance: At the start of the Franco-Prussian War, the reporter presented the German attitude towards the on-going state of affairs and the question of German unity. According to this report, the German people being interviewed were mostly very motivated and determined in fighting the war with little regard to their personal loss. At the same time, while the popular support for a war over the Rhine territories was largely present in both France and Germany, it was unlikely the real factor that prompted the two governments into the war. France engaged in war due to its overestimation of its strength and its backward mindset of old aristocratic dynastic consideration. In contrast, the Germans under the leadership of Bismarck had a very clear goal of the unification of Germany and a determined doctrine to its realization—through "iron and blood." While the war seemed inevitable, the difference between the two sides highly suggested a Prussian victory, and Bismarck should receive high praise for it.

The Punch, or the London Charivari. Vol. 58 Published at the Office, 85, Fleet Street. London. 10 September 1870. Page 106.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=64MIIj4wZXoC&pg=RA1-PA106&dq=%22blood+and+iron%22&hl=zh-CN&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwimzcOj16reAhVr4YMKHR1dCwQQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Relevance: This piece was a satirical poem published on the Punch magazine, made during the unfolding Franco-Prussian war. The author satirically mocked the Prussian devotion and zeal towards wars under the call for “Blood and Iron”. Interestingly, whoever composed this poem placed “blood” before “iron.” This was published in late 1870, and the Times of London, which happened to be in the same city, published its report on the negotiation in early 1871. Therefore, the appearance of this satirical poem undermines the probability of my previous assumption on the reason for the re-ordering of the phrase “Iron and Blood.” However, it makes it more probable that this change of phrasing occurred during 1870-1871.

"The Negotiations For Peace." Times [London, England] 28 Feb. 1871: 10. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 1 Nov. 2018.

<http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=ucsantabarbara&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=CS167947356&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>

Relevance: While the report itself is mainly about the back-and-forth negotiations between the French and German leaderships following the landslide Prussian victory in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), it was the earliest publication I found in which Bismarck’s 1862 speech and its subsequent doctrine was phrased as “blood and iron” instead of “iron and blood.” And the phrase “blood and iron” was recorded to have been spoken by the French leader when he was arguing that the Prussians had already reaped enough benefits from the war according to the doctrine of “Blood and Iron.” It is likely that the French, due to translation error or miscommunication, confused the order of “iron” and “blood” in Bismarck’s speech.

"The German Official Account Of The Franco-German War.*." Times [London, England] 22 Oct. 1872: 6. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 1 Nov. 2018.

<http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=ucsantabarbara&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=CS100839254&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>

Relevance: This was a report only a short period (about a year) after the negotiation and end of the Franco-Prussian War by the Prussian authority. While the report itself mainly sought to inform its audience of what the Prussians thought about the war and its impact for the new German nation, interestingly, “Blood and Iron” was used here. It further shows that the order of the phrase was carried out to this report from the one on the negotiation, since both reports previous to the one on the negotiation adopted “Iron and Blood” and all these reports were from Times of London.