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Considering Clausewitz Across Contexts

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CONSIDERING CLAUSEWITZ ACROSS CONTEXTS

By Laura Salter

One of the greatest phenomena of human history is man's penchant for destruction: namely, by waging war. Mankind's ability to organize and execute combat has developed drastically over the centuries, with philosophies of its purpose, justice, and motivations flourishing alongside. Few military theories have achieved the longevity and diverse applicability of that of Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz (see Figure 2). His magnum opus *On War* (originally *Vom Kriege*) was published posthumously in 1832. Since then, it has been studied and re-studied, analyzed and reviewed, praised and criticized, and used as a key text by scholars and soldiers alike. What explains the continuous relevance of Clausewitz's theory, despite changing contexts and technology? Clausewitz's addition to the philosophical discussion was uniquely suited to apply to a host of cases, across diverse cultures and vastly different streams of political thought. His intention and his methods aimed for accuracy and applicability. First, he achieved this by defining war as a tool of politics fundamentally composed of political reason, the hatred or will of the people, and chance. These ideas in addition to his methodology and approach to the subject, and his description of the nature of war and of man's reactions therein, has allowed Clausewitz's theory to influence a tremendously diverse spectrum of readers and remain a uniquely flexible and applicable treatise on war.

Writing in the shadow of the Napoleonic Wars, Clausewitz brought to his treatise the expertise of having been a soldier, and the worldview of having seen a massive war restructure the political landscape of Europe. He built his theories largely on his observations of the years in and around Napoleon's reign. The French Revolution of 1789 was the beginning of the end of the monarchy, preceding decades of violence in the continent. In the 1790s, a young Napoleon Bonaparte witnessed his country descend from revolution into anarchy and terror.¹ Struggling to self-identify either as a republic or a monarchy, France's tumult bred factions and resulted in a vacuum of structure in politics and the military. In 1799, Napoleon became First Consul.

By 1804, he had declared himself emperor, and was ready to wage a ferocious war to expand his empire over the continent. He reorganized the French army and pioneered the permanent corps structure—already altering the

¹ Robert Asprey, *The Rise of Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 45.

way modern war would be conducted and demonstrating his strategic brilliance.² Napoleon's triumphs during the years that followed were unprecedented, until the scope of his armies and his battles grew so large that strategic errors became inevitable.³ Finally, his downfall began with the Peninsular War of 1808-1813, when Spanish nationalistic sentiment, with British support, fueled a fight against Napoleon's appointment of his brother as king of Spain.⁴ In 1812, Napoleon faced a war on another front with his infamous invasion and disastrous retreat from Russia. 1814 brought the end of French *gloire* as Russian and British troops invaded France with the help of a renewed ally: Prussia, home of Carl von Clausewitz.

Clausewitz bore witness to the political and militaristic events occurring across the continent, a context whose role was paramount as it provided allusions and references found in his theory. King Frederick's Prussia joined the war against France in 1806, but suffered significant defeats in the Battles of Jena and Auerstadt on October 14. A passionately distraught article published in 1813 described the shocking wreckage and torrential bloodshed that ensued when the formidable Prussian forces met the "modern tactics of France."⁵ The loss shattered Prussian spirits. What followed was a period of demoralization and subordination that bolstered a new trend of nationalist sentiment.⁶

Young Prussians, like Clausewitz, were driven by patriotism and resentment to pursue military reform and eventually repel the French invaders. Clausewitz was born in 1780 and had entered the Prussian Army a mere 12 years later, in 1792. From 1801-1803, he studied at the Military School at Berlin, where he became acquainted with men who greatly influenced the Prussian military, as well as Clausewitz's own life and works, like General Gerhard von Scharnhorst, who became one of Clausewitz's major mentors.⁷ Over the course of his life, Clausewitz experienced the breadth of military service. He served as aide-de-camp to Prince Augustus of Prussia; was wounded, taken prisoner, and kept in France; and he assisted with the reformation of the Prussian Army in the period following its defeat. The

² Gregory Fremont-Barnes and Todd Fisher, *The Napoleonic Wars: The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (Botley, Oxford: Osprey Publishing Limited, 2004), 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴ *Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia* (2016): s.v. "Napoleonic Wars."

⁵ "Destructive Effects of the War," *Jamaica Magazine* 3, no. 2 (February 1813): 95.

⁶ Fremont-Barnes and Fisher, 253-256.

⁷ *Dictionary of World Biography*, Vol. 5, s.v. "Carl von Clausewitz."

modernization of the army imitated the effective methodology of the French *Grande Armée*—it was reorganized, no longer based on nobility or seniority, and featured modernized tactics for warfare.⁸ Later, Clausewitz became the military instructor to Prussian Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, which gave him the opportunity to pen his emergent military theories in his essay *Principles of War*.⁹ In 1812, Clausewitz left to fight alongside the Russians. At this point, Prussia had been under French occupation for five long years. It was under these circumstances that Clausewitz assisted in the negotiations of the pivotal convention of Tauroggen in 1812, wherein General Ludwig York set the stage for an alliance with Russia and other nations that opposed Napoleon, abandoning Prussia's French alliance.¹⁰ Clausewitz remained in the Russian service until 1814. The following year, the fateful Battle of Waterloo brought the Napoleonic Wars to a close. Napoleon abdicated his throne and was exiled. The wars were over, but their impact resounded.

Clearly, the time period was critical to the development of Clausewitz's thought. Most of his life was devoted to and surrounded by warfare. A military man since the age of 12, his brilliant and studious mind was saturated with strategy. Clausewitz began to climb in the ranks to become Chief of Staff of several corps over the years, and was named Director of the Military School at Berlin in 1818.¹¹ His experience in the field provided practical examples of how states behave and pursue power, giving his studies a historical foundation rooted in practical experience. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars were so pivotal to military development and European political society that emerging theories of war had to compete with one another while keeping up with the changing nature of politics and warfare.¹² Clausewitz began writing his observations and ideas into eight books to address this lack of a consistent understanding.

Crucial to a discussion of the historical and personal influences on Clausewitz's work is mention of his most significant relationship, his intellectual stimulant: his wife, Marie von Clausewitz. A well-educated woman for her time, Marie was a close observer of the Napoleonic Wars and

⁸ Fremont-Barnes and Fisher, 263.

⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *Principles of War*, trans./ed. by Hans Wilhelm Gatzke, Vol. 82 (Harrisburg: PA: Military Service Publishing Company, 1942), accessed October 9, 2016.

¹⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *The Campaign of 1812 in Russia*, trans. by Francis Egerton (London: John Murray, 1843), accessed 06 November 2016.

¹¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, translator's note, 12-13.

¹² "Destructive Effects of the War," 97.

outspokenly political.¹³ Through years of correspondence followed by a loving marriage, Marie was privy to the formation of her husband's celebrated theory



Marie von Clausewitz

of war. In her preface to *On War*, she wrote that as they shared everything in their marriage, he “could not be occupied on a work of this kind without its being known to [her].”¹⁴ In 1831, after over a decade of collecting his thoughts and writing his seminal work, Carl von Clausewitz died of cholera. It fell to his late wife to edit his transcripts and publish *On War* posthumously. This is noteworthy because the author, himself, only had the opportunity to completely edit one book of his volume, and the rest were revised and assembled by editors and his wife. Some scholars suggest that this is causal of contradictions and misinterpretations of the text, but Clausewitz's notes,

correspondences, and completed sections of his work present a generally consistent theory of war.¹⁵

In his preface to *On War*, Clausewitz defined his terms, stating that there are two possible objects of war: the overthrow of the enemy or territorial conquest, both of which can manifest themselves in a variety of sub-goals. He then introduced the cornerstone of his treatise. War, he wrote, is a “continuation of politics by other means.”¹⁶ This phrase became one of Clausewitz's most celebrated ideas, and is key to the continued prevalence of his work in political spheres.

War is not an end to itself; it is a tool employed within the greater political context to achieve a specific purpose. Clausewitz made this point intentionally, well aware of its influence on his theory's applicability. If war is a political choice, the manifestation of each war will “differ in character according to the nature of the motives and circumstances from which [it] proceeds.”¹⁷

Interpretations of Clausewitz's point have varied. A popular usage is to say that

¹³ Vanya Eftimova Bellinger, “The Other Clausewitz: Findings from the Newly Discovered Correspondence between Marie and Carl von Clausewitz,” *Journal of Military History* 79, no. 2 (April 2015): 348.

¹⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 6.

¹⁵ Bellinger, 365-366.

¹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25

if war is a type of policy, then military matters should be subordinate to the government and the people.¹⁸ Clausewitz's description does support this idea; since war is created in pursuit of a political aim, it must remain directly in rational proportion to its goal. If expenditures surpass the worth of the object, then the war must be terminated.¹⁹ War as an extension of policy became *On War*'s signature idea, and indeed was an influential concept in the understanding of why states go to war. However, there is a risk in reducing Clausewitz's work to this sole axiom.

A second, uniquely flexible point that Clausewitz makes is the "trinity" of war. War, he says, is fundamentally based on hatred and animosity, chance, and policy or reason.²⁰ Connected to these three objects are three principle characters: the people, the Army, and the Government. The three elements of the trinity are not necessarily equal in magnitude, nor are they in a fixed ratio—therein lies the unique flexibility afforded by this principle. Over the centuries when faced with different case studies, the dominance of a particular sphere of the trinity could change. A graphical analysis by Janeen Klinger published in *Parameters* depicted the fluctuation in proportions of the trinity from the 18th to the 20th century. Klinger demonstrated that in the latter era, hatred and enmity grew to be equal in proportion to policy and chance in the makeup of war, which changed the motives and execution of warfare.²¹ This corresponded to Clausewitz's observations of both Prussians and Spaniards, whose resentment toward occupation became a primary force for reform and resistance. Since no particular aspect was the driving factor of Clausewitz's theory, war itself appeared to shapeshift in response to its variant composition. The trinity adds to the widespread relevance of *On War* as it addresses the foundational groups of any conflict in the political and military spheres.

The trinity is an important concept in *On War* because it distinguishes the spirit and morale of the nation as an intangible driving force, separate from tactics and logistics.

Rationally, it follows that Clausewitz included the emotional will of the people as one-third of the substance of war, even though war before Napoleon had relied much more on standing armies and paid soldiers. In Book I, while describing wars of entire communities, Clausewitz wrote that war "of whole

¹⁸ Thomas Waldman, "Politics and War: Clausewitz's Paradoxical Equation," *Parameters* 40, no. 3 (Autumn, 2010): 2.

¹⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

²¹ Janeen Klinger, "The Social Science of Carl von Clausewitz," *Parameters* 36, no. 1 (Spring, 2006): 86.

Nations...always starts from a political condition.”²² Prussia’s military reformation movement was a direct result of nationalist sentiment against the French occupiers and recognition of the need for modernization.²³ Likewise, this transformation of the trinity can be applied to a host of conflicts born out of nationalism or resentment toward occupiers in the following centuries. Consider the Algerian War of Independence. A repressed French colony since 1830, Algeria began its own resistance movement against the French in 1954, led by the National Liberation Front (FLN). Algerians, who did not yet have their own nation-state, engaged in battles, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism against the brutality and torture employed by French troops.²⁴ The core of this conflict was deeply psychological. Terrorist tactics used by the FLN were driven largely by hatred and vengeance, while torture by French paratroopers caused further alienation. In fact, these counter-terrorism efforts helped the Algerian nationalist cause by winning over international opinion and polarizing French public opinion.²⁵

In Clausewitzian terms, both the FLN and the government of France pursued political aims: for the former, political independence, and for the latter, the submission or appeasement of its colony. These political aims made the two sides diametrically opposed—but the brutality and terror of the conflict drew primarily from decades of enmity and resentment borne of mistreatment. All three elements of the Clausewitzian trinity were present, but it was morale and the willingness of the people to commit terror that won the Battle of Algiers. The intentional adaptability of Clausewitz’s trinity allows his theory to be applied to numerous wars and conflicts, and is surely evidence of *On War*’s continued relevance.

While the ideas found in *On War* are deeply significant, equally noteworthy is the methodology used by Clausewitz. *On War* addressed at length the failures of other theorists to create a comprehensive theoretical construction of war, but Clausewitz’s preface rejected the idea that such a theory was impossible.²⁶ Book III Chapter XVII, “On the Character of Modern War” described how war had changed under Napoleon, “since all methods formerly usual were upset by [his] luck and boldness.”²⁷ Previously, war had been

²² Clausewitz, *On War*, 24.

²³ Fremont-Barnes and Fisher, 253-256.

²⁴ Nancy Gallagher, “Learning Lessons from the Algerian War of Independence,” *Middle East Report*, no.225 (2002): 45.

²⁵ Gallagher, 45.

²⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

characterized by long periods of standstill—what Clausewitz refers to as the “suspension of the act of war,” an inevitable pause in hostilities while the armies rested in defense.²⁸ In fact, Clausewitz said that most earlier wars spent more time in this “state of equilibrium” than in conflict.²⁹ This was one noticeable change of Napoleon’s wars. As the impassioned *Jamaica Magazine* reported about the particularly heightened violence of the Napoleonic Wars, “no equal time has ever witnessed such horrors, such wholesale butcheries, such wanton devastations, such complicated miseries inflicted by man on man, as the last ten years!”³⁰ Again, the context was a key part of the development of Clausewitz’s theory. His approach to the subject had to be realistic and as comprehensive as possible.

Clausewitz’s approach to the study of war was unique in its fusion of the philosophical with the physical. In Book I of *On War*, Clausewitz created his framework of analysis, emphasizing the importance of both rational and non-rational elements of warfare. Prior to Clausewitz, theories of war were focused on “things belonging to the material world,” merely a “mechanical art” with little regard given to the “energies of the mind and the spirit.”³¹ Clausewitz criticized these attempts to create “positive theories” of war based purely on mathematical principles, tactics, and materials. “They strive after determinate quantities, whilst in War all is undetermined, and the calculation has always to be made with varying quantities.”³² His problem with this method of theory-generation revealed his purpose in writing—not to simply educate on how to win battles, but to understand the foundations, and the nature, of war. This set him apart in his era and beyond.

To Clausewitz, war was to be considered a “game both objectively and subjectively.”³³ The element of chance, as included in the trinity, was inexorably linked to the outcome of war. Clausewitz acknowledges the unpredictability of war and a leader’s imperfect knowledge of the circumstance and of how an enemy will respond. These elements of the nature of war, like its unpredictability, unknown circumstances, and need for military genius, created what Clausewitz termed “friction.”³⁴ Friction was what separated war “on paper” from how war was experienced in reality— “incidents take place upon

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 123.

³⁰ “Destructive Effects of the War,” 92.

³¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 57.

³² *Ibid.*, 59.

³³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

which it was impossible to calculate, their chief origin being chance.”³⁵ These uncontrollable elements were fundamental to Clausewitz’s method of explaining war. He was unsatisfied with competing theories that were built on mathematical rules and absolutes. “Theory must also take into account the human element; it must accord a place to courage, to boldness, even to rashness.”³⁶

One such competing theorist was Antoine-Henri Jomini, a Swiss military theorist contemporaneous with Clausewitz. Jomini published his own treatise, *Traité de grande tactique*, in 1803. Like *On War*, it was influenced greatly by the experience of the Napoleonic Wars, albeit from the opposing side, as well as observations of King Frederick’s Prussian army.³⁷ However, Jomini’s presentation in this work was practical and utilitarian, compared to Clausewitz’s more comprehensive approach. Jomini sought to describe fixed values, physical forces, and certainty, while Clausewitz was determined to include the factors of friction.³⁸ This difference could not have been due to disinterest in material advice on Clausewitz’s part; his preliminary writings for the Prussian Crown Prince actually praised Jomini’s advice on strategy.³⁹ But when the time came to create a viable, transmutable theory of war, Clausewitz rejected the positivist, scientific approach. In fact, Christopher Bassford speculated that *On War*’s criticism of other military theories is aimed at his Swiss counterpart.⁴⁰ Jomini, similarly, did not withhold criticism of Clausewitz’s pretentious style.⁴¹ However, Clausewitz’s death denied him the chance of reading Jomini’s later-published, revised theory. *Summary of the Art of War*, published in 1838, expanded the content of Jomini’s theory of war to include morale, the limits of scientific military theory, and the relationship between politics and war—ideas that were likely borrowed from Clausewitz.⁴² The Prussian’s unique approach to the study of war was quick to influence the continent’s other seminal thinkers.

Another feature of Clausewitz’s methodology was his demonstrated interest in historical examples and observable case studies. In the book’s opening notice, Clausewitz wrote: “Investigation and observation, philosophy and experience,

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 23.

³⁷ Antoine-Henri Jomini, *Traité de grande tactique* (University of Lausanne, 1806), 16.

³⁸ *Dictionary of World Biography*, Vol. 5, s.v. “Carl von Clausewitz.”

³⁹ Clausewitz, *Principles of War*, section 11.

⁴⁰ Christopher Bassford, “Jomini and Clausewitz: their interaction,” *An edited version of a paper presented to the 23rd Meeting of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe at Georgia State University*, vol. 26., 1993, 7.

⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

⁴² Bassford, “Jomini and Clausewitz,” 8.

must neither despise nor exclude one another...the propositions of this book...are supported either by experience or by the conception of War itself as external points, so that they are not without abutments.”⁴³ *On War* was punctuated by references to the Napoleonic Wars used to illustrate greater, more abstract qualities of the nature of war. Spain’s “stubborn resistance” during the Peninsular Wars showed how powerfully effective the “general arming of the people” and insurgent groups could be, while Prussia proved adding militia to the army to be a significant force multiplier.⁴⁴ Both concrete, historical examples showed Clausewitz’s greater point. The “heart and sentiments of a Nation” were deeply significant to its political and military strength—and this would, inevitably, change how War was fought and organized.⁴⁵ His purpose in writing *On War*, though, did not lead him to describe specific campaigns or tactics in detail; each example that he provided was an illustration of important aspects of war and their corresponding human reactions.⁴⁶ Clausewitz acknowledged that although war was being waged in new, unprecedented ways, he could observe and draw general principles from historical experience. Similarly, the modern reader knows that despite further changes since *On War*’s beginnings, an understanding of the past and its lessons can benefit understanding of the present.⁴⁷

An additional key aspect of *On War*’s methodology was Clausewitz’s use of a dialectic model, which alternated between discussion of total war and limited war. “Total war” referred to a theoretical construct in which war was fought to bend the adversary’s will; it was the abstraction, or the idealized essence, of war.⁴⁸ A mathematical consideration of this concept showed that each side of a conflict would increase its use of force in proportion to its enemy’s resistance, and in this pure world, the mutual enhancement would never have reason to stop until the enemy was destroyed.⁴⁹ Limited war, by contrast, was war’s concrete manifestation, within the natural boundaries and “friction” of reality. Real war would not come to the utmost extreme of violence. The inherent assumption was that only the second form could exist, because of the

⁴³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 11.

⁴⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 121.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

⁴⁶ Peter Paret, “*On War* Then and Now,” *Journal of Military History* 80, no. 2 (April 2016): 483.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 484.

⁴⁸ Peter R. Moody, “Clausewitz and the Fading Dialectic of War,” *World Politics* 31, no. 3 (1979): 422.

⁴⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 16.

disorder of reality and the importance of chance.

However, it is now argued that nuclear technology has brought the abstraction of total war into potential, physical existence.⁵⁰ Nuclear weaponry has, undeniably, changed the dialogue that accompanies modern warfare. Senator J. William Fulbright, a critic of Clausewitz, made the claim that nuclear weapons make the inevitable ends of war completely disproportionate to any political aims, rendering Clausewitz's doctrine "totally obsolete."⁵¹ The mentality toward war was altered fundamentally as the world came to understand nuclear weaponry; the capacity for destruction was immeasurably heightened. But does this change the applicability of Clausewitz's theory? Clausewitz would not have foreseen the advent of total war in the real world. However, by anyone's estimation, it is irrational to fight a nuclear war due to Mutually Assured Destruction.

As Clausewitz pointed out, military action will "in general diminish as the political object diminishes."⁵² In other words, political motivation and morale must be incredibly high in order for reason and rationale to permit total war to occur. It is worth returning to the original cornerstone of Clausewitz's theory here: war is a *continuation* of politics by other means. His point has not been lost; instead, the political means have had to be adjusted. The Cold War era witnessed nuclear superpowers engaging in proxy wars, indirectly pursuing political ideology, and engaging in nuclear brinkmanship. Clausewitz was aware that warfare could change, and he built that awareness into his theoretical framework. As he wrote, "the tendency to destroy the adversary which lies at the bottom of the conception of War is in no way changed or modified through the progress of civilisation."⁵³ Political reason, chance, and the morale of the people are still key determinants of warfare, even if the components of Clausewitz's dialectical method have been transformed into a physical reality that the theorist did not foresee.

In fact, the dialectical model's description of total war has been the subject of significant debate within political thought over the years. Undoubtedly, one of the most notorious admirers of Clausewitz was Adolf Hitler. Nazi Germany was developed at the hands of German National Socialists who revered Clausewitz as an exemplary nationalist and soldier.⁵⁴ Germans

⁵⁰ Moody, 418.

⁵¹ Moody, 418.

⁵² Clausewitz, *On War*, 19.

⁵³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 15.

⁵⁴ P.M. Baldwin, "Clausewitz in Nazi Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16, no. 1 (1981): 10.

celebrated the Prussian military from 1805-1813 as a movement that paralleled the Nazi movement of the time.⁵⁵ Hitler himself quoted Clausewitz on numerous occasions, both aloud and in his writings, always in defense of Nazism's embrace of total war.⁵⁶ Clausewitz wrote that adding any principle of moderation to the practice of war was irrational, since absolute war occurs at the peak escalation of violence between actors.⁵⁷ With the dialectic model in view, it was understood that this ideal form of war existed only in abstraction, and he did not intend this model to advocate absolute brutality. Nevertheless, Hitler found the justification and inspiration that he sought. Hitler quoted Clausewitz to reprimand his more moderate generals. He was keenly aware of the use of war as an extension of politics, stating as early as 1931 that "anyone familiar with the thinking of Clausewitz and Schlieffen knows that military strategy can also be used in the political battle."⁵⁸ His was an uncompromising, absolute battle with existential political aims. The complete destruction of the enemy was the only possible outcome, and so politics became an extension of war.⁵⁹ An unfair criticism of Clausewitz blames his work for the horror of the World Wars, but understanding his dialectical model and abstraction reveals that the guilt of misusing a theory lies in the hands of the reader, not the author.

Clausewitz influenced a number of other influential leaders and theorists. He is strongly associated with Marxist-Leninist military thought. Lenin, struggling to understand the beginnings of World War I, first read *On War* in 1915, recorded his observations, and applied Clausewitz's thought to political socialism.⁶⁰ Clausewitz was instrumental in the transformation of Lenin's own philosophy on foreign policy and imperialist war. Lenin's essay "The Principles of Socialism and the War, 1914-1915" connected Marxist ideas of class struggle to Clausewitz's description of war as political means.⁶¹ In 1917, it was easy, then, to categorize the Russian Revolution as a war that could bring the Marxist faction to power through the class struggle. Eventually, the Marxist-Leninist movement used *On War's* terminology to describe the war between the

⁵⁵ Adolf Hitler, "Proclamation read by Gauleiter Adolf Wagner" (speech, Nurnberg, September 6, 1938),

Collection of Speeches 1922-1945.

⁵⁶ Baldwin, 10.

⁵⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 15.

⁵⁸ Baldwin, 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁰ Jacob W. Kip, "Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1915-1921," in *Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev, 1915-1991*, ed. William C. Frank and Philip S. Gillette (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992), 68.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

“proletarian state” and the capitalist, “bourgeois world,” calling for the militarization of Marxism.⁶² Lenin was impressed by Clausewitz’s practical information regarding defensive and offensive tactics, but he was especially interested in the discussion of the nature of war and its function in history. His own communist ideology merged with Clausewitz’s philosophy and created a hybrid ideology in response to World War I: war was a continuation of politics by violent means, therefore that war was a violent defense of capitalist states’ interests.⁶³

Clausewitz’s theories have been found in Anglo-American military thought as well, although not as a constantly acknowledged presence.⁶⁴ Christopher Bassford points out that enthusiasm for Clausewitz was elevated in the United States following the disastrous Vietnam War, parallel to the rise in popularity in England after the South African War.⁶⁵ He attributes this occurrence to the Clausewitz’s description of war as politics, subject to the government and enacted by the army and people. The trinity’s shared responsibility in this respect can reduce the weight of responsibility felt by the military, since the war was not its own prerogative, but a form of government policy. Clausewitz was mentioned periodically in American military literature, in such publications as *The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, which discussed the implications of Clausewitz’s description of strategy versus tactics and the role of the trinity in matters of war.⁶⁶ His contribution to military thought affected both the philosophy and strategy taught in modern American military academies. Even President Eisenhower is reported to have named *On War* as the most influential military book that he had read, having read it three times.⁶⁷

Technological advancements have changed who is capable of widespread destruction and how quickly it can occur, but the essential nature of conflict remains as Clausewitz broadly stated in the trinity and in his link between politics and war. However, Clausewitz wrote with the expectation that

⁶² Ibid., 77.

⁶³ Azar Gat, “Clausewitz and the Marxists: Yet Another Look,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 2 (1992): 371.

⁶⁴ Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America 1815- 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.

⁶⁵ Bassford, *Clausewitz in English*, 203.

⁶⁶ J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., “Volume I: Theory of War and Strategy,” in *The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, 4th ed. (2010): 4-9.

⁶⁷ Carlo D’Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier’s Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002; reprint, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 168.

war would occur between nation-states, as history had demonstrated to that point. In the modern era, scholars termed as “New War theorists” have rejected Clausewitz based on this fact, in view of the rise of non-state actors and ethnic disputes.⁶⁸ However, the principles that Clausewitz laid out can feasibly be extrapolated to these modern phenomena. State-sponsored terrorism, for example, occurs when a foreign power funds or supports a terrorist organization to gain power in the region.⁶⁹ It is surely an extension of politics, as it is a strategic use of force to accomplish a certain political end. A clear case study of this concept is the Iranian-backed political-terrorist organization, Hezbollah. Hezbollah has been integrated into the Lebanese government as a political party that provides social services and infrastructure, as well as support for the families of suicide martyrs. Within Lebanon, Hezbollah is largely considered to be legitimate—possibly even more influential than the state or a regular political party.⁷⁰ However, the organization retains its own independent arms capability that it has used frequently throughout history to achieve its political goals, particularly in attacks on Israeli civilians and military.⁷¹ Despite its being a non-state actor, Hezbollah has organized military units, tactics studiously developed in correlation to Israel’s strengths, the support and passion of its nation, and rationally-determined policies. State-sponsored terrorism employs the three principles of the Clausewitzian trinity; in fact, it has been postulated that terrorism is a war-substitute that increases the proportion of hatred and enmity with respect to chance and political reason.⁷² Although terrorism is an indirect and asymmetric form of violence, defined differently than “war,” relevant comparisons can still be drawn. Clausewitz’s point that war is inseparable from politics remains as true as ever, and these new forms of warfare are challenging because of the modern-day complexity of political contexts.⁷³ But to deny *On War*’s adaptability is to ignore Clausewitz’s own prescient acknowledgment that war does change forms. “War is, therefore, not only chameleon-like in character, because it changes its colour in some degree in each particular case, but it is

⁶⁸ Bart Schuurman, “Clausewitz and the ‘New Wars’ Scholars,” *Parameters* 4-, no. 1 (Spring, 2010): 90.

⁶⁹ Brad Roberts, “Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Has the Taboo Been Broken?,” *Politics and the Life Sciences* 15, no. 2 (1996): 216.

⁷⁰ Julie C. Herrick, “Nonstate Actors: A Comparative Analysis of Change and Development within Hamas and Hezbollah,” *The Changing Middle East: A New Look at Regional Dynamics*, edited by Korany Baghat, American University in Cairo Press, 2011: 183.

⁷¹ Herrick, 187.

⁷² Klinger, 87.

⁷³ Waldman, 12.

also, as a whole, in relation to the predominant tendencies which are in it...”⁷⁴ According to Clausewitz, the form of war, itself, can change in relation to whichever third of the trinity is predominant. Violence, chance, and political ends are not foregone in the modern forms of war. They are present in the actions of non-state actors and terrorist organizations.

Altogether, *On War*’s content and methods aimed to describe the nature of war in reality. As already mentioned, this entailed some description of the strategy and purpose of entering a war, as well as the intangible elements of friction and moral forces. Clausewitz listed four elements that composed the “atmosphere” of war: danger, physical effort, uncertainty, and chance.⁷⁵ The existence of these conditions demanded a degree of courage and passion from the soldiers—and in times of difficulty, good leadership in the commander. Clausewitz did not pretend that war was a predictable game that could be perfectly played, or that armies operated as smoothly as machines. Like a man trying to walk in water, movement in war was always met with resistance—so the best war theorist, and the synthesis of Clausewitz’s dialectic model, was someone who had experienced the reality of war but could also draw generalizations about it.⁷⁶ War could best be theorized by a soldier-scholar who recognized that it was a social activity, subject to human emotion and dependent on both physical and moral forces.⁷⁷ *On War* does include technical details and information about strategy and tactics, but the overall themes of the work are illustrations of the nature of war and its human participants. All of these factors combined, from *On War*’s content, applications, and methods, culminated in a political philosophy of war whose relevance spanned generations. As author Antulio Echevarria II wrote, “Our understanding of war’s nature, or whether we believe it has one, influences how we approach the conduct of war—how we develop military strategy, doctrine and concepts, and train and equip combat forces.”⁷⁸ Clausewitz created a theoretical foundation, not to recommend specific strategy and tactics to the limited context of the 19th century, but to better comprehend the complex nature of war itself. Aware that his death could interrupt the revision of his theory, he acknowledged that his work might be “open to endless misconceptions” that would “give rise to a number of crude criticisms”, but despite its imperfection, he hoped that the impartial, truth-

⁷⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 26.

⁷⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 38.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

⁷⁸ Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), Part II Chapter 3.

seeking reader would find “leading ideas which may bring about a revolution in the theory of War.”⁷⁹

Carl von Clausewitz’s life experiences granted him a distinct degree of expertise in the conduct and nature of war. The Napoleonic Wars provided fertile ground for the study of this violent streak in humanity that countless scholars and leaders have attempted to understand and better use. *On War* had short-term influence on other generals, military men, and theorists like Jomini following its publication. It had long-term effects on numerous world leaders and students of statecraft, in spite of the changing times. Clausewitz presented war as an extension of politics composed of a trinity of forces, used methodology which remains applicable, and wrote with the purpose of elucidating not only the strategic manner of warfare, but its very nature—and in doing so, he created a uniquely flexible understanding of the art of war. As the more recent historical examples have demonstrated, *On War*’s description of the nature of war and its components is linked to politics and to human nature. Its application, though misused by some and criticized by others, has nonetheless left an indelible mark on the understanding of war’s place in statecraft and political thought.

⁷⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 9.