



FUNDAMENTAL PRECEPTS DERIVED FROM THE WORKS OF CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ

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The analysis of Carl von Clausewitz's personality and contribution in literature has highlighted their complexity and impact in the field of military science. As a war theorist, he developed a practical military philosophy that was adapted to the real needs and experiences of the military. The pragmatic nature and immediate usefulness of these ideas, as well as their relevance to military leadership and strategy in concrete conflict situations, are highlighted in this interpretation.

Despite the fact that some authors and researchers have proposed the Polish origin of his name, historical and genealogical documents prove that his family had German roots and a strong Prussian patriotism. The national and cultural identity had a major impact on how it perceived and conceptualized war, as it considered conflict to be an essential element of the Prussian state's identity and sovereignty.

Furthermore, the family and social environment in which he was brought up helped him to develop a rigorous and analytical perspective on military phenomena. His academic training, combined with his practical experience gained in military service, was the foundation for the theories and principles he later expressed in his landmark work, "Vom Kriege", still considered a core work in military science.

Keywords: military science; lessons learned; Prussia; "Vom Kriege"; policy;



INTRODUCTION

The idea of analysing the lessons learned from Clausewitz's work lies in the unique capacity of this corpus of texts to function not as a rigid dogma, but as a tool for critical reflection applicable to contemporary strategic challenges. In an era marked by uncertainty and accelerated technological transformations, the rediscovery of its fundamental concepts, such as friction, trinity and the supremacy of politics, provides the necessary benchmarks to distinguish between the immutable nature of war and its ever-changing forms, thus ensuring a solid intellectual basis for any complex decision-making process.

In the current security context, marked by instability in the proximity of national borders and the need to modernize strategic thinking within international partnerships, the reassessment of these lessons gains increased relevance for the Romanian space. Adopting a Clausewitzian perspective allows local decision-makers and specialists not only to better integrate into the conceptual language of the allies, but also to gain a deep understanding of the interdependence between political objectives and military action, essential for strengthening national resilience.

Carl von Clausewitz's treatise *"On War"* (*"Vom Kriege"*) represents, without a doubt, the most profound and influential attempt to codify the complex nature of armed conflict, offering a dialectical synthesis between theoretical rigor and the unpredictable reality of the battlefield. Although written in a specific historical context, his work transcends the Napoleonic era, remaining an indispensable analytical *"lens"* for understanding how politics, hazard, and human will interact in defining modern strategy.

The personality of Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) has been approached from numerous perspectives and in various ways. For the British military historian Michael Howard, translator of Clausewitz's work, he was a *"soldier's soldier"*, who developed a military philosophy

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that was applicable and oriented towards soldiers. Peter Paret, a central figure in contemporary military historiography, portrays Clausewitz as an intellectual of exceptional rigour, albeit marked by an austere temperament (2007; 2015). In contrast, Clausewitz's critics have portrayed him as a military dilettante with rather aggressive tendencies, while, in military academic circles in Germany, Britain and America, his work has often been received as a sterile and excessively dogmatic work, reserved exclusively for theoretical study (Bassford, 1994).

Carl Philippe Gottfried von Clausewitz was born in Burg, near Magdeburg, on 1 July 1780. Although his name has been claimed by some writers to have had Polish origins, the family was German and patriotically Prussian. However, despite their claims to nobility, the Clausewitz family (who were certainly members of the local Burg elite) probably had their origins in the middle class. The elder Clausewitz had obtained a commission in Frederick the Great's army, but it was withdrawn during Frederick's purge of non-noble officers after the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). Carl was able to enter the army as a cadet through the influence of his noble step-grandfather. Based on the military achievements of Carl and his brothers, the family's nobility was confirmed without hesitation by King Friedrich Wilhelm III in 1827. Clausewitz entered the Prussian army at the age of twelve; He first encountered combat at the age of thirteen, in a guerrilla campaign against revolutionaries in France. After Prussia withdrew from the wars of the French Revolution in 1795, he spent five years performing garrison duties. There, he focused on his own education. Beyond strictly military subjects, Clausewitz would develop a wide range of interests in art, science, and education. All of these interests would have an impact on his military-philosophical work. His efforts were so successful that, in 1801, he was admitted to the Institute for Young Officers in Berlin, which would eventually evolve into the famous Kriegsakademie. He quickly came to the attention of the new director, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, a key figure in the Prussian state during the upheavals of the Napoleonic Wars and Chief of the General Staff in 1806.

Impressed by Clausewitz's ability, Scharnhorst would become his sponsor, mentor, and close friend. Clausewitz graduated at the top

of his class in 1803 and was rewarded with the position of military adjutant to the young Prince August. It brought him into close contact with the royal family.

Alarmed by France's devastating victories over Austria and Russia in 1805, Prussia mobilized for war in 1806. Confident in the legacy of Frederick the Great, Captain Clausewitz and most of the other Prussian officers eagerly awaited a fight with France. The planning and implementation of the

Prussian mobilization, however, were deficient, and the nation was psychologically unprepared. The Prussian forces were shattered in humiliating defeats at the battles of Jena and Auerstedt. Two weeks later, covering the retreat of what remained of the Prussian army, Clausewitz and Prince August were captured on the battlefield. In the peace settlement, Prussia lost half of its population and territory and became an occupied French satellite.

When he returned from educational exile in France in 1807 (Scheipers, 2019, pp. 1-25), he energetically joined Scharnhorst and other members of the reformist movement, helping to restructure both Prussian society and the army, preparing for what he felt was an inevitable new battle with the French. His duties included planning a national insurrection against the French occupation, an undertaking that would involve a "people's war" (along the lines of the brutal guerrilla warfare then taking place in Spain) in conjunction with the greatly reduced operations of the Prussian army. His enthusiasm for active resistance to the French was not, however, shared by the king, who was more concerned with maintaining his position in the Prussian state. Major Clausewitz's disillusionment reached a peak when occupied Prussia agreed to provide an army corps to Napoleon to aid him in his invasion of Russia in 1812. Along with about thirty other officers and with the king's reluctant permission, he resigned from Prussian service. He then accepted a role in the Russian army



Carl von Clausewitz



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Clausewitz also participated in many key events of the War of Liberation (1813–1814), but was overburdened with duties that, while important, were not at the centre of the most dramatic events. In a sort of subterfuge, Scharnhorst arranged for him to serve as a Russian liaison officer in the Prussian army.

to continue the resistance against Napoleon. However, before leaving for Russia, together with the Prussian Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, whose military tutor he had become in 1810, he prepared an essay on war. The essay was called *“The Most Important Principles of the Art of War to Complete My Course of Instruction for the Crown Prince”*. It represented Clausewitz’s theoretical development up to that point, but it was only a rather primitive precursor to his later work – *“Vom Kriege”* (*“On War”*). Its subject matter was largely tactical. While some of the work’s most important theoretical concepts were fairly well developed (e.g. *“friction”*), many were embryonic, and others were completely absent. Notably, and in great contrast to the later work, *“The Principles of War”* is not particularly sophisticated from a historical perspective. It is based almost entirely on the experience of Frederick the Great and the early wars with revolutionary France and Napoleon. Unfortunately, it has often been treated as a summary of Clausewitz’s mature theory (Clausewitz, 1984; Paddy, Dennis, 2007).

In the Russian service, Clausewitz was somewhat hampered by his ignorance of the Russian language. However, he spoke French (as well as English), as did many Russian aristocrats and the Russian imperial family, and there were many ethnic Germans in Russia and in the army. He participated in the long Russian retreat, fought in the Battle of Borodino, and witnessed the disastrous French retreat from Moscow, including the catastrophic crossing of the Berezina River. By boldly infiltrating behind French lines, he played a key role in negotiating the Convention of Tauroggen, which led to the desertion of General York von Wartenburg’s Prussian troops from the French army. That risky venture angered the king, but ultimately forced Prussia into the anti-French coalition, leading directly to Napoleon’s defeat and abdication in 1814, and the revival of Prussia itself (Leggiere, vol. I).

Clausewitz also participated in many key events of the War of Liberation (1813-1814) (Leggiere, vol. II), but was overburdened with duties that, while important, were not at the centre of the most dramatic events. In a sort of subterfuge, Scharnhorst arranged for him to serve as a Russian liaison officer in the Prussian army. In reality, he was an influential advisor to General August von Gneisenau, chief of staff to Field Marshal von Blücher (1813-1815)

and one of the main leaders of Prussia's military revival. He often found himself in the thick of battle, as at Lützen/Grossgörschen in 1813, where he led several cavalry charges and was wounded. Scharnhorst died of wounds received in the same battle. However, having done so much to challenge the subjugation of Prussia by France, Clausewitz was now considered by many to be a national hero. Thus, the change of Prussian sides finally led to his reinstatement into the Prussian army as a full colonel in April 1814.

During the 1815 campaign, Clausewitz served as chief of staff of the Prussian 3rd Corps, commanded by General von Thielmann. In 1818, the king promoted Clausewitz to Major General and appointed him the administrative head of the General War College in Berlin. Despite the conservative reaction in Prussia after 1819, during which many of the liberal reforms of the war years were weakened or reversed, he and his wife, Marie, led a very active life among the highest social, intellectual, and political circles in Berlin. Having little to do with actual school instruction, Clausewitz spent his abundant free time writing studies of various campaigns and preparing the theoretical works that eventually became *"Vom Kriege"* (Kirkpatrick, 2015; Schuurman, 2017, pp. 1-23).

General Clausewitz returned to active service in 1830, when he was appointed commander of a group of artillery brigades stationed in East Prussia. When the revolutions in Paris and Poland seemed to portend a new general European war, he was appointed chief of staff to Field Marshal Gneisenau, and the Army of Observation was sent to the Polish border.

Before leaving, he sealed his unfinished manuscripts. He would never open them again. In any case, Clausewitz's intention was clearly never to publish them during his lifetime, his decision being a strategy of intellectual integrity. Clausewitz feared that if he had published while he was still an active general, he would be tempted to conceal the truth, so as not to upset his superiors or to protect his reputation. Writing only for the future, he allowed himself to be frank and critical in his analyses.

Although war was averted, Clausewitz remained in the East, organizing a cordon sanitaire to try to stop the spread of the cholera epidemic in Poland. His friend Gneisenau soon died of the disease,



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and in August 1831 Clausewitz took command of the army. Although a young general, he was outranked in the hierarchy by some of his subordinates; however, none dared to challenge his position or usurp his authority. Once the danger of serious fighting had passed, he was replaced by the inexperienced but politically acceptable Field Marshal Karl Friedrich von dem Knesebeck. Clausewitz returned home to Breslau, but soon after fell ill with cholera and died on 16 November 1831, aged 51.

ANALYTICAL POINTS OF CLAUSEWITZ'S WORK

The most rigorous reconstruction of the work, based on the manuscripts that survived the destruction of 1945, was carried out by the German scholar Werner Hahlweg between the 1950s and 1960s. His editions served as the basis for the 1976 English version, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, mentioned at the beginning of this study.

After the premature death of the Prussian general, his wife, Marie von Clausewitz, together with his brother, undertook the laborious task of ordering and revising the manuscripts that remained unfinished. The result of the editing work was the publication of an impressive collection in ten volumes, which crystallized his theoretical legacy and gave the world the fundamental treatise *“On War”*. The first three of them appeared between 1832 and 1834. In subsequent editions, his ideas sometimes fell prey to the revisionist impulses of his various editors. The most rigorous reconstruction of the work, based on the manuscripts that survived the destruction of 1945, was carried out by the German scholar Werner Hahlweg between the 1950s and 1960s. His editions served as the basis for the 1976 English version, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, mentioned at the beginning of this study. Recently, an older text, probably written around 1817, was rediscovered, which prefigures the first four books of *“Vom Kriege”*. Entitled *“Aphorismen über den Krieg und die Kriegführung”* (*“Aphorisms on War and the Conduct of War”*), this manuscript is remarkable for its brevity and concentrated aphoristic style (Eftimova, 2015, pp. 345-367). Marie von Clausewitz published this text in the form of a serial, simultaneously with the rest of her husband's posthumous writings, but it was immediately eclipsed by the scope of the fundamental treatise. In the Anglo-Saxon space, the pillars of the analysis of Clausewitz's work remain the seminal work *“On War”*, its precursor, *“The Principles of War”*, as well as the two classic campaign studies, recently completed, in the period 2018-2021, by two more critical volumes. The first of these studies was *“The Campaign*

of 1812 in Russia”, translated and published anonymously by a close friend of the Duke of Wellington, in 1843 (Kirchubel, 2024, pp. 106-109). The second work, “The Campaign of 1815 in France”, remained inaccessible to the English-speaking public until 2010, when two separate editions were published. Previously, there had only been an abridged translation, made privately for the Duke of Wellington, who reacted with a memorandum that later became famous and influential in 19th-century Britain. This document (recently integrated, together with an extensive documentary analysis, in one of the 2010 editions) was essential in shaping Clausewitz’s modern reputation. However, the memoir fell into relative oblivion after 1914, being systematically ignored by British historians, who avoided highlighting the decisive contribution of Prussia to the victory at Waterloo (Paret, Moran, 1992; Schuurman, 2017, pp. 1-23; van Beurden, 2015).

The studies of 1812 and 1815 were about the campaigns of the Napoleonic era, in which he himself participated, although this aspect is not sufficiently addressed. They represent different stages in the evolution of Clausewitz’s ideas and reflect a number of elements of his mature theories. The findings of the 1812 study were, for the most part, incorporated into “Vom Kriege”. However, the 1815 study, one of the last (probably completed in 1827), was never incorporated into the larger work.

The work “Der Feldzug von 1796”, dedicated to the campaign in Italy, was completed in 1828, after the study of 1815. Although this campaign is mentioned more frequently than that of Waterloo in “Vom Kriege”, its influence on the fundamental treatise seems equally limited. At the same time, various other fragments of his work were translated in the Anglo-Saxon space, but they had a minor impact on strategic thinking in this area.

The treatise “Vom Kriege” benefited from several translations into English, the most relevant being the versions made by J.J. Graham (1873), O.M. Jolles (1943) and the reference edition by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (1976, revised in 1984). The work is a dense and demanding read, not because of any stylistic deficiency or lack of rigor on the part of the author – his campaign studies are, by contrast, remarkably accessible – but because of the intrinsic complexity



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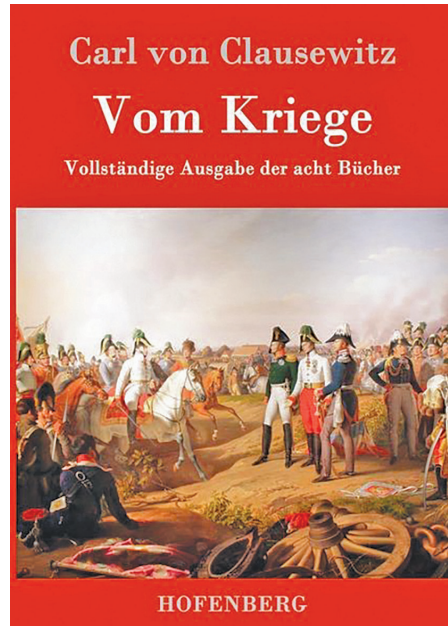
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of the subject and the unfinished nature of the manuscripts. Although it has frequently been published as three separate volumes, the most recent compact English edition runs to about 580 pages, excluding the critical apparatus.

To be fully understood, "Vom Kriege" must be approached as a whole, the informed reader needing to recognize that the various sections reflect distinct stages in Clausewitz's intellectual development. The first book,

the second, and the second half of Book VIII are generally considered the most relevant and finished parts of the work; by contrast, the early segments fail to always resonate with the author's mature concepts. In the abbreviated editions, Books V, VI, and VII are often omitted, on the pretext of their tactical nature, which is considered outdated. This practice, however, generates serious errors of interpretation, since it is in these sections that Clausewitz elaborates the practical implications of his theory. For example, for those who portray him as an "apostle of the offensive", the omission of Book VI, "Defense", is particularly convenient, although it substantiates his controversial thesis that defence is, intrinsically, the strongest form of war.

One of the main sources of confusion about Clausewitz's approach lies in his dialectical method of exposition. For example, Clausewitz's famous quote that "War is only a continuation of politics", although correct in itself, was not intended as a simple factual statement. It is the antithesis of a dialectical argument whose thesis – formulated earlier in the analysis – claims that "war is nothing more than a duel (or hand-to-hand combat, a more faithful translation of the German term "Zweikampf") on a large scale". Its synthesis is represented by the concept of a "fascinating trinity" ("wunderliche Dreifaltigkeit").



This synthesis goes beyond the limits of the two previous statements, demonstrating that war is neither exclusively an act of brute force nor merely a purely rational instrument of politics (Herberg-Rothe, 2022, pp. 1-12; Villacres, Baasford, 1995, pp. 9-19). Rather, it is a dynamic, inherently unstable interplay of the forces of violent emotion, chance, and rational calculation on all sides. Identifying exactly who would benefit from reading *“On War”* and exactly how – are somewhat perplexing questions. Clausewitz’s pragmatic goal was to provide military analysts with a rigorous conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon of war, in the hope of optimizing both the actual conduct of operations and the specialized literature (Clemmensen Hesselholt, 2011, pp. 61-85; Waldman, 2009). He anticipated that such theoretical rigor would refine the judgment of commanders, although he remained convinced that *“military genius”* derives from character, personality, and temperament rather than pure intellect. Perhaps due to his own introspection, he believed that intellectuals are generally less effective military leaders. However, he argued that only a reflective and self-aware mind has the capacity to assimilate the depth of a treatise such as *“On War”* (Hughes, 2020, pp. 773-805).

STRATEGIC LANDMARKS IN CLAUSEWITZ’S WORK

Clausewitz perceived history in relative terms, rejecting absolute categories, standards, and values. The past must be accepted on its own terms. The historian must try to penetrate the mentalities and attitudes of any period studied, the *“spirit of the age”*. History is a dynamic process of change, driven by forces beyond the control and often beyond the comprehension or even detection of any individual or group. This attitude is particularly evident in two key themes in *“Vom Kriege”* that are absent from *“Principles”*. These are the famous assertion that *“War is a continuation of politics with an admixture of other means”* (i.e., organized violence) and the recognition that war can vary in its forms, depending on the changing nature of politics and the society in which it is waged.

A considerable part of *“Vom Kriege”* is devoted to examining the role of war in history, the practical utility of military history



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In order to penetrate the essence of Clausewitz's mature theories, an appropriate starting point lies in examining the most frequent misinterpretations of his argumentation. As a rule, these conceptual errors are the result of approaches by authors who either did not fully read the treatise "On War" (limiting themselves to introductory fragments or simplified versions), or deliberately aimed to distort its theses. In reality, the specific arguments of the work are formulated with remarkable clarity, being rarely difficult to assimilate.

for the active frame, and the inherent difficulties in its reception and writing. Clausewitz's most relevant technical contribution to military historiography is his discourse on *"critical analysis"*. The author rigorously delimited the attributions of the historian from those of the military critic, although he recognized the complementarity of the two roles. He argued that pure historical research is independent of theory or criticism, its purpose being the identification, interpretation, and ordering of *"equivocal"* facts (those data susceptible to multiple interpretations). In contrast, critical analysis involves the identification of causality, while *"criticism"* aims at evaluating actions taken and the *"means used"*, exploring tactical alternatives, and formulating value judgments. In such an assessment, actions must be analysed not only individually (at the tactical, operational, strategic or political level), but also in terms of their interdependence, the theory providing the necessary framework for the process of analysis and judgment (Bassford, 1994, p. 36).

Von Clausewitz's name is associated with a complex series of categories, such as ideal war, real war, *"war to render our adversary militarily or politically powerless"*, limited war, total war and absolute war. Of these six terms, the first three belong exclusively to the mature stage of his thinking. The fourth is a phrase that Clausewitz never used; his emphasis on *"limited objectives"* reflects the conviction that an exhaustive typology of war, which would include all the actors involved, is impossible to achieve. As for the fifth term, *"total war"*, although it is frequently attributed to him, it does not belong to him and is completely absent from the treatise *"Vom Kriege"* (Keegan, 1994). Its origin remains uncertain, but, in its common meaning, the concept is fundamentally antithetical to the Clausewitzian approach. Finally, absolute war marks an early stage of his reflection (being the precursor of the abstraction of *"ideal war"*), and is nevertheless found, with various nuances, in the older sections of the text, especially in the first half of Book VIII (Ib.).

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read the treatise *“On War”* (limiting themselves to introductory fragments or simplified versions), or deliberately aimed to distort its theses. In reality, the specific arguments of the work are formulated with remarkable clarity, being rarely difficult to assimilate. The first of these erroneous interpretations resides in the idea that von Clausewitz considered war a *“science”*. A second misconception, correlated with the first, claims that he viewed war exclusively as a rational instrument of state policy. If the first assertion is fundamentally erroneous, the second represents only one facet of a much more complex issue. In Clausewitz’s view, war, unlike strategy or tactics, belongs neither to the realm of art nor to that of science. These two terms often define the parameters of theoretical debate, and its most vehement critics (such as Jomini, Liddell Hart, or Fuller, at first) tended to treat the military phenomenon as an exact science. As Clausewitz argued, the goal of science is knowledge and certainty, while the finality of art is the creative capacity. Of course, any form of art integrates scientific elements (such as the mathematical foundations of harmony), and any rigorous scientific approach inherently involves creativity (Brands, 2023; Hew, 2022, pp. 143-160).

Clausewitz perceived tactics as having an essentially scientific nature, while strategy was assimilated to an art form; however, he emphasized that the conscious and purely rational exercise of *“military strategy”* – a favourite concept among theorists and historians – is a relatively rare phenomenon in objective reality. The author expressed his belief that, in the context of armed conflict, ideas are usually so easy and obvious that their mere application can rarely be invoked as indisputable proof of a commander’s talent or genius: *“It has become our general belief that ideas in war are generally so simple and lie so close to the surface that the merit of their invention can rarely prove the talent of the commander who adopts them”*. (Daase, Davis, 2015).

Most real events are determined by forces such as chance, emotion, bureaucratic inertia, and intra-organizational political dynamics, and many *“strategic”* decisions are made unconsciously, often long before hostilities break out. If he had been forced to choose, Clausewitz would have positioned war closer to the realm of the arts; however, no terminological classification seemed entirely satisfactory to him (Bruce, Dickie, Kiley, Pavkovic, Schneid, 2008).



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War, on the other hand, is a form of social interaction. The Prussian theorist occasionally compared it to commercial activities or legal disputes, but most frequently associated it with the sphere of politics. This distinction is fundamental: unlike art or science, where the subject acts on inanimate matter, in business, politics, and war, the will is exerted on an animate object.

War, on the other hand, is a form of social interaction. The Prussian theorist occasionally compared it to commercial activities or legal disputes, but most frequently associated it with the sphere of politics. This distinction is fundamental: unlike art or science, where the subject acts on inanimate matter, in business, politics, and war, the will is exerted on an animate object. It does not merely react, but manifests independent actions, transforming war into a phenomenon governed by “*intelligent forces*”. Although defined as “*an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will*”, war is never unilateral, but represents a confrontation between autonomous wills. In this contest, mastery and creativity are competed for by factors such as personality, chance, emotion, and the dynamism specific to any human interaction, including the manifestation of brute force (Hughes, pp. 287-296; Garard, 2022, pp. 92-109).

When Clausewitz wrote that war may have its own grammar, but not its own logic, he meant that the logic of war, like politics, is the logic of social relations, not that of art or science. The first pages of “*Vom Kriege*” have created a dialectical model of the “*ideal war*” war, which many readers find confusing, but ultimately this knowledge is quite necessary. Ideal war, the intellectual descendant of his earlier term “*absolute war*” (which appears in an earlier part of the book, exclusively in the first half of Book VIII), is an exploration of Clausewitz’s original thesis that “*war is nothing but a combat match on a larger scale*”. Ideal war is a philosophical abstraction, a “*logical fantasy*” impossible to translate into reality. It represents war in its “*pure*” form, a manifestation of extreme violence, unfettered by the intervention of reason or the frictional effects generated by time, space, and human nature. In such a theoretical model, conflict would be triggered without a specific political motive, through a maximum and simultaneous effort of both sides, in perfect symmetrical opposition. Its ultimate objective is the total overthrow of the adversary by the complete annihilation of his physical capacities for resistance. After exploring this notion of war as an act of pure force, Clausewitz demonstrates the weaknesses of that not at all unusual notion. While it is true that war is an act of force to compel our enemies to do our will, it is clearly much more than that. Its violence alone cannot explain our actual experience of war (Garard, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

Clausewitz's fundamental goal was to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Unfortunately, his work has often remained trapped in the very gap it sought to bridge, being perceived as too pragmatic for intellectuals, too complex and ambiguous for the political factors, and far too abstract for the military. As a result, many on both sides of this conceptual divide have failed to grasp the depth of the ideas contained in his treatise *"On War"*.

Moreover, this gap reflects a genuine dichotomy between the values and perceptions of scholars and those of the military, marked by mutual suspicions, sometimes well-founded. Whether as an inevitable phenomenon or as a result of remediable deficiencies in their training, practicing soldiers often lack the historiographical depth necessary to internalize Clausewitz's historicist argument, to decipher his dialectical approach, and to discern the pragmatic applicability of his concepts.

The reader's personal experience profoundly conditions the reception of the treatise *"On War"*. Although the claim that readers internalize only those ideas that confirm their own opinions or experiences might seem an exaggeration, it is not far from the truth. The work often functions less as a window onto reality and more as a mirror of the one who reads it, which is probably inevitable. During my military career, the passages on friction, hazard, and moral factors had the strongest impact on me. With each reading, the volume revealed itself differently to me, although the only variable that changed was myself. It is therefore not surprising that survivors of the trench warfare of 1914-1918 found their own experiences in its pages, just as Vietnam veterans tend to see in this text an analysis of the failures of their own conflict. This subjectivity of reception would not have surprised Clausewitz, who constantly insisted that individual experience (or the absence thereof) is essential to any authentic understanding of the phenomenon of war. These conclusions do not justify, in any case, the assertion of many scholars and military personnel that Clausewitz's theories are worthless because of their unlimited flexibility.

Clausewitzian theory represents, like any precision instrument, a valuable resource for theorists, scientists, and practitioners alike.



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The quality of the result obtained, however, depends fundamentally on the rigor and depth of the intellect that uses it. Regardless of how personal biases may influence one's perception of the conflict, the perspective offered by Clausewitz provides superior analytical rigor. The relevance of this theoretical "*lens*" derives not only from its intrinsic value, but also from the fundamental role that Clausewitzian theories, including their misinterpretations, have acquired within the United States of America national security community. Thus, the treatise "*Vom Kriege*" substantiated the most significant "*lessons learned*" from the Vietnam experience, finding its essence in the work of Harry Summers and in the premises of the Weinberger Doctrine, as a direct response to the failure of the Vietnam War. The connection of this doctrine with Clausewitz is especially evident in point 5, which reflects its "*trinity*": the army cannot win a war unless there is a solid connection between the government (objectives), the people (support/passion), and the army (execution). The intervention must have the support of the American people and Congress (Skold, 2014).

The remarkable efficiency of the "*community*" of action through which the US armed forces and related agencies managed the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) and subsequent conflicts is due, to a significant, although difficult to quantify, measure, to the common conceptual foundation generated by the study of Clausewitz's work. It provided the intellectual basis that formal doctrines have constantly sought but have failed to provide because of their inevitably restrictive approaches, often oriented towards a single military service and marked by an excessively prescriptive character.

The value of this common ground lies precisely in the flexibility of Clausewitzian theory, a feature that many find frustrating: it provides a unified set of concepts and intellectual tools that facilitate analysis and debate, while leaving conclusions open to creativity and diversity of strategic objectives. However, invoking the authority of Clausewitz's name has also contributed to the crystallization of an increasingly dysfunctional American strategic culture that, at least in my opinion, has come in the post-9/11 era to accept war as a simple way to continue a deficient policy by other means.

Clausewitz's dominance in the American intellectual-military landscape over the past four decades has generated monotony or rejection among many thinkers reluctant to explore its complexity. It has triggered reactions from critics such as Martin van Creveld and John Keegan, ideologues such as Mary Kaldor, and adherents of the "new wars" paradigm, as well as from military personnel disillusioned with unproductive forms of conflict, erroneously labelled "Clausewitzian". However, if Clausewitz's work is ever relegated to the dusty shelves of history, it will likely be because his fundamental ideas have been completely assimilated, rendering his own formulation redundant through total integration.

In conclusion, the work of Carl von Clausewitz remains a fundamental pillar of modern strategic thinking, not by offering universal recipes, but by providing a rigorous conceptual framework for understanding the complexity of war. Although often misinterpreted or reduced to political slogans, the treatise "On War" proves its value precisely through its dialectical flexibility, which allows the adaptation of its principles to contemporary technological and political realities. Whether his ideas will continue to be studied directly or will be fully assimilated into future doctrines, Clausewitz's legacy lies in the recognition that war is, in essence, a social and political phenomenon, dominated by chance, friction and the interaction of human wills. Thus, the survival of his theory depends not on literary rigor, but on its capacity to remain an indispensable "lens" for any critical mind trying to decipher the unchanging nature of armed conflict and the lessons more or less learned.

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