CLAUSEWITZ AND HIS TREATISE ON WAR AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE 21ST CENTURY

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**Clausewitz and His Treatise On War and Its Relevance to the 21st Century**
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**I.  Introduction**

The American strategic thinker Bernard Brodie has made a bold statement about Karl von Clausewitz’s study *On War*.  “It is not simply the greatest, but the only great book about war.”[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn1%22%20%5Co%20%22) It is difficult to disagree with this statement.

Anyone trying to put together a collection of texts on military theory comparable to anthologies on social, political, or economic thought will find it hard to match Clausewitz.

We can’t ignore, of course, the study by Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, written in the 4th century B.C.  There are also several chapters written by Jomini, some scattered passages among the works of Liddell A Hart and JFC Fuller, and many insights to be excavated from the writing of Marks, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.  Not to forget – there is also the wisdom we can discover with earlier writers, like Thucydides and Machiavelli.  Nonetheless, there is no systematic study comparable to that of Clausewitz.

Clausewitz expressed a modest hope that his book would not be forgotten after two or three years and that it “might be picked up more than once by those who are interested in the subject.”[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn2%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**Reading Clausewitz after almost two centuries – is it worth it?**

Among books we pick to read, we put many of them aside unfinished.  Among the books we skip are usually the classics, especially those which are not purely literary because we tend to assume, *first*, that however great they were in their own times they are not pertinent to ours, and, second, that whatever wisdom they do contain that is relevant to our times has, no doubt, been absorbed and exploited by later writers.

Coming down to our own era, Clausewitz is probably as pertinent to our times as most of the literature specifically written about nuclear war.  These latter miss the depth and scope which are particularly the hallmark of Clausewitz.  We miss especially his tough-minded pursuit of the idea that war in all its phases must be rationally guided by a meaningful political purpose.

That insight on the political object is quite lost in most contemporary books, to include the one written by Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*.  His argument of US survival was based on technical premises rather than on political assessment and evaluation.

The great work of Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), is acknowledged to be the fountainhead of modern economics, marking a break with the mercantilist tradition.  This great work has had mighty successors in the two centuries since its publication.  All of Smith’s contribution was fully absorbed and developed by later writers.  Clausewitz, though he easily compares in talent and innovation with Adam Smith, has had no comparable brilliant successors.

Why isn’t Clausewitz’s *On War* as well known as Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*?  The reason is that soldiers are rarely scholars, and civilians are rarely students of war theory or strategy.  Most scholars agree that Clausewitz’s genius is indisputable and he is unique in his field.

**II. The Person**

The active career of Karl von Clausewitz exactly spanned the course of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (1792-1815).  He was born in 1780, the son of a lieutenant in the Prussian Army.  At the age of twelve he obtained a commission in the 34th Infantry Regiment.  His father had been bourgeois and academic and had been commissioned by Fredric the Great during the crisis of the Seven Years Wars.

Clausewitz passed his life as a member of the Prussian Officer’s Corps, which gave him the opportunity to gain entry into the entourage of the royal family (the Hohenzollerns).

He was an autodidact; he devoured literature on any available topic, not only military affairs, but philosophy, politics, art and education.  He was a compulsive writer on all these matters, from the age of 20 until his death in 1831.[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn3%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Clausewitz was no desk soldier.  He had his baptism of fire at the age of thirteen, when the Prussian army was positioned on the left of the forces of the First Coalition containing and driving back the armies of the First French Republic; he was campaigning first on the Rhine, then in the Vosges.  During the five years after the Vosges campaign, Clausewitz made good use of the excellent library of Fredric the Great’s brother, Prince Henry, which was opened to the officers of his regiment.

In 1801 he was transferred to Berlin to attend the newly opened War College under the direction of Gerd van Scharnhorst. It was now at the age of 19 that his career really began.

Scharnhorst is revered as one of the giants in the creation of Germany – a distinguished thinker and a statesman as he was a soldier.[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn4%22%20%5Co%20%22)

To learn how to defeat the French, it was not enough just to study their military techniques.  One had to consider the political context as well and the historical background against which these techniques had emerged.  The syllabus adopted in the War College under Scharnhorst was thus liberal as well as technical, with discussion groups, where no limit was observed in considering the implications of the military revolution of the time.

This was the ideal setting for the young Clausewitz and he quickly attached himself to Scharnhorst as a deeply admiring disciple.  Scharnhorst reciprocated with an equal affection for the brilliant and receptive young officer.  The foundation was laid for a partnership that was to end only with Scharnhorst’s premature death in 1813, and it was to bring Clausewitz into the heart of the group of military reformers.

During the next two years 1803-1805, Clausewitz wrote a lot, developing ideas that were to receive their final form twenty years later when he came to write his treatise –*On War*.[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn5%22%20%5Co%20%22)

In 1806, Clausewitz accompanied Prince August who was given a command to the battle field of Auestadt.  There he participated in his great Napoleonic battle and in the catastrophic retreat that followed, where he and Prince August were cut off and taken as prisoners.

He resigned his commission in the Prussian army and took service with Emperor Alexander I of Russia just as the French and their satellite armies were invading Russia.

When the King of Prussia abandoned Napoleon in 1813, Clausewitz returned to Berlin and rejoined Scharnhorst and again helped him to raise new armies.

After the death of Scharnhorst, Clausewitz joined August von Gneisenau, who was appointed Commander in Chief of the Prussian Army, and became his Chief of Staff.  They were recalled shortly to Berlin for their radical and patriotic thinking.  Clausewitz became director of the War College.  His ideas for reform were rebuffed.  For twelve years he devoted his time on writing studies of the Napoleonic campaigns and drafts for the comprehensive study on war that he projected as early as 1816.[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn6%22%20%5Co%20%22)

In 1830, Clausewitz was posted to the command of a major artillery formation, and then when the simultaneous rising in Paris and in Poland made a new war seem probable, he served as Chief of Staff to his old commander Gneisenau.  He died on November 16, 1831 after catching cholera.  His wife published *On War*a year after his death.[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn7%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**III.  *On War* and the Theory**

The work is divided into eight books:[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn8%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Book One: on the nature of war – the object of war, total and limited wars, genius of  of the commander, characteristics of war and friction, danger of war,the fog of war.

Book Two:deals with the theory of war – the art of war, on the theory of war(definitions), art of war or science of war methods, criticalanalysis, historical examples.

Book Three:on strategy in general – strategy, and its elements, moral factors in war,military virtues of boldness, perseverance, superiority of numbers,surprise, concentration of forces, economy of forces, suspension ofaction.

Book Four: deals with engagement, to include won and lost battles – it is a shift fromstrategy to tactics, but it is obvious that Clausewitz does not sharplyseparate the two.

Book Five: talks about military forces, theatre of operations, order of battle, marches,maintenance and supply, terrain, and lines of communications.

Book Six: focuses on defense.

Book Seven: focuses on the attack.

Book Eight: talks of war plans – absolute and real war, interdependence of various elements, scale of objective, the defeat of the enemy, political aim, limited aim and offensive war, war plan for total defeat.

As can be seen, books One, Two and Eight make up the whole body of theory.

**IV.  Theoretical Framework and Practice**

The first problem Clausewitz had to solve was how to have a theory of war at all.  It was not simple to combat the crude pragmatism to which all soldiers are temperamentally prone – the belief that theorizing is a lot of nonsense and that all military problems which are not purely technical ones can be solved by courage and common sense.  Clausewitz had great sympathy for this thinking, and his writing provided some justification for it.
At that time, the writers on war would have fallen into three categories.

First, a great majority of writers had dealt with purely technical questions of armament, supply, drill, and deployment.  An analogy can be drawn between practical knowledge as compared to the art of generalship and the craft of sword smith as compared to the art of fencing.

The second category of writers rejected all belief in theory and postulated that war was a natural function of man which he performed as well as his aptitude permitted.  There could be no “principles of war” according to this school of thought; everything was a matter of individual genius that could neither be initiated nor analyzed.  The appearance of Fredric or of Napoleon was as unpredictable as that of Shakespeare or that of Mozart.

The third category of writers believed in the possibility of studying war as a science and of laying down immutable principles for its conduct.  Lloyd and his successors tried to extend this kind of scientific approach and they thought, as a result, that Clausewitz’s theory had been grossly misleading.

Clausewitz’s views were different; he accused the others of over-simplification and ignoring the essence of war:

“They aim at fixed values, but in war everything is uncertain and calculations have to be made with variable quantities.  They direct the inquiry exclusively towards physical quantities, whereas all military action is intertwined with psychological forces and effects.  They consider only unilateral action, whereas war consists of a continuous interaction of opposites.”

No theory could be of any value, he maintained, that did not take account of these interconnected elements – the uncertainty of all information, the importance of moral factors, and, lending to both of these, the unpredictable reactions of the adversaries.  The uncertainty arose very largely from the impossibility of gauging enemy intentions and reactions, something very difficult when there were no overmastering political incentives to determine his military decisions.[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn9%22%20%5Co%20%22)

“With uncertainty on one scale, courage and self-confidence must be thrown onto the other to correct the balance.”

If war was the realm of uncertainty and chance, even more was it the realm of suffering, confusion, exhaustion, and fear.  All these factors combined to create the element that Clausewitz termed “friction” – the environment in which all military actions took place.

Friction, said Clausewitz, is that which distinguished real war from war on paper.  Its importance had to be the starting point for any theorist.  A commander in the field could seldom be sure exactly where the enemy was or in what strength, much less what the enemy was likely to do.  Sometimes, the commander did not know the location and condition of his own troops.

**V.  Clausewitz’s Concepts of War and Doctrine**

       Definition:

“War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale.

War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.

To secure that object, we must render the enemy powerless, and that, in theory, is the true aim of warfare.

War is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst.

To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would always lead to logical absurdity.

Two different motives make men fight one another.  Hostile feelings and hostile intentions.  Our definition is based on the latter, since it is the universal element.”[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn10%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**The Three Extremes**

“War is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of force.  This is the first case of interaction and the first extreme.

War is the collision of two living forces; the ultimate aim of waging war must be taken as applying to both sides.  Once again, there is interaction.  So long as I have not overthrown my opponent, I am bound to fear he may overthrow me.  Thus, I am not in control:  he dictates to me as much as I dictate to him.  This is the second case of interaction and it leads to the second extreme.

If you want to overcome your enemy, you must match your effort against his power of resistance, which can be expressed as the product of two inseparable factors:  the means at his disposal and the strength of his will.  The extent of the means...should be measurable.  But the strength of his will is much less easy to determine...   The competition will again result...it must again force you both to extremes.  This is the third case of interaction and the third extreme.”[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn11%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**The Political Object**

The political object now comes to the fore again.  According to Clausewitz, this original motive must become an essential factor in the equation and it will thus determine both the military objectives to be reached and the amount of effort it requires.

Any theory of war was thus a branch of social and political theory and had to be considered in the context of politics, the womb in which war develops.  Clausewitz’s teaching says theory will have fulfilled its main task when it is used to analyze the constituent elements of war, to distinguish precisely what at first sight seems fused, to explain in full the properties of the mean employed and to show their probable effects, to define clearly the nature of the ends in view and to illuminate all phases of warfare in a thorough, critical enquiry.  Theory lights the way, eases the progress, trains the judgment, and helps to avoid pitfalls, but it could never tell a commander exactly what to do.  To Clausewitz, war is merely the continuation of policy by other means.

The political object is the goal; war is the means of reaching it; means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn12%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Clausewitz returned in Book Eight to stress the subordination of the military point of view to the political one.  He says that that political view should wholly cease to count on the outbreak of war is hardly conceivable unless pure hatred made all wars a struggle for life and death.  In fact, as we have said, they are nothing but expressions of policy itself.  Subordinating the political point to the military would be absurd, for it is policy that creates war; policy is the guiding intelligence, and war only the instrument, not vice versa.  The probable character and general shape of any war should mainly be assessed in the light of political factors and conditions.

In short, at the highest level the art of war turns into policy – but a policy conducted by fighting battles rather than by sending diplomatic notes.

**On Military Genius**

For Clausewitz, the quality of the commander was covered in a chapter entitled “On Military Genius.”  For him military genius was not something paranormal or god-given, but simply a very highly developed mental aptitude for a particular occupation.  Military genius, like any other, consisted in a harmonious combination of elements in which one or the other ability may predominate but none may be in conflict with the rest.  These elements included high intelligence and courage, both physical and moral, but there were two qualities derived from these on which Clausewitz laid particular stress.  The first was intuition:  the quality labeled by the French *coup d’oeil* (the capacity to discern through the fog of war what was happening and what needed to be done).  The second requisite was the capacity of once having taken a decision, sticking to it – determination.[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn13%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**Limited and Absolute War**

The distinction which Clausewitz drew between limited and absolute war and which twentieth century political and strategy teachers find so significant did not emerge as a  result of any long or profound thought – he was only twenty-four when he stated that war could be of two kinds.

Clausewitz provided three distinct explanations for this concept:  one historical or sociological, one metaphysical, and one empirical.  Historically, he pointed out all wars were the products of the societies that fought them.  Clausewitz presented the concept of absolute war not as something culturally conditioned but as a platonic ideal to which most wars, in reality, were imperfect approximations.  It was ideal, that is, not in the sense of being good, but in the sense of being logical and in the Aristotle sense natural.  It was an act of force, and there is no logical limit to an act of force.  Empirically, the purpose of war is to try to destroy the enemy:  there is no stopping place of the extreme.  Since war is a reciprocal action it could be limited or absolute based on the will and the object the two sides are fighting for.[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn14%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**Strategy and Center of Gravity**

The original means of strategy is victory – that is, tactical success.  Its ends in the final analysis are those objects which will lead directly to peace.  The application of these means for these ends will also be attended by factors that will influence it to a greater or lesser degree.

It is the use of an engagement for the purpose of the war.  Strategic theory must, therefore, study the engagement in terms of its possible results and of the moral and psychological forces that largely determine its course.

The ideal strategy, he indicated, was to identify the enemy’s center of gravity and then to direct all one’s energy against it, and if the center of gravity proved to be the opposing army, so much the better.

If the enemy is thrown off balance, he must not be given time to recover.  The victor must strike with all his strength and not just against a fraction of the enemy.

The centers of gravity could be the opponent’s army, his capital, or the army of his protector.[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn15%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**The Culminating Point of Victory**

If the superior strength of the attack – which diminishes day by day – leads to peace, the object will have been obtained.  There are strategic attacks which have led directly to peace, but these are the minority.  Most of them lead up to the point where the remaining strength is just enough to maintain a defense and wait for peace.  Beyond that point, the scale turns and the reaction follows with a force that is usually much stronger than that of the original attacker.  This is what we mean by “the culminating point of the attack.”[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn16%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**VI**. **Clausewitz’s Rise Versus Jomini’s Eclipse**

The military world that today burns gun powder at the altar of Clausewitzian doctrine has all but forgotten Antoine Henri Jomini.

It is a strange paradox of military history that while Clausewitz is today’s pre-eminent figure of military theory, it was less than a century and a half ago that the name of Jomini was synonymous with military wisdom.[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn17%22%20%5Co%20%22)  The military writings of Clausewitz, known to even casual readers today, were then virtually unknown except to his devoted wife and a small group of leading military thinkers.  The military may have gained greatly from the military and intellectual deification of Clausewitz, but it has deprived itself of more than a little knowledge by permitting the writings of Jomini to fall into discard and obsolescence.

The Napoleonic era produced the subject matter as well as the stimulation of military thought that resulted in an increase in military literature.  Foremost among the new school of military authors emerging from the Napoleonic era were Jomini (1779-1869) and Clausewitz (1780-1831).  These contemporaries, the Swiss and the Prussian, each present a selection of the most amazing studies of human nature in modern military history, replete with striking similarities and violent contrasts.  Both were career soldiers; both possessed analytical and penetrating intellects. Each had disappointments in his quest for high rank and military fame; Jomini failed to come even close to independent command or a marshal’s baton in the Imperial Army, and Clausewitz failed to achieve independent high command.  Both spent the bulk of their military years in the staff.  Each progressed from minor staff assignments to positions as chiefs of staff of an army corps – Jomini serving as chief of staff to Marshal Ney and Clausewitz performing the same duties in the Prussian Army Corps.[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn18%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Strangely, both were forced by circumstances to change their allegiances and serve in a foreign army.  Jomini left the “Grande Armee” to rid himself of Berthier (The Chief of Staff of Napoleon); Clausewitz left the Prussian army rather than be bound by terms of the peace treaty between Fredric William III and Napoleon.  Even more startling is the coincidence that, upon renouncing his original loyalty, each joined the Russian army, Jomini accepting service under the Czar in 1813 and Clausewitz going to the Imperial Russian forces that same year.

Both fought the battles of the Napoleonic era, and both were, from the military and intellectual standpoints, products of that time.  It is with good reason that both Clausewitz and Jomini are known to the readers of military doctrine as interpreters of Napoleon.[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn19%22%20%5Co%20%22)

It is only reasonable to expect that these great intellects developing their ideas in the environment of the Napoleonic wars would produce theories of similar nature.  This logical expectation would not be altogether erroneous.  Careful comparison of their two greatest works – Jomini’s *Summary of the Art of War* (1838) and Clausewitz’s *On Wa*r (1831) – disclose much common basic military teachings.  Many of the concepts laid down by Clausewitz find their counterparts in the work of Jomini.

The fundamental difference between Clausewitz and Jomini is that the Prussian roamed in the psychological and philosophical domains of war.  He traveled the metaphysical darkness of the war theory.  The Swiss remained more concerned with the more immediate character of war as it is fought.  Jomini dealt with the tangible dimensions of war, and much less with the philosophical side of the theory.  And, yet when Jomini considered some intangible factors of war he was close to Clausewitz, and when Clausewitz wrote of battle fighting methods, he was often on common ground with Jomini.  Both were aware that battles were something fluid, changing, and subject to chance.

One of the more popular misconceptions regarding the works of Jomini is the assertion that he thought of war in terms of geometrical formations and absolute rules.  Jomini, aware of this when he wrote his *Summary of the Art of War*, pointed out that his diagrams were “not to be understood precisely as the geometrical figures indicate them.”[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn20%22%20%5Co%20%22)  Numerous of his contemporaries, as well as many of his successors in the field of military writing, have continued to perceive Jomini as an advocate of geometrical battle tactics.

Military writers, past and present, adhered to this interpretation as the basic concept of Jomini’s theory.  In reality, it is true that many of Jomini’s diagrammed tactical movements are no longer valid in terms of modern battle and military doctrine.  It should be kept in mind that such tactical movements are out-dated not because they were geometrical methods, but rather because of changes in weapon systems and technological advance.

Past and present military writers have labeled Jomini’s concept of war as being restricted in scope.  They looked and judged Jomini on the basis of his discussions of the “Base of Operations.”  Jomini, in reality, wrote as a practitioner rather than as a philosopher of war, though sometimes he displayed evidence of possessing aspects of the same philosophic depth that characterized the thinking of Clausewitz.  He did not show the practical imagination that characterized Clausewitz’s vision of the future of warfare, that same imagination that permitted Leonardo da Vinci to catch glimpses of the future world.  For Jomini’s world the horse was still the fastest mode of transportation on the field of battle, and the highest means of observation was a well-situated hilltop or a church tower.  The bulk of the industrial revolution with most of its technological progress was still beyond the horizon of Jomini’s vision.  It is evident that his thoughts pertaining to the potentialities of even free balloons were not projected, as he noted that it would be very interesting to know how objects would appear “ when seen at five or six hundred feet of perpendicular elevation.”[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn21%22%20%5Co%20%22)

The Jominian concept of the battle as intrinsic to operations yet subject to intelligent control was to be eclipsed by the doctrine which Moltke and others read into Clausewitz, that the opposing army would be an objective which one attacked in the strongest possible force, relying upon greater number or greater moral strength to see one through.  The Clausewitzian concept focused on the political object of the war, making the military aim as a means to victory rather than an end in itself.  The new technologies were to make it possible to think once more in terms of movement and maneuver.  The battle was to be thought of as an instrument and not as an end.  Generalship was to be thought of as an intelligent activity requiring skill and subtlety as well as moral resolution and logistical expertise.  War was to be thought of in the terms of being the servant of policy and not its master.

**VII.  Clausewitz and the 19th Century**

Originality and independence of mind are rarely comfortable characteristics, either for their possessor or for his fellow men.  The new is difficult to achieve and to welcome.  Yet, within the compact majority that guards our taboos, the innovator can count on subversive support, which changes hostility to enthusiasm and then to matter-of-fact acceptance of what has come to seem obvious.[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn22%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Clausewitz’s theories underwent such a process of selection and transformation during the 19th century.  His political essays, which, with one or two exceptions, did not begin to appear in print until the late 1870’s, could not contribute to the first impact of his thought.  Most of his writings on military subject, however, became widely known soon after his death with the publication between 1832 and 1837 of an edition of *Posthumous Works*in ten volumes, the first three of which contained *On War.*It must be admitted that the German military society quickly sensed the exceptional intellectual effort represented by these theoretical and historical studies.  The attribute “classic” was not slow in coming.[[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn23%22%20%5Co%20%22)

*On War* was translated into Dutch in 1846; several years later a French translation followed; by the time Colonel J J Graham published his English translation in 1873, Clausewitz was considered throughout the Western world as Germany’s most significant thinker on war.

There is something strange about Clausewitz’s influence, the military historian, Max Jahns, wrote toward the end of the century, “It is almost mystical in nature; his writings, too, never completed and published only after his death, have actually been read far less widely than one might suppose, and yet his opinions have spread throughout the entire German army and have proved fruitful.”[[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn24%22%20%5Co%20%22)

There is no sign that the century considered Clausewitz important for his speculations on war as a political and social phenomenon, or for such formulations as the distinctions between total and limited war, and certainly not for his most original achievement:  subjecting the armed conflicts between nations to the dialectical analysis of German idealistic philosophy.  These characteristics were indeed noted, but the interest of serving officers and commentaries centered on different aspects of his work.  Here the military theorist shared a common fate with other figures of Germany’s classical age; men for a brief period had combined a universality of outlook and a sensitivity of the uniqueness of individuals and cultures in their thoughts and writings.   Clausewitz descended from the realms of literature and philosophy practiced by poets, like Goethe and Holderlin, to that area of activity which was termed by analysts as the craft rather than the art of war.

The combative posture of *On War* can scarcely be overlooked during the second half of the century.  Readers, nevertheless, tended to regard the book as though it had been written in a vacuum.  The kind of distortion created by tearing the work from the soil that had nurtured it is exemplified by the exegesis commonly placed on Clausewitz’s thesis of the importance of superior numbers.  Proponents of the nation in arms, the war ministers and general staffs of European powers before 1914, gave an absolute value to these arguments, as did other later critics, with their condemnation of the author as a prophet of brute strength and extreme violence, whose thought had provided an intellectual cover for the heavy blood-letting of the First World War.

The campaigns of Frederic, of the French Revolution, and of Napoleon, together with the inability of the theorists to span this diversity, gave Clausewitz the material on which to build his arguments.[[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn25%22%20%5Co%20%22) But his real aim was to create a work of permanent utility and pertinence to the future of warfare.

Clausewitz could speculate on war with a mind undisturbed by the innovation in armaments or ideological ideas that confused later generations.  Clausewitz proceeded from the belief that even operational problems could not be mastered from an exclusive point of view. “War,” Clausewitz wrote, “is not an isolated area of human activity, but rather an extension of policy in different form.”[[26]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn26%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Today, the delusions and disasters of European nationalism may finally be behind us.  The controlled, rational use of political and military force has become a universally understood need of our times; no longer engaged in the old wars, we can evaluate Clausewitz with greater objectivity than could his immediate successors.  Both as the theorist of war and  interpreter of Europe entering the modern industrial age, Clausewitz has come to mean more to the 19th and 20th centuries than he did to his own time.

**VIII.  The Relevance of *On War* to Modern Warfare**

Clausewitz’s writing was far more pertinent to the problems and issues of World War I than was Ferdinand Foch’s *Principles of War* published in 1903 – only 11 years before the war began.[[27]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn27%22%20%5Co%20%22)  Foch gave lip service to the name of Clausewitz whose work he claimed to have read and absorbed, but his own writing is of a totally different character.

Clausewitz, indeed, made much of the role and talent of the commanding general – but, altogether, more soberly than Foch.  He weighed with great care the relationship of the offensive to the defensive, concluding that the latter was the strongest for war.  There is no utility in reading Foch today.  The same thing could be said about the written work of Giulio Douhet.  Douhet’s famous *Command of the Air* is narrow in outlook, and the Second World War proved how wrong it was.  Air power advocates refer to Douhet as the “prophet of air power” – but they might come to reject his theory if they were to check in detail and with objectivity his predictions about the future role of air power against the experience of the Second World War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.  In none of these wars did the bombers achieve victory in just a few days as predicted in his writing.  It is no doubt true that his ideas would be more appropriate to nuclear weapons than they were to the conventional bombs he had in mind.[[28]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn28%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Coming down to our own era, Clausewitz’ writings are probably as pertinent to our times as most of the books and literature specifically written about modern conventional or nuclear wars.

Among works on nuclear war we find a good deal of useful technological data and scenarios for different courses of action, but what remains missing is the depth and scope which is the hallmark of Clausewitz.  We miss his focus on the idea that war in all its phases must be rationally guided by clear and meaningful political objects.  That insight is quite absent in most of the contemporary literature, including the famous book

of Herman Kahn *On Thermonuclear War*.  Kahn based his argument on the capability of the United States to survive a thermonuclear war and not to fear its adversary.[[29]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn29%22%20%5Co%20%22)  This argument was based on technical premises which are not valid anymore.  Kahn’s book was published in 1960 and lost, after such a short time compared to Clausewitz’ book, its relevance to wars like Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq.  Nonetheless, we cannot deny that Kahn’s work could supplement Clausewitz’s writing by dealing with new technological developments.

We, therefore, think Clausewitz continues to be worth the most careful study:  first, because he was a great, gifted thinker and could dig and get to the fundamentals of the

theory of war, and second, he has been virtually the only one to have achieved such an accomplishment.   *On War* is “not simply the greatest, but the only truly great book” dealing with such a delicate subject.  No other writer on these issues has ever managed to come close to Clausewitz.[[30]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn30%22%20%5Co%20%22)

The theories of Clausewitz have proved to be timeless; he did not analyze war as a mechanical process of how battles were fought between opposing generals.  He analyzed warfare from the social, political, moral and emotional perspectives as well as from the strategic and tactical levels.

Thinkers like Raymond Aaron, Michael Howard, and Peter Paret translated and interpreted Clausewitz for a newly attentive cold war audience.  Yet the dangers of simplification and misinterpretation always remain, and Austrian defense academic Hugh Smith’s new book on Clausewitz, *A Study of Military and Political Ideas* is in part an attempt to forestall this.  In his final chapters, Smith mounts a convincing defense of the continued relevance of Clausewitz against those who claim that evolution at the upper bounds (nuclear war) and lower bounds (insurgency) of traditional warfare has made his work redundant:  “War is a chameleon --- can be seen as simply changes in colour – dramatic but not so far altering its fundamental nature.”[[31]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn31%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Perhaps, most important among the recent books on Clausewitz that reads properly his theories and practices is the book by Bernard Brodie, the “dean of American civilian strategists,” War*and Politics.*  Almost as influential has been the work by Colonel Harry F. Summer, Jr., *On Strategy:  A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*.

Brodie’s summary of Clausewitz’s concept is that “war takes place within a political milieu from which it derives all its purposes.”[[32]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn32%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Clausewitz offers in some chapters of his work a “universal” and “timeless” theory of war.  At the same time he is one of the greatest anti-theoretical writers when it comes to his famous theory of “fog of war” and moral factors dealing with the complexities of human behavior.

Brodie comments, “This understanding has never fully got across to the great majority of those people who think or write about war, and even less to those who fight it.”[[33]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn33%22%20%5Co%20%22)  This assumption leads Brodie to recommend civilian control of the military and, more specifically, control by civilians who know something about the capabilities of the military and who themselves have taken to heart Clausewitz’s central perception – what Brodie calls “genuine civilian control.”[[34]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn34%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Other commentators came up with the same conclusions with respect to Clausewitz.  Eliat A. Cohen in *Winston Churchill Coalition Politics in World War II* found a Clausewitzian teaching that such policy was an assertion of the primacy of politics in conducting a war.  Cohen came to the conclusion that at the top “true politics and strategy are one.”[[35]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn35%22%20%5Co%20%22)  Politics, which is the business of civilians, determines the strategy of the military.

The current US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, writing in the same book as Cohen, points out that Stalin held to a similar doctrine.  Rice poses some of the “classical questions” of grand strategy – “How can war be avoided?  If it cannot, what peace is desired at the end of the war?”  And she comments, agreeing with Clausewitz, that “the Soviets assign these questions to politicians” which leaves what for the military?  Rice answers, “Questions of how to fight – by what means – are the prerogative of the military profession.”[[36]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn36%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Most of these thinkers are referring to Clausewitz’s notion of his famous “trinity” construed as the people, the political leadership, and the military.  However, Clausewitz did not specify in his book *On War* in what proportion these elements should be in with respect to each other.  Indeed, it seems that Clausewitz, who lived as a Prussian officer during the Napoleonic era, was not thinking of democratic principles, and his use of the term “trinity” without any clarity to determine the interrelation between its elements is offering a notion in the form of “should” rather than “is” war should be the continuation of policy, but all too often is not.

Clausewitz stresses in the final chapter of *On War*, “The subordination of the political point of view to the military would be unreasonable, for policy has created the war...The subordination of the military point of view to the political is, therefore, the only thing which is possible.”  Bernard Brodie in his analysis of the disaster of Vietnam pins blame on the lack of any clear and workable policy in Vietnam.  The reality forced Kaspar Weinberger to emphasize in his doctrine the clarity of the objective Principle #3 - “We should have clearly defined political and military objectives.  And we should know precisely how our forces can accomplish these objectives.”  In Brodie’s view, a careful teaching of Clausewitz can explain “our failures in the past, at the same time there is hope that taking our principles to heart can prevent such debacles in the future.”

Harry G. Summers was even clearer that Clausewitz can be used not only to explain the past, but to shape the future.  Summers repeatedly cites Clausewitz to buttress his views of what the US military did not do in Vietnam; he noted, “During the course of the Vietnam war there were changes in both the strategic and tactical definitions of the objectives.  What had been a clear relationship between military strategy and political objectives was lost in the obtuse discussion of national objectives, rejection of aggression, deterrence, and the whole concept of a spectrum of war.  The new definition obscured the

Clausewitzian dictum that the political object – the original motive for the war – will

determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires.”[[37]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn37%22%20%5Co%20%22)

In Summers’ view, Clausewitz emphasized that war was waged not for its own sake but was waged to obtain a particular aim – the political object of the war – something even a general as astute as Douglas Macarthur failed to grasp and whose utterances “reflected the rejection of the Clausewitzian belief that it is clear that war should never be thought of as something autonomous but always as an instrument of policy.”[[38]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn38%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**Technology and the Relevance of Clausewitz**

Some commentators argue that technology has not rendered Clausewitz outdated.  Technology in their opinion changes only “the grammar of war, not its logic.”[[39]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn39%22%20%5Co%20%22)  In other words, new technologies change only the focus, not the nature of war.  Clausewitz saw war as multi-dimensional and composed of subjective and objective natures.  The objective elements vary according to time and place; the essential nature of war remains constant:  violent, unpredictable, and prone to escalation.

Technology, in fact, resides in all three elements of the trinity without altering their basic relationship within it.  The basic interdependency of the various components of the trinity will remain unchanged, despite revolutionary advances in technology itself.

The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), continually evolving information and advanced communications, will merely expand the immediacy – shorten the response time and heighten the sensitivity – of each component of the trinity in its interaction with the others.[[40]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn40%22%20%5Co%20%22)

Evidence concerning the Cuban missile crisis and that of the October 1973 war shows that even in the modern age misperceptions continue to create and exacerbate crisis situation.  Technology can speed the arrival of information, it will provide information in new forms and it may change the time to make a decision,

New military technology will change the level of violence.  New weapons systems make it possible for both sides to observe and strike simultaneously throughout the depth of the battlefield, thus eliminating “safe” areas.  A general lack of immunity will prevail as units at all echelons of command and control will endure greater risk.

Precision guided weapons systems and munitions do, indeed, increase the certainty of a hit or a kill, but the weak side will remain the problem of supplying reliable and timely target data.

New technology alone has not proven decisive in modern war.  Victory will come as a result of adopting a comprehensive doctrine that fully integrates the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war.  This leads us to conclude that the objective concept of war presented by Clausewitz will remain relevant to future high tech war.

The development of the nuclear weapon, known as the absolute weapon, has not meant the death of Clausewitz, as some have expected.  His dictum that “war is the continuation of policy by other means” remains more valid in a nuclear war than in conventional warfare.  Under the nuclear “fear,” we need to rely more on *politick* to contain such high risk of total destruction.  The evolution of US nuclear strategy from “massive retaliation” in the 1950’s to the policy of “flexible response” in the early 1960’s demonstrates such evolution and reveals how *politick* can influence war in a nuclear environment.  After the use of two atomic bombs against Japan, policy makers duly responded to changing political situations, especially with the building-up of nuclear arsenals, the growing strike and counter-strike capabilities, and the will of the peoples to reduce the risks they were exposed to under nuclear threat.  The nuclear weapons did not suit the superpowers’ political objectives when it came to consider their interests with non-nuclear states; in most cases, these political objectives were better served through the development of a large conventional force, equipped with high-tech weapons and the means to insure greater strategic and tactical mobility.

To be sure, the destructive power of nuclear weaponry, the prospect of runaway escalation, and the elimination of friction through reducing the chain of tension and events that must occur between the decision to use nuclear weapons and the actual launch of a nuclear strike will reduce or negate the choices of policy makers on whether the conduct of nuclear war should, or shouldn’t, occur.  We ought to know the scale of danger we run in not developing the possibility of aborting nuclear war once a launch is initiated.  Such situations illustrate what Clausewitz, in his historicist approach, would have called the subjective elements of war, which ultimately constitute an expression of the interactions between the elements of Clausewitz “trinity” in terms of absolute war.

Nuclear weapons, as some believe, will not render irrelevant the intelligence of the government, the potential of the military, or the emotions of the people.  Nuclear weapons, in fact, have proven to drive each of the components of the “trinity” toward changing behavior over time.  Diplomacy has become more aware of the risks, and thus has become the leading force of any national security strategy.  The military has gradually altered its decision-making system to fit into the new national security system with all its complexities.  The people, too, have become more aware of what goes on around them and in the world.  People are more politicized and increasingly sensitive to the fact that their future rests in the hands of rulers who are chosen by their “free” will.  These developments do not invalidate the Clausewitz’s “trinity, but speak instead of its lasting durability and intrinsic dynamism.”[[41]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn41%22%20%5Co%20%22)

**Clausewitzian Theories Are Timeless**

The writings of Clausewitz continue to generate a great deal of discussion, both within the Western military community and within the civilian research and academic bodies.  He is often quoted to prove a point or to explain an event or a situation.

The relevance of Clausewitz has been debated ever since Helmut Von Moltke, Chief of the Prussian General Staff, first applied Clausewitzian theory to the battlefield in 1871.  In the late twentieth century, many historians and strategists debated the usefulness of his writings in a world possessing weapons of mass destruction and the technological revolution of weaponry and communications.  In the aftermath of the Gulf War to liberate Kuwait in 1991 and the invasion of Iraq to bring down Saddam Hussein, many military theorists and military commanders believed that Clausewitz was once again validated due to the overwhelming victory achieved through the use of Clausewitzian theories.[[42]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn42%22%20%5Co%20%22)

The theories of Clausewitz are seen as timeless because he did not analyze war as a mechanical phenomenon describing how battles were fought between opposing commanders.  Instead, he analyzed warfare from the social, political, moral, and emotional perspectives, as well as the tactical and strategic levels.

If we were to analyze the operations against Iraq, we really ought to make several assumptions by dividing the war of 2003 into three phases.  The first phase is obviously the war plan aimed at defeating the Iraqi army and causing the downfall of Saddam Hussein’s regime.  The second phase is the plan to stabilize Iraq and to conduct humanitarian relief, reorganizing and reactivating all civil infrastructures and rebuilding a temporary Iraqi administration to oversee this process.  The third phase, probably the most complicated, aims to establish a stable, democratic government.  The first phase of operations “Iraqi freedom,” which consists of the war plan, should be our primary focus in trying to examine it against Clausewitzian theories:

1. In putting down the war plan, US military commanders have admittedly relied on   Clausewitzian theories.  Most of military commanders can recite Clausewitz without reference since *On War is* taught in most senior military courses.
Since General Tommy Franks, Commander of the US Central Command, is undoubtedly an expert on Clausewitzian strategy, he presumably influenced the war planners to use the strategic framework described in *On War* when developing the war plan.[[43]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn43%22%20%5Co%20%22)
If we were to follow up closely how the whole plan was executed, we would find that all different and vital aspects of military organization, planning, and waging war fit quite well each of the chapters of *On War*.
2. The political objective for operations Iraqi Freedom fit very well with the theory of the primacy of the theory saying, “War is a continuation of policy by other means.”  The application of this theory could be recognized, first, by the leadership and decision taken by Donald Rums field as a policy maker, even sometimes in contradiction with the military leadership views.  The plan had a clear political objective centered on the downfall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, while the military aim was clearly centered on the destruction of the Republican Guard’s divisions and the occupation of Baghdad.
3. According Clausewitz’s teaching there is “no higher and simpler law of strategy”   than to focus the military effort on the most vulnerable part of your enemy dubbed as his center of gravity, which is “the hub of all power and movement on which everything depends.  That is the point against which all our energies should be directed.”  The application of this theory was conducted through the fast movement of the brunt of the US forces towards Baghdad bypassing most cities and towns between Kuwait and Baghdad.  This push northwards, without paying any attention to any of the forces protecting the towns and the cities along the routes of advance, was the central cause of the quick victory over and the destruction of Saddam Hussein’s regime.  As the regime quickly fell, the domino effect was to follow and the remaining government strongholds and enemy units were to collapse or dissolve.
4. Clausewitz treated the economy of force as a vital part of waging war and any break of the rule is “abhorrent to strategic thought.”  With a significantly smaller force than the one used in 1991, the coalition was able to defeat the Iraqi army and occupy Baghdad in twenty-one days.  This is to prove that the proper application of this core theory of Clausewitz played a vital role in the success of the operation.
5. Clausewitz stressed the importance of surprise in achieving quick victory as he said, “It is still more important to remember that almost the only advantage of the attack rests on its initial surprise.  Speed and impetus are its strongest elements and are usually indispensable if we are to defeat the enemy.”
The initial bombing of what was presumably the bunker of Saddam Hussein through the high speed of the armor sweep in the western dessert and the high thrust along the Euphrates and Tigris towards Baghdad, all constituted the elements of surprise necessary for quick victory as stated by Clausewitz.
6. Fog and friction in Clausewitz’s theory *On War*are two words that are frequently used to explain changing events relating to war.  The fog of war focuses on uncertainty which is explained by Clausewitz: “War is the realm of uncertainty.  Three-fourths of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty.  A sensitive and discriminating judgment is called for, a skilled intelligence to send out the truth.”  The primary cause of fog is the absence of a true picture of the enemy.  What has happened, what is happening, and what is likely to happen is always unclear under the best of conditions.  The fog of war varies in time and place.  Sometimes it is impenetrable, at other times it permits glimpses and partial pictures.[[44]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn44%22%20%5Co%20%22)
The effects of the fog of war in the Iraqi war had a limited impact on Allied forces.  The US had used tremendous intelligence assets from spy satellites to human intelligence on the ground.  The US knew the Iraqi military order of battle; they were able to locate all Iraqi units and track their movements.  More importantly, the US had a very effective command and control system which fed information up and down the chain of command which helped to reduce the fog or uncertainty of war greatly but, as predicted, never totally eliminated it.
On the Iraqi side, the effects of fog or uncertainty were magnified and heavily felt because the allied forces were able from the beginning of the war to damage all the command and control facilities through heavy and accurate bombing.  Furthermore, Iraq’s intelligence gathering was inadequate, even before the beginning of the air war.  The Iraqi command had a poor picture of allied order of battle.  Consequently, the Iraqis had difficulty tem-plating their future battles.[[45]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn45%22%20%5Co%20%22)
Friction, although related, is a different idea.  It is “the force that makes the apparently easy so difficult.”  Friction and chance are closely connected.  The fluidity of the battlefield was clear in the areas of Nassiriya, Najaf, Karbala, and Um Kasar when the Iraqi forces launched several attacks against the US and British forces, using mainly light troops and paramilitary forces, such as Saddam’s fedayeen.  The friction created by these attacks caused a shock necessitating a reorganization of the attack and reduced its impetus.
On the other hand, the Iraqis suffered from the effects of friction due to the destruction of their command and control system.  The attempt to locate and assassinate Saddam Hussein and his senior aides totally disrupted the chain of command and reduced the Iraqi capability to conduct a coordinated defensive battle on all the axes leading to Baghdad and left the capital defenseless.
7. Clausewitz wrote, “It is not possible in every war for the victor to overthrow his enemy completely.  Often, even victory has a culminating point.  This has been amply demonstrated by experience.”[[46]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn46%22%20%5Co%20%22)
It was clear from the beginning of the war that the US plan was focused on occupying Baghdad to bring down Saddam’s regime, which would lead to a total collapse of the Iraqi state.  Occupying Baghdad was assigned to be the culminating point of victory for the US planners.
The Iraqi front divisions, under-strength and with low morale and diminished fighting spirit, were not able to withstand the shock of the allied attack and failed to fight an honorable battle.  The Republican Guard divisions, which were assigned the mission to stop, or to at least delay, the allied attack and  to withdraw in the final phase to Baghdad to defend the city failed to accomplish this main defensive task because of the heavy losses they suffered under the heavy US bombardments.  In reality, Baghdad which was assumed to witness siege warfare and *une defense a outrance*was found defenseless and open to occupation without any resistance at all, and the culminating point of victory came to be the easiest part of the whole battle.
8. Clausewitz explains, “No rules exist for maneuver and no method or general principles can determine the value of the action; rather, superior application, precision order, discipline, and fear will find the means to achieve palpable advantage in the most singular and minute circumstances.”  According to this, no battle plan is final or unchanged due to the uncertainty of war.  The best way to guarantee victory is through the use of a superior and well disciplined force.  There is no doubt that the US forces have used the best military hardware in history and their personnel were highly trained and very disciplined.  The US forces used 16,000 precision guided weapons compared to 1,500 used in the Gulf war of 1991 which made the great difference in the way this war was fought.  We can conclude by saying that the US command literally applied Clausewitz’s definition of strategy:  “The best strategy is always to be very strong; first in general, and then at the decisive point.”

**IX.  Conclusion**

Many modern strategists and historians have questioned the relevance of Clausewitz in modern battlefields.  They had doubts that Clausewitz’s 19th century philosophy would withstand all the changes in fighting a war with advanced technology weaponry, to include nuclear weapons.  This philosophy is proving that the basic aspects and principles of warfare, no matter how sophisticated weapons are, seem to go unchanged.  The American central command intentionally built the framework for the war in Iraq in 2003 using the teachings of the Prussian scholar.  This modern war plan clearly illustrates the relevance of *On War* for 21st century battles.

In fact, nuclear weaponry did not render irrelevant the ability of the governments, the skill of the military or the emotive force of the people as some strategists had believed.  Each of the components of this trinity have undergone some changes over time, but their importance in determining the will of nations to conduct war has not diminished.  Diplomacy has become more aware of the consequences of military action, and it has taken as its main aim to reduce the consequences and escalation of such.

The military has greatly changed its training to increase its capabilities in fighting a faster war and achieving swifter victory.  The people have changed to becoming more politicized and growing sensitive feelings towards losses incurred in war.  These developments have not invalidated Clausewitz’s famous trinity but have left it with more lasting durability and intrinsic dynamism.

     [1] Michael Howard, Clausewitz (New York:  Oxford University Press, 1983), 1.
     [2] Carl von Clausewitz, On War (Princeton University Press, 1976), 62.

     [3] Howard, 5.

     [4] Ibid., 6.

     [5] Ibid., 8.

     [6] Ibid., 9.

     [7] Ibid., 11.

     [8] For more details, see Bernard Brodie, “A Guide to the Reading of *On War*,”  Clausewitz *On War*, 642-711.

     [9] Howard, 24.

[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref10%22%20%5Co%20%22) Clausewitz, 75-76.

[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref11%22%20%5Co%20%22) Ibid., 77.

[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref12%22%20%5Co%20%22) Ibid., 80.

[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref13%22%20%5Co%20%22) Ibid., 100.

[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref14%22%20%5Co%20%22) Ibid., 579.

[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref15%22%20%5Co%20%22) Ibid., 177-183.

[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref16%22%20%5Co%20%22) Ibid., 566.

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[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref20%22%20%5Co%20%22) Ibid.

[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref21%22%20%5Co%20%22) Ibid., 31.

[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref22%22%20%5Co%20%22) Peter Paret, “Clausewitz and the Nineteenth Century” in The Theory and Practice of War edited by Michael Howard (London:  Cassel and Company Ltd, 1965), 23.

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[[34]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref34%22%20%5Co%20%22) Bruce Fleming, “Can Reading Clausewitz Save Us from Future Mistakes,” 2004

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[[44]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref44%22%20%5Co%20%22) Herbert T. Holden, “The Continuing Relevance of Clausewitz,” 7-8. [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1991/JJT.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1991/JJT.htm)

[[45]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref45%22%20%5Co%20%22) Ibid., 8.

    [46] Clausewitz, 566.

**كلوزويتش ورسالته بشأن الحرب وأهميّتها بالنسبة للقرن الحادي عشر**

بالنسبة إلى عصرنا، لكلوزويتش أهميّة كبرى توازي كلّ ما كُتب عن الحرب النووية تحديداً.

وامتّد نشاط كارل فان كلوزفيتش المهني طيلة مدّة الحروب الثورية وحروب نبليون (1792-181). فلقد وُلد عام 1780، وهو ابن ضابط من رتبة ملازم في الجيش البروسّي.

ينقسم العمل *عن الحرب والنظرية*إلى ثمانية كتب. أول مسألة تطرّق إليها كلوزفيتش هي كيفيّة الحصول على نظرية تخصّ الحرب.

ولقد خضعت نظريات كلوزفيتش لعملية انتقاء وتغيّرات خلال القرن التاسع عشر. ولم تساهم كتاباته السياسيّة، باستثناء القليل منها، بالتأثير الأولي لتفكيره إذ أنها لم تُنشر قبل أواخر1870.

كانت كتابات كلوزفيتش المتعلّقة بمسائل ومشاكل الحرب العالمية الأولى وثيقة الصلة بهذا الموضوع أكثر من *مبادئ الحرب* التي نشرها فردينان فوش عام 1903- أي 11 سنة قبل اندلاع الحرب. ولقد ذكر فوش أنه اطّلع كليّاً على أعمال كلوزفيتش غير أن كتاباته كانت ذات طابع مختلف جدّاً.

ويعتقد بعض المعلّقين أن أعمال كلوزفيتش ما زالت عصريّة وفعّالة بالرغم من وجود التكنولوجيا الحديثة. فبالنسبة إليهم، تغيّر التكنولوجيا "قواعد الحرب وليس المنطق القائمة عليه". أي بمعنى آخر، إن وسائل التكنولوجيا الحديثة تغيّر الهدف وليس طبيعة الحرب. ولقد رأى كلوزفيتش أن الحرب متعدّدة الأبعاد وأنّها تتألّف من طبيعات ذاتية وموضوعيّة. وتتغيّر العناصر الموضوعيّة وفقاً للمكان والوقت، بينما تبقى طبيعة الحرب الأساسيّة على حالها: عنيفة، لا يمكن التنبّؤ بها وعرضة للتصعيد.

ما زالت كتابات كلوزفيتش تثير الكثير من الجدل، ضمن المجتمع العسكري الغربي والهيئات الجامعيّة والأبحاث المدنية. وغالباً ما يتمّ إقتباس كتاباته لتقدمة البراهين أو تفسير حادثة أو واقع ما.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/clausewitz-and-his-treatise-war-and-its-relevance-21st-century#sthash.au08rQdV.dpuf