POLITICAL CONTROL OVER THE USE OF FORCE: A CLAUSEWITZIAN PERSPECTIVE

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May 2001

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This paper was originally conceived as part of a larger project on use of force decisionmaking, and presented at the 2001 meeting of the International Studies Association (ISA) held in Chicago from February 21-24, 2001. The author thanks Professor Steve Rosen of Harvard University for giving her a serious introduction to Clausewitz's thought, and the participants of the panel entititled "Theoretical Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations" at the ISA meeting. I am especially grateful to the panel's discussant, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Hays (U.S. Air Force), for his invaluable comments and encouragement.

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ISBN 1-58487-050-8

FOREWORD

What is the ideal relationship between the commander and the statesman in time of war? Is there a balance to be struck between political control and military operational expertise? Given the importance of these questions, the range of answers that has been given to them by both theorists and practitioners is striking. Major Suzanne Nielsen addresses these issues by examining what Carl von Clausewitz has to say about civil-military relations and the use of force. Though Clausewitz's insight that "War is a continuation of policy" is well-known, his arguments about the appropriateness of extensive political control during time of war are not as often discussed. Clausewitz provides an argument for extensive political influence over military operations—influence that lacks a clear limit.

Major Nielsen looks in depth at Clausewitz's arguments on this point. After reviewing his theoretical approach, she discusses four key implications of the basic idea that political purposes govern war. Her argument suggests that Clausewitz has issued both statesmen and commanders a challenge. Commanders must appreciate the necessity of subordinating military means to political ends, and statesmen must think as strategists as they make decisions about the relationship between ends and means and the achievement of their goals.

Major Nielsen examines these questions in a thoughtful and comprehensive manner. The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to publish her study as part of our Letort Paper series.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

SUZANNE C. NIELSEN, a major in the U.S. Army, is an assistant professor in the Social Sciences Department at the U.S. Military Academy. Her teaching responsibilities have included course directing the core course in international relations, and co-teaching senior seminars on cyberwarfare and politics and film. Prior to serving at West Point, Major Nielsen served in military intelligence units in Germany and the United States. As the company commander of an intelligence company, she deployed her unit twice from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to Europe to support peace enforcement operations in Bosnia. Currently a doctoral student in the Harvard Government Department, her research pertains to civil-military relations and military effectiveness. Major Nielsen will leave West Point to attend the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in the summer of 2002.

POLITICAL CONTROL OVER THE USE OF FORCE: A CLAUSEWITZIAN PERSPECTIVE

What is the ideal relationship between the commander and the statesman in time of war? What are the optimal limits, if any exist, on political control over military operations? Is there such a thing as political guidance that crosses the line and becomes interference? Given the importance of these questions, the range of answers that have been given to them by both theorists and practitioners is striking. On the side of limiting the statesman's role, one view is that the political leader should exercise, at most, limited control after hostilities have begun. Sun Tzu, who is believed to have written his great work *The Art of War* during the 4th century BC, appears to take this perspective.[1] He argues that the decision to go to war must be a political decision, but that the general must be free to act autonomously once that decision is made.[2] This view has survived to the modern day. Within the American military experience, perhaps the most famous advocate of this position is General Douglas MacArthur. In a speech to Congress after his relief by President Truman, General MacArthur claimed that: "Once war is forced upon us, there is no alternative but to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very object is victory—not prolonged indecision."[3] MacArthur's position implies that there is little room for political factors to moderate a conflict once it has begun.

There have also been those who have taken the opposing view and taken steps to ensure extensive political control over military operations. One leader whose conduct exemplified this principle was Adolph Hitler. Not only did he override the strategic advice of his generals in the early days of World War II, he also became increasingly involved in the details of military operations as the war progressed.[4]

American history also provides examples of political leaders who have taken this approach to the issue; several presidents have chosen to be active participants in the making of military strategy and the planning of campaigns. During the American Civil War, for example, President Abraham Lincoln was a very active commander-in-chief.[5] More recently, President John F. Kennedy was deeply involved in the operational details of the quarantine during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Is such engagement appropriate oversight or troubling interference? In the case of the blockade, the Chief of Naval Operations who resisted Secretary of Defense McNamara's repeated requests for operational details certainly thought it was the latter.[6]

This question of the proper level of political control over military operations is crucially important, but does not seem to allow easy answers. It is important because the use of force usually suggests that significant interests are at stake—at times even state survival. Yet the range of answers given by those who have seriously thought about these issues, and those who have had to deal with them in practice, suggest that the solution is not obvious. Is there a balance to be struck between political control and military operational expertise? If so, where is the line to be drawn?

This monograph will begin to address this question by examining what Carl von Clausewitz had to say about civil-military relations and the use of force. Clausewitz, who lived from 1780-1831, was both a soldier with a distinguished record of service and a theorist of war who wrote prolifically. His major work was *On War*, a book in which he attempted to record "the major elements of strategy" as he saw them.[7] Published posthumously in 1832, *On War* has become a military classic. Some of Clausewitz's most enduring and powerful insights are on the relationship between war and politics. In *On War*, he not only firmly establishes that political considerations must drive the conduct of war, he also usefully identifies some of the dynamics which may shape the relationship between senior military and political leaders. His insights

are all the more interesting given that his standard is strategic effectiveness. For Clausewitz, maintaining political control is not a question of values, but the key to success.

The following analysis of Clausewitz's views on this subject is divided into four sections. In the first, I will provide background on Clausewitz's approach to the study of war. This will include his views on the utility of theory, his argument that war is a unique and distinct human activity, and his emphasis on the fact that wars are the products of political forces that not only cause them, but also powerfully shape their natures. This background is not only useful for understanding Clausewitz's arguments, but also establishes why *On War* is an especially useful work for the study of civil-military relations and the use of force. In the second section, I will explore the conclusion that Clausewitz draws from this that the political object must guide the conduct of war and four key implications of this idea. I will conclude this section with a discussion of Clausewitz's views on optimality—how can one judge the quality of a state's military strategy? In the third section, I will explore what Clausewitz says about the extent and limits of the political guidance of military operations. I will also discuss some dynamics that Clausewitz introduces that might affect the divergence or convergence of views between the military commander and the statesman. In the conclusion, I will summarize the above with an assessment of both the strengths and limitations of Clausewitz's approach.

Before proceeding, however, some of the difficulties in analyzing Clausewitz's work must be faced. Raymond Aron was surely correct when he wrote about *On War* that "You can find what you want to find in the treatise: all that you need is a selection of quotations, supported by personal prejudice."[8] One major difficulty is that the work was still in draft form at the time of Clausewitz's death. In an 1827 note, Clausewitz himself foresaw the problems that this might cause:

> If an early death should terminate my work, what I have written so far would, of course, only deserve to be called a shapeless mass of ideas. Being liable to endless misinterpretation it would be the target of much half-baked criticism . . .[9]

His inability to complete this revision may explain why Clausewitz at times seems inconsistent on certain issues. In attempting to deal with this problem fairly, I will emphasize the ideas that represent later stages of his thought. In *On War*, his most mature views are probably reflected in the first few chapters of Book One, "On the Nature of War," which he did revise.[10] As for personal prejudice, the recognition of its possible existence and a conscious striving to overcome its effects may be the best that one can do.

CLAUSEWITZ'S APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF WAR

To appreciate Clausewitz's insights, it is useful to first review three key aspects of his approach. The first is that though Clausewitz valued theory, he had limited expectations of what it could accomplish. The second is that Clausewitz viewed warfare as a unique human activity, set off from all others as a realm of danger, physical exertion, uncertainty, and chance. Third, Clausewitz thought that it was impossible to analyze wars without taking into account their political and social context. Wars spring from political sources, and take on their particular characters as a result of these origins. I will address each of these points in turn.

Theorizing about War.

Clausewitz argues that the development of a theory of war must be supported by a careful study of military history. He writes: "Just as some plants bear fruit only if they don't shoot up too high, so in the practical arts the leaves and flowers of theory must be pruned and the plant kept close to its proper soil—experience."[11] This requirement sets a limit on the value of abstract analyses.

For Clausewitz, there is little value in a theory of war that manages to be logical, complete, and systematic at the price of separating itself from reality.[12] A useful theory must be derived from, or at least checked against, the historical record.[13] In a strong statement of this point, Clausewitz writes: "A great advantage offered by this method [reliance on historical evidence] is that theory will have to remain realistic. It cannot allow itself to get lost in futile speculation, hairsplitting, and flights of fancy."[14]

In Chapter Two, "On the Theory of War," of Book II Clausewitz criticizes some existing approaches to the study of war, and identifies some additional factors a theory on this subject must address. He particularly targets those theorists that attempt to establish positive doctrines, or principles of war that are always valid.[15] He argues "An irreconcilable conflict exists between this type of theory and actual practice."[16] Two of Clausewitz's contemporaries whose theories he rejects on these grounds are Heinrich Dietrich von Bülow and Antoine Henri de Jomini. Von Bülow's writings emphasize the importance of the angle between the fighting forces and their base line, and Jomini focuses on the importance of interior lines.[17] Clausewitz believes that theorists who focus on a single principle, particularly an abstract geometrical one, exclude vital factors from their analyses. Not only do they fail to reflect the fact that war is a highly uncertain affair, they fail to acknowledge that war is a product of the unpredictable interaction of living forces which are attempting to defeat each other.[18] In such an environment, not only are calculations regarding the relevant material forces difficult to make, fear and danger make psychological factors vitally important to the outcome.[19]

Because of the need to be consistent with the evidence of history, and the difficulty of accounting for all of the material and psychological forces that can be important in war, Clausewitz draws the conclusion "A positive doctrine is unattainable."[20] Theorizing about war is hard; so hard, in fact, that perhaps the attempt could be considered futile.

However, Clausewitz also rejects this position, finding that theorizing about war can still be valuable for several reasons. First, the problem is not the same at all levels. It is easier to derive worthwhile principles on which to base action at the tactical level of war. A second reason theory is useful is that it can aid the education of a future commander. Clausewitz writes:

> Theory exists so that one need not start afresh each time sorting out the material and plowing through it, but will find it ready to hand and in good order. It is meant to educate the mind of the future commander, or, more accurately, to guide him in his self-education, not to accompany him to the battlefield . . .[21]

Reflection guided by theory is a crucial component of the education of military leaders. Finally, and most relevant to the present argument, theory can guide the study of ends and means.

This last fact is important here because, given Clausewitz's elaboration on what those ends and means are, it is clear that his focus is very much on political guidance of the use of force. For Clausewitz, warfare is a special activity because of the special nature of its means, and the means of warfare is always combat.[22] At the lower (tactical) level of warfare, it is easy to be clear about the definition about both ends and means. "In tactics the means are the fighting forces trained for combat; the end is victory."[23] However, at the higher level of war, the ends are much more varied. Clausewitz's definition of strategy is "the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war."[24] As used here, the term "engagement" refers to distinct instances of combat.[25] What is particularly worthy of attention in this definition is the fact that Clausewitz uses the vague formulation of "the purpose of the war." Clausewitz clearly and repeatedly establishes the concept that the ends of strategy "are those objects which lead directly to peace," and the nature of those objects may vary.[26] The fact that Clausewitz refuses to argue that the purpose of war is always victory, and instead argues that the end is the politically desired peace, is a

crucial one. It begins to establish the dominance of political considerations, a point that will be further developed shortly.

Above it was mentioned that Clausewitz requires theory to be consistent with history. It was also argued that Clausewitz's views on the difficulty of theorizing about war, particularly at the highest levels, lead him to focus on the relationship of ends and means. Clausewitz also limits the scope of his theory in a third way by focusing almost entirely on the operational use of these means. He devotes little effort to discussing the development of armed forces, and does not find it useful to pay much heed to the technical crafts that provide commanders their tools. According to Clausewitz:

> Strategy . . . does not inquire how a country should be organized and a people trained and ruled in order to produce the best military results. It takes these matters as it finds them in the European community of nations, and calls attention only to unusual circumstances that exert a marked influence on war.[27]

In other words, Clausewitz has little to say in *On War* about peacetime civil-military relations, to include relationships between political and military elites and relationships between armed forces and their societies. These matters are not necessarily unimportant; they are merely beyond the scope of his theory of war and discussions of strategy.[28] According to Clausewitz: "The theory of war proper . . . is concerned with the use of these means, once they have been developed, for the purposes of the war."[29]

Clausewitz raises one final point about the limitations of theory. He argues that as political aims become smaller, and as wars of lesser intensity drift toward a state of armed observation, theory has less to say about its central dynamics. First of all, general principles are more difficult to derive in such circumstances because events are much more contingent on a multiplicity of minor factors.[30] Not only are they harder to derive, Clausewitz also argues that

general rules are less necessary: ". . . as the modifying principle gains a hold on military operations, or rather, as the incentive fades away, the active element gradually becomes passive. Less and less happens, and guiding principles will not be needed."[31] This may go some distance in explaining why Clausewitz mostly abstracts from political aims in Books IV-VII of *On War*, which cover tactical engagements, military forces, and defense and offense. Political aims are one of the factors that may moderate war, and therefore reduce its intensity. In the transition at the end of Book III, Clausewitz says the following:

> Everything we shall have to say about the relation between the attack and defense and the way in which this polarity develops refers to the state of crisis in which the forces find themselves during periods of tension and movement. By contrast, all activity that occurs during a state of equilibrium will be regarded and treated as a mere corollary. The state of crisis is the real war; the equilibrium is nothing but its reflex.[32]

This limitation is important to note in the current context because it suggests that Clausewitz may disproportionately focus his attention on conflicts on the higher end of the spectrum.

"War is a special activity, different and separate from any other pursued by man."[33]

Clausewitz's rejections of the theories of von Bülow and Jomini partially stem from his belief that they fail to fully recognize the implications of the unique nature of war. What makes war unique is not that its basic principles are intellectually complicated and difficult to grasp. In fact, Clausewitz holds the opposite to be true:

> Everything in strategy is very simple . . . Once it has been determined, from the political conditions, what a war is meant to achieve and what it can achieve, it is easy to chart the course. But great strength of character, as well as great lucidity and firmness of mind, is required in order to follow through steadily,

> to carry out the plan, and not to be thrown off course by thousands of diversions.[34]

It is not the difficulty of arriving at strategic solutions, but rather the nature of the environment in which these solutions must be carried out which gives war its unique nature.

Clausewitz groups many of the characteristics that make the environment of war uniquely difficult to operate in under the general category of "friction." He feels that these factors are so important that he devotes four of the eight chapters of Book I to them, and mentions them in each of the others. In fact, the concept of friction is so central to Clausewitz's understanding of war that it literally pervades his entire work. One of the key sources of friction is danger. Since war is a realm of danger, especially those who are new to it sense that "the light of reason is refracted in a manner quite different from that which is normal in academic speculation."[35] Because of this, "*courage* is the soldier's first requirement."[36] Other key sources of friction are physical exertion, the uncertainty of all information, and even chance occurrences such as bad weather. "Friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper."[37] Because friction is always present, "Action in war is like movement in a resistant element."[38]

It is important to discuss friction here, not just because it is central to Clausewitz's thinking on war, but also because understanding friction and having the ability to overcome it are important components of the military commander's expertise. If there is an argument to be made that commanders' views on strategy deserve some hearing because commanders have a superior understanding of military means, knowledge of friction must be a crucial component of that understanding. After all, any one of reasonable intellect could memorize capabilities of weapons systems, compositions of units, march tables, and many of the other technical details of warfare. Clausewitz writes:

> The good general must know friction in order to overcome it whenever possible, and in order not to expect a standard of achievement in his operations which this very friction makes impossible. Incidentally, it is a force that theory can never quite define. . . . Practice and experience dictate the answer: "this is possible, that is not."[39]

Although Clausewitz feels that challenging peacetime maneuvers can begin to give officers an appreciation for friction, the only real lubricant for the military machine is combat experience.[40]

When discussing the special nature of military expertise, the idea that war is a simple enterprise should not be overstated. The intellectual abilities required of commanders at higher levels are significant. In fact, Clausewitz seems to be concerned that he may have mislead the reader on this point when he states that ". . . the reader should not think that a brave but brainless fighter can do anything of outstanding significance in war."[41] Instead, Clausewitz argues that the commander-in-chief must have considerable intellectual skills and intuition as well as the ability to overcome friction. True military genius requires *"a harmonious combination of elements"* which include both intellectual gifts and strength of character.[42]

"Politics . . . is the womb in which war develops . . ."[43]

Clausewitz feels that developing a theory of war is worthwhile, but that there should be limited expectations as to the guidance such a theory can provide. Because of the nature of the subject, Clausewitz feels that theory is incapable of establishing positive doctrine, particularly for the conduct of war at the highest levels. However, Clausewitz does believe that a theory of war can be useful by aiding in the analysis of the relationship between ends and means. The making of strategy involves the use of military means to achieve political ends in particular instances. In the above analysis, I introduced Clausewitz's view that political considerations must be dominant in the making of

strategy. Below, I will further elaborate on this point by reviewing several ways in which Clausewitz establishes both the importance of politics as the source of war, and the primacy of political objectives. The relationship between wars and their political contexts and purposes is a theme repeated throughout Clausewitz's work.

One of the places in *On War* where Clausewitz discusses the primacy of politics is Chapter Six-B of Book VIII, "War as an Instrument of Policy." In this chapter of his concluding book, Clausewitz begins by reminding the reader of the uniqueness of war as a human activity. Elsewhere, Clausewitz has established that war is distinguished by its distinctive means, which is combat.[44] As noted above, war is a realm of uncertainty, physical exertion, and danger in which only men with a certain combination of character traits and intellectual abilities can excel.[45] After reminding the reader of this separateness, however, Clausewitz quickly moves on to reestablish a unity between war and other human activities. *"This unity lies in the concept that war is only a branch of political activity; that it is in no sense autonomous."*[46] The following passage, which clarifies this point, is worth quoting in full:

> It is, of course, well known that the only source of war is politics—the intercourse of governments and peoples; but it is apt to be assumed that war suspends that intercourse and replaces it by a wholly different condition, ruled by no law but its own. We maintain, on the contrary, that war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means.[47]

Clausewitz goes on to emphasize that not only is war rooted in political causes, but also "in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something different."[48] War is a product of political forces, and these forces continue to be at work as a war progresses. It is because of this that war is not autonomous. "Its grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic."[49]

The above establishes not only that the source of war is outside war itself, but also leads one to recognize that the ends of war must be shaped by the political forces that began the conflict and continue to operate throughout. In other words, it is a political logic rather than a purely military one that decides the characteristics of the desired peace. This insight is an interesting perspective to keep in mind when reading Chapter One, "What is War?" of Book I—the only chapter of *On War* Clausewitz suggests that he is satisfied with in his final note on the text.[50] The method Clausewitz employs in this chapter, and the conclusions he draws, can be seen as an attempt to play out the logic of war as if it were autonomous. His conclusion that this results in an inadequate view of war reestablishes the primacy of political considerations.

In this opening chapter, Clausewitz examines the essence of war as an abstract concept, which he also calls "absolute" war and the "pure concept of war."[51] In itself, war is "nothing but a duel on a larger scale," or in a slight modification that clarifies war's means, "War is thus an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will." In this abstract notion of war, conflict tends to extremes. There is no logical limit to the force that each side will use or the objectives that each will seek. Even if one side attempts to aim for less than the complete overthrow of the enemy, since war is a series of reciprocal moves, conflict cannot be limited through unilateral action. Finally, there is no logical limit to the means to be used. In a contest for ultimate survival, each side will use their entire physical strength, as well as strength of will.

However, Clausewitz suggests that this war in theory is actually nothing but a "logical fantasy" which is unlikely to motivate actors in the real world.[52] In the real world, war takes place between two real adversaries who have some idea of each other's power and will, as well as some warning of the imminence of conflict. War in reality is also never absolute because it does not consist of a single, short blow. This is because a nation cannot bring the entirety of its

resources, to include "the fighting forces proper, the country . . . and its allies" to bear all at once, and because both sides may attempt to overcome initial shortcomings later in the conflict. Finally, war in reality is never absolute because it is never final—even a defeated state may still recover. For these reasons, the dynamic that leads to extremes fades, and the political purpose which governs the conflict reasserts itself.[53] This analysis yields Clausewitz's famous formula that *"War is Merely the Continuation of Policy by Other Means."* This result firmly establishes the dominance of political over military considerations.

The preceding analysis lays out two of the methods Clausewitz uses to make the point that war not only has political sources, but also that political purposes should establish a war's objectives. As discussed above, Clausewitz argues that war's logic comes from outside itself in Chapter Six-B of Book VIII. Wars are produced by political forces that continue to operate while wars are in progress; these same political forces establish the ends to be sought. In Chapter One of Book I, Clausewitz plays out the pure logic of war, which results in a view of war that is inadequate. An attempt to understand war solely through an abstract development of its internal logic yields absolute war, which must be rejected because it does not reflect reality. As soon as the political context is taken to account, this abstract logic of war is immediately exposed as incomplete; particular wars will always be decisively shaped by the contexts that give rise to them. "If we keep in mind that war springs from some political purpose, it is natural that the prime cause of its existence will remain the supreme consideration in conducting it."[54]

A third way Clausewitz makes clear his position that political purposes should be dominant in war is in his depiction of war as a trinity. Clausewitz writes:

> As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, . . . of the play of chance and probability within which the creative

> spirit is free to roam; . . . and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government.[55]

The character of a given war will be conditioned by each of these elements. However, Clausewitz's views on the dominance of the government and its political purposes as the governing forces in war come through clearly. As he restates later in the text: "Policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political."[56]

Politics not only provide the "womb in which war develops," they are also the source of wars' purposes. Given this analysis, Clausewitz's conclusion that the political object must guide the conduct of war is unsurprising. The next section will further elaborate on what an acceptance of this view entails.

POLITICAL PURPOSES AND THE CONDUCT OF WAR—IMPLICATIONS

This section will address four key implications of the idea that the political object must guide the conduct of war. The first recognizes that, because these political objects can vary in scale, war will take on many different forms. Second, because political interaction does not cease during war itself, these purposes can change during the course of the war. A third implication is related to this one; political influence on the war must be continuous. Finally, because governments are the custodians of the political interests of the states they represent, they can decisively affect success or failure in war. Each of these implications affects the nature of the interaction between statesmen and commanders in time of war. This section will conclude with an analysis of what Clausewitz would view as an optimal management of political purposes and military means.

Political Purposes Will Vary in Scale.[57]

Clausewitz points out that the political interests which lead to war can vary greatly, ranging between the extremes of national survival to cases in which a state hesitantly fights for an ally when it "no longer seems to reflect the state's true interests."[58] Wars can be either more total or more limited in character based on the political objectives that guide them.[59] This observation begins to explain the variety of wars in human experience. Since war is an instrument of policy, a military objective should be sought which serves the political end. To the extent that the conduct of war is under the control of a rational government, the interests at stake should also determine the level of effort to be made. In sum: "The political object—the original motive for the war—will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires."[60]

Though the reconciliation of military means to widely varying political ends starts to explain the widely varying character of different wars, it is important to note that for Clausewitz it does not tell the whole story. Clausewitz's trinitarian conception of war points to additional factors which also matter. First, the involvement of the people—whom Clausewitz identifies with the element of hatred and primordial violence in war—can greatly change a war's character. For example, "Between two peoples and two states there can be such tensions, such a mass of inflammable material, that the slightest quarrel can produce a wholly disproportionate effect—a real explosion."[61] A second reason viewing war as consisting only of rational calculations is inadequate is that such a conception leaves out the importance of military genius. The commander with this trait can best exploit the realm of chance and probability created by the uncertainty and danger of war. It must not be forgotten that "The art of war deals with living and with moral forces. . . . With

uncertainty in one scale, courage and self-confidence must be thrown on the other to correct the balance."[62]

Because of all of these factors, Clausewitz argues "War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to a given case."[63] It is a "paradoxical trinity" affected by the role of the people, the character of the commander and his army, and the political purposes of the government. The complex interaction of these three elements will shape the character of the war in any given case. While the variety of political purposes is important to the explanation of the variety of forms taken by war, it is not in itself sufficient.

Political Purposes Can Change during the Course of the War.

Another point to keep in mind while considering Clausewitz's argument that the political purpose must guide the conduct of the war is that the purpose may change during the course of a conflict. This is related to the point above that politics do not cease when war begins. As the war progresses "the original political objects can greatly alter during the course of the war and may finally change entirely since they are influenced by events and their probable consequences."[64] This provides one more reason why Clausewitz holds that the logic of war comes from outside itself. "War moves on its goal with varying speeds; but it always lasts long enough for influence to be exerted on the goal and for its own course to be changed in one way or another—long enough, in other words, to remain subject to the action of a superior intelligence."[65]

The Influence of the Political Object on the Conduct of War Must Be Continuous.

A third implication of the idea that war springs from political sources and has political purposes is that the influence of these political goals must shape the conduct of

the entire war. The following passage from *On War* makes this point clearly:

> Were [war] a complete, untrammeled, absolute manifestation of violence (as the pure concept would require), war would of its own independent will usurp the place of policy the moment policy had brought it into being; it would then drive policy out of office and rule by the laws of its own nature, very much like a mine that can explode only in the manner or direction predetermined by the setting. This, in fact, is the view that has been taken of the matter whenever some discord between policy and the conduct of war has stimulated theoretical distinctions of this kind. But in reality things are different, and this view is thoroughly mistaken.[66]

Again, this is a strong affirmation of Clausewitz's view that war lacks its own logic. "The main lines along which military events progress, and to which they are restricted, are political lines that continue throughout the war into the subsequent peace."[67]

Because war is an act of policy, and a means to a political end, the determination of the amount of effort that end justifies must be a political decision. This decision is not only required at the onset of war, but because of war's great uncertainties, must be continuously evaluated as a war progresses. According to Clausewitz:

> Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in *magnitude* and also in *duration*. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow.[68]

Not only will the political object affect the level of effort to be made, it will also affect the conduct of operations. Clausewitz rejects the idea that there is one best path to victory, finding instead that "many roads lead to success."[69] What is imperative is that the commander-in-chief has a thorough understanding of national policy and act accordingly.[70] At the highest levels, the idea of a purely military opinion or purely military advice does not make

sense: "No major proposal for war can be worked out in ignorance of political factors."[71]

The Role of Government in Determining Success.

A final implication of the idea that policy must be the guiding intelligence behind military operations is that the government will have a great role to play in determining a country's success or failure in war. Before elaborating on this point, however, it would be useful to clarify that Clausewitz assumes in *On War* that governments are the custodians of their people's interests. About government policy, Clausewitz says:

> It can be taken as agreed that the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values, and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests against other states. That it can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests, and vanity of those in power, is neither here nor there. In no sense can the art of war ever be regarded as the preceptor of policy, and here we can only treat policy as representative of all interests of the community.[72]

In this selection, Clausewitz clearly recognizes that government's policies may be misguided or serve selfish purposes. Nevertheless, he finds it appropriate for the purpose of *On War* to assume that government policy is made in the best interests of the political community as a whole. Policy provides the guiding intelligence that the military commander must serve.

However, even given Clausewitz's assumption that a critique of policy is outside the scope of a theory of war, there is one instance in *On War* in which he does criticize governments. It is useful to recall here that Clausewitz served in the Prussian armed forces during the Wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. In fact, he was captured during the Prussian defeat at the hands of Napoleon in October 1806, and his subsequent internment

in France was a personally humiliating experience.[73] In *On War,* Clausewitz argued that the key to the decisiveness Napoleon brought to warfare was related to societal changes.[74] The transformation of warfare in the 18th century was political, and it was a political failure for the leadership of Prussia, as well as France's other enemies, not to have recognized the implications of these changes. "Clearly the tremendous effects of the French Revolution abroad were caused not so much by new military methods and concepts as by radical changes in policies and administration, by the new character of the French people, and the like."[75] It was Napoleon who realized and took advantage of the fact that the "heart and temper of a nation" could make an enormous contribution to "the sum total of its politics, war potential, and fighting strength."[76] Even if military leaders perceived these changes (and Clausewitz does not claim that they did), it would have been beyond the scope of their authority to act on them.[77]

This brings out the general point that when Clausewitz is willing to judge policy in *On War*, it is based on whether it is in conformance with the spirit of the age. For this reason, Clausewitz is able to praise the very different policies of both Napoleon and Frederick Great. In an earlier age, Frederick the Great showed his wisdom by acting in accordance with his true situation in his campaign of 1760:

> As head of a small state resembling other states in most respects, and distinguished from them only by the efficiency of some branches of his administration, Frederick could not be an Alexander . . . His whole conduct of war, therefore, shows an element of restrained strength, . . . Neither vanity, ambition, nor vindictiveness could move him from this course; and it was this course alone that brought him success.[78]

Operating under new conditions, the most important of which was the increased role of the people in warfare, Napoleon deserves praise for acting with boldness in the pursuit of great objectives. He perfected and exploited the potential of the armed forces of the age, and is called by

Clausewitz the "God of War himself."[79] In an era of limited war, to pursue limited objectives with limited means is a mark of wisdom. However, when the Prussians and Austrians took the same approach against Napoleon in the campaigns of 1805, 1806, and 1809, it could only end in disaster.[80]

The wisdom of both Frederick the Great and Napoleon as discussed above was that they not only understood the potential of domestic resources, but also the character of the international environment. Governments can also contribute to their state's success in war by accurately interpreting the character of international relations. As an example, changes in international alignments can drastically affect the success of an offensive operation. "All depends on the existing political affiliations, interests, traditions, lines of policy, and the personalities of princes, ministers, favorites, mistresses, and so forth."[81] The ability to analyze these factors is the special expertise of political leaders, not military commanders.

It was mentioned in the section on theory that Clausewitz's focus in *On War* is on the operational use of armed forces to meet political ends. He does not claim to address broader questions of how societies should be best organized for their defense, or issues associated with the development of armed forces. Those issues are fundamentally political and are in the hands of the government. Nevertheless, Clausewitz does express a willingness to judge the government's performance. The government must not only be a capable interpreter of what the current international environment will allow, it must also adequately ensure that appropriate societal resources are mobilized in time of need.[82]

So far in this section, four key implications of Clausewitz's argument that political purposes must guide military operations have been explored. However, there is an additional point that should be clarified. What is the criterion against which Clausewitz is measuring the quality

of strategic decisionmaking? In other words, how does one judge the merit of a given state's strategy?

Clausewitz and Optimality.

Clausewitz seems to find the answer to this question in the efficient use of resources. An optimal strategy will accomplish political objectives at the lowest possible cost. According to Clausewitz:

> A prince or a general can best demonstrate his genius by managing a campaign exactly to suit his objectives and his resources, doing neither too much nor too little. But the effects of genius show not so much in novel forms of action as in the ultimate success of the whole.[83]

Not only is it contrary to good statecraft to waste resources, an attempt to apply a maximum effort when it does not appear justified by the political purpose is likely to fail.[84] Minor purposes will be unlikely to adequately motivate the human will to extreme exertions, and the war effort may falter for domestic reasons.[85] Means should be proportionate to ends.[86]

Clausewitz makes this point clearly when discussing the effect that the political objective will have on military operations. There are many places in *On War* where he seems to emphasize the dominance of the destructive principle, and elevate the destruction of the enemy above other military objectives. However, in Chapter Two of Book II, "Purpose and Means in War," he makes it clear that in a war for minor purposes only minor exertions of strength may be appropriate. The following passage is a useful statement of this point:

> When the motives and tensions of war are slight we can imagine that the very faintest prospect of defeat might be enough to cause one side to yield. If from the very start the other side feels that this is probable, it will obviously concentrate on bringing about this *probability* rather than take the long way around and totally defeat the enemy.[87]

The amount of effort to be expended should be proportionate to the ends being sought. This not only implies a careful management of resources, but also implies that different ways of achieving objectives may be successful in different circumstances. Clausewitz again shows his resistance to a positive doctrine for the conduct of war by stating that ". . . given certain conditions, different ways of reaching the objective are *possible* and that they are neither *inconsistent, absurd,* nor *even mistaken."*[88]

When discussing optimality, Clausewitz is also clear on another point. The goal of warfare cannot be to minimize bloodshed. In Chapter One of Book I, Clausewitz says that this goal may seem attractive, but: "Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst."[89] He returns to this point again a few pages later: "Avoidance of bloodshed, then, should not be taken as an act of policy if our main concern is to preserve our forces. On the contrary, if such a policy did not suit the particular situation, it would lead our forces to disaster."[90] Clausewitz wants to make it clear that whenever armed forces are used, one must consider combat.[91] Even if one wishes to attain victory through a means other than destroying the enemy, since war involves the interaction of living forces, the commander attempting this strategy must be aware that he does not have complete freedom of choice. According to Clausewitz, such a commander:

> . . . must never forget that he is moving on devious paths where the god of war may catch him unawares. He must always keep an eye on his opponent so that he does not, if the latter has taken up a sharp sword, approach him armed with only an ornamental rapier.[92]

A statesman may choose war as the optimum path to his political objective; however, he should not make the facile assumption that such a course of action will be without costs.

Clausewitz asserts repeatedly that the central activity of war is fighting. However, the parallel he draws between war and commerce clarifies his meaning on this point:

> The decision by arms is what cash payment is for all major and minor operations in war what cash payment is for commerce. Regardless how complex the relationship between the two parties, regardless how rarely settlements occur, they can never be entirely absent.[93]

A key point here is that the outcome of war depends on combat, but that does not mean that actual fighting always takes place. Instead: ". . . all action is undertaken in the belief that if the ultimate test of arms should actually occur, the outcome would be *favorable*."[94] Clausewitz restates this point again in a section entitled "Possible Engagements are to be Regarded as Real Ones Because of their Consequences." He writes: ". . . the destruction of the enemy's forces and the overthrow of the enemy's power can be accomplished only as the result of an engagement, no matter whether it really took place or was merely offered but not accepted."[95] Again, combat is central to war. Although there may be results even if fighting does not take place, those results are due to expectations of who would have prevailed in an actual trial of arms.

Of course, a further important question relates to how the various costs of war should be compared to one another. How can one weigh relative costs in resources, territory, and lives? Clausewitz is unwilling to claim that such a comparison is easily made.[96] However, he does imply that people may be willing to pay an extremely high price to preserve the existence of their political community.[97] When survival is at stake, Clausewitz expects few limits on the application of means.

Clausewitz clearly argues that the dictates of policy must continuously shape the course of the war. In another statement of this point, he says: "Policy, then, will permeate all military operations, and, in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them."[98] In

addition to affirming political control, however, here he has introduced an interesting qualifier. He suggests that the influence of policy may be somewhat limited by the "violent nature" of military operations. Is there something unique about the nature of military means that dictates a limit on appropriate political guidance and oversight? The next section will address the tensions associated with this relationship. Although Clausewitz does not establish a clear limit to appropriate political influence, his discussion makes it clear that political involvement will and should be extensive.

POLITICAL PURPOSES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON MILITARY OPERATIONS

In the concluding book of *On War*, Clausewitz returns to the relationship between ends and means and the concerns of the strategist. He reminds the reader that: ". . . as we argued in the second chapter of Book One (purpose and means in war), the nature of the political aim, the scale of demands put forth by either side, and the total political situation of one's own side, are all factors that in practice must decisively influence the conduct of war."[99] A few pages later, the reader is also reminded that policy "is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political."[100]

This section takes as its starting point Clausewitz's very clear position on the dominance of political over military considerations in war, and the implications of that view which were discussed in the previous section. The question to be explored here is whether there are any limits to that dominance, or any aspects of warfare that must be considered purely military. I will start by arguing that Clausewitz does not draw any clear lines between issues that are the proper concern of military commanders and those that belong to the political leadership. I will then examine Clausewitz's depiction of the relationship between

senior political leaders and military commanders to gain a better understanding of his expectations. I will conclude this section with an analysis of the dynamics that Clausewitz argues will affect the potential divergence of political and military perspectives.

Where is the Line?

When seeking to find where Clausewitz argues military operational expertise ought to take over and political control cease, the following quotation initially seems promising: "Only if statesmen look to certain military moves and actions to produce effects that are foreign to their nature do political decisions influence operations for the worse."[101] If, because of an inadequate understanding of the grammar of war, statesmen give orders that are self-defeating, they can have a negative impact on the conduct of war. However, Clausewitz's response to this problem is not to draw a line beyond which political leaders should not get involved. Instead, he advocates a different solution. This problem can be avoided if senior political leaders have some familiarity with military affairs. However, even this is not essential—all that is really necessary is that statesmen have ready access to military advice, and this should always be possible.[102] Of course, Clausewitz is assuming that statesmen inexperienced with warfare would be willing—and intelligently critical—consumers of that advice. The main point, however, is that Clausewitz does not use limited professional expertise as a basis for arguing that political influence over the conduct of war should observe certain limits.

Another possibility would be for Clausewitz to argue that political involvement is essential at the higher levels of war, but inappropriate at lower ones.[103] At first, it appears that this is the position Clausewitz takes on the matter. As has already been discussed, Clausewitz feels that political leaders must establish the overall aims for the war. The only limiting factor on this general proposition is that the

political aims must adapt themselves to military means. "War in general, and the commander in any specific instance, is entitled to require that the trend and designs of policy shall not be inconsistent with these means."[104] This may not be a small requirement, but Clausewitz argues that it will never do more than modify policy.

Moving on to a discussion of lower levels of war, Clausewitz argues that: "Policy, of course, will not extend its influence to operational details. Political considerations do not determine the posting of guards or the employment of patrols." In so stating, Clausewitz seems to argue that decisions at the tactical level are the prerogative of military commanders. However, his next sentence makes this ambiguous again: "But they [political considerations] are the more influential in the planning of war, of the campaign, and often even of the battle."[105] The planning of a battle, or to use another of Clausewitz's terms, the engagement, is generally thought to be a matter of tactics and not strategy. If political considerations may also be significant here, then Clausewitz does not establish a clear limitation on political control over military operations.[106]

This result is consistent with Clausewitz's non-doctrinaire approach to a theory of war. If war is actually "more than a true chameleon" which can take on an almost infinite variety of forms, the establishment of an immutable dividing line between the proper realms of political and military concern in the conduct of war is not possible. In any given case, the character of the political purposes, the involvement of the people, and the nature of the commander and his army would affect such decisions. Clausewitz explicitly states that at the highest level, the idea of a purely military opinion or purely military advice does not make sense. Although he is not as explicit on this point, it seems consistent with his analysis to argue that, especially in a war for limited purposes, even tactical operations may also be political in nature.

A second explanation for this result may be Clausewitz's emphasis on the need for military commanders, and especially the commander-in-chief, to clearly identify the nature of the war and act accordingly.[107] Perhaps because of his experiences in the Napoleonic Wars, Clausewitz seems particularly concerned that statesmen and commanders identify a near total war when that is what they face.[108] However, Clausewitz also discusses the need for commanders to recognize the character of the conflict when they are engaged in wars for small purposes. Noting that many past wars took on this form, Clausewitz writes:

> . . . a battle might be fought to celebrate the birthday of a monarch (Hochkirch), to satisfy military honor (Kunersdorf), or to assuage a commander's vanity (Freiberg). It is our opinion it is essential that a commander should recognize these circumstances and act in concert with their spirit.[109]

Therefore, recognizing the character of the war may also involve accepting being involved in a war of "armed observation."[110] In either of these cases, the need for political control at the lowest levels may not be an issue when commanders have internalized the political objectives and are already acting accordingly.

The Relationship of Senior Political and Military Leaders.

Given that Clausewitz does not establish a clear division between the proper realms of political influence and military operational expertise, what does his depiction of the relationship between senior political and military leaders say about his expectations? A first possibility is that one individual, such as Napoleon, has both roles. If this is the case, that person must have the attributes of both a statesman and a military leader. In Chapter Three-B, "Scale of the Military Objective and of the Effort to be Made," in Book VIII of *On War*, Clausewitz discusses some of the attributes that this individual should have. Clausewitz starts from the observation that, since war is a

political instrument, the degree of effort to be made should be appropriate to the objective to be reached. However, figuring this out "clearly calls for the intuition of a genius," since one must take into account the scale of the political demands, the situations and conditions of belligerents, the governments' and peoples' strength of will, character, and abilities, and the political sympathies of other states.[111] If the two roles are combined in one person, this one person needs not only the highly developed intuition needed to figure out the above puzzle, but also must have the skills of a general. "On the one hand, he is aware of the entire political situation; on the other, he knows exactly how much he can achieve with the means at his disposal."[112] In this case, though the demands on this individual are great, there is little to be said about civil-military tensions.

A second possibility is that the functions of political leadership and military command may belong to separate individuals. When examining what Clausewitz has to say about this case, it quickly becomes clear that Clausewitz expects political leaders to exercise a great deal of influence. As Clausewitz notes: ". . . it is a matter of common experience that despite the great variety and development of modern war its major lines are still laid down by governments; in other words, if we are to be technical about it, by a purely political and not a military body."[113] Not only do political leaders establish the political aims, which "are the business of the government alone,"[114] Clausewitz also expects them to establish the size of the army,[115] and the system of supply.[116] The commander will accept the resources provided by the government, and make the best use of them.

Clausewitz also seems to expect a great deal of communication between the commander-in-chief and the government. The mechanism that he proposes is that, if practicable, the commander-in-chief should sit in the cabinet, so that cabinet members can be involved in his activities.[117] Clausewitz praises the practice adopted by the allies in 1813-1815 of relocating the cabinet closer to the

theater of operations in order to make this practicable.[118] Clausewitz gives another indication of the extensive communication he expects to occur between military leaders and the government in Chapter Twenty-Two, "The Culminating Point of Victory," of Book VII. In this chapter, Clausewitz discusses the factors that cause an offensive to lose power as it advances. He writes:

> If a monarch does not command his troops in person . . . a new and very serious handicap arises from the loss of time involved in the transmission of messages. Even the widest powers conferred on a commander will not suffice to meet every contingency that may arise in his sphere of action.[119]

This passage is useful not only for what it reveals about the anticipated character of relations between supreme military commanders and their governments, but also expresses again Clausewitz's emphasis that political control of military operations must be continuous.

Although Clausewitz provides indications of what he expects the relationship between the political leader and military commander to be like, he does not address problems that may arise. The following passage suggests that Clausewitz feels that in establishing the dominance of policy, he has resolved all questions:

> From this point of view again, no conflict need arise any longer between political and military interests—not from the nature of the case at any rate—and should it arise it will show no more than lack of understanding. It might be thought that policy could make demands on war which war could not fulfill; but that hypothesis would challenge the natural and unavoidable assumption that policy knows the instrument it means to use. If policy reads the course of military events correctly, it is wholly and exclusively entitled to decide which events and trends are best for the objectives of the war.[120]

By assuming that "policy knows the instrument it means to use," Clausewitz makes it unnecessary to address the actions that the military commander should take if the political leader's direction is inconsistent with military

means. And what if policy does not read "the course of military events correctly"? Does the military commander have the right or obligation to disobey orders when he feels them to be either contrary to the leader's main purposes or impossible to carry out? Clausewitz gives us little guidance for navigating waters such as these.

One further point should be made on this issue. Despite the many historical examples Clausewitz uses when discussing other issues, he never provides an example of a confrontation between a military and a political leader over a strategic disagreement. In addition, when describing the extensive coordination that should occur between these leaders in time of war, Clausewitz emphasizes the importance of keeping the political leaders abreast of military strategy more than he does political leaders keeping the military commander informed of their intent. One example from Chapter Six-A, "The Effect of the Political Aim on the Military Objective," of Book VIII may illustrate this point. In this chapter, Clausewitz describes a case in which one country contributes troops to support an ally's defense but does not support the ally's cause with any intensity. In this case, Clausewitz argues that the contributing government is likely to maintain control over its own forces. The commander of this deployed force is then "dependent only on his own government, and the objective the latter sets him will be as ambiguous as its aims."[121] One interesting thing about this scenario is that Clausewitz never implies that this gives the commander cause to complain of his government's management; he seems to expect that the military commander should just accept this situation of ambiguity and act accordingly. In such a situation, the motives for war may gradually dissipate, in which case the real obligation of the commander "will be to make sure the delicate balance is not suddenly upset in the enemy's favor and the half-hearted war does not become a real war after all."[122] Although it seems consistent with Clausewitz's approach to argue that communications at the highest level ought to be both extensive and two-way, he

does not provide an example in which a military commander has a basis for complaint.

Recognizing that to do so one must depart from Clausewitz, it is still useful to consider what one would find by pushing this point a bit further. What if the political leader is not knowledgeable about military means, lacks the capability or willingness to take advantage of military advice, and is giving what appears to be self-defeating orders from a military perspective? Here it is useful to recall that Clausewitz's basic justification for political control is strategic effectiveness, and even from this perspective his argument for firm control is unmodified by any exceptions. If one were to add the context of a liberal democratic society, the argument for political control would only get stronger. In a government based on the principle of rule by the people, preservation of the system itself relies on civilian control of the military. As Peter Feaver argues, "Civilians should get what they ask for, even if it is not what they really want. In other words, civilians have a right to be wrong."[123] The responsibility for holding elected political leaders accountable for their choices rests with citizens, and perhaps with other branches of government. The role of the military leader is to assist to as great extent as possible in the crafting of a policy that makes strategic sense, but the final choice rests with the statesman.

Dynamics of the Wartime Civil-Military Relationship.

The argument to this point has been that Clausewitz does not establish a clear limit on the influence of political leaders over the conduct of war, but that he does seem to expect this political guidance to be extensive. The aims of the war will be political, and these aims will exert a continuous influence over its conduct. His depiction of the relationship between political and military leaders also suggests that he expects their coordination to be extensive to ensure that war remains a faithful instrument of policy.

However, this does not yet fully capture all that Clausewitz has to say on the subject of wartime civil-military relations. He also provides some indications of when these relationships may be more or less harmonious. Two of the factors that may affect this are the intensity of the war (measured by the involvement of the population and the strain between states), and the scale of the objectives.

Before discussing his arguments on this point, it is useful to recall the logic of absolute war that Clausewitz discusses in Chapter One of Book I. Clausewitz argues that war's internal logic drives it to an absolute state in which there are no limits to the efforts to be devoted or the force to be used because the objective is the total overthrow of the enemy. In this abstract concept of war, the enemy is in the same situation and an escalation to extremes occurs as both sides struggle for survival. In *On War*, Clausewitz seems to associate this logic of total victory with the military perspective. Even when actual circumstances prevent this logic from fully being realized, Clausewitz argues that commanders must keep it in mind. It becomes "a general point of reference, so that he who wants to learn from theory becomes accustomed to keeping that point in view constantly, to measuring all his hopes and fears by it, and to approximating it *when he can or when he must.*"[124]

Given this association of the military perspective with the logic of total victory, Clausewitz's argument that in wars of greater intensity political and military perspectives will tend to converge makes sense. In discussing wars of lesser intensity, Clausewitz argues: "The less involved the population and the less serious the strains within states and between them, the more political requirements in themselves will dominate and tend to be decisive."[125] In this situation, the military objective certainly cannot be total defeat of the enemy because it would not be in accordance with political aims. It also seems reasonable to argue that the challenges associated with ensuring that means are proportionate to the ends being sought could be significant. On the other hand:

> The more powerful and inspiring the motives for war, the more they affect the belligerent nations and the fiercer the tensions that precede the outbreak, the closer will war approach its abstract concept, the more important will be the destruction of the enemy, the more closely will the military aims and political objects of war coincide, and the more military and less political will war appear to be.[126]

After this passage, Clausewitz is quick to reassert that this is only a question of appearance; both limited and total wars are political in nature. However, the main point is that when the political aim is the total defeat of the enemy, this aim and the military objective will tend to converge. Ensuring that means are proportionate to the ends should become less difficult as the more total nature of the objective demands a more unlimited application of the means.

A similar argument could be made about the scale of the political aims sought in a given conflict. Clausewitz approvingly quotes Napoleon in arguing that determining the means appropriate to achieving political aims can require the genius of a Newton.[127] However, the more the aims approach the total overthrow of the enemy or the preservation of one's survival, the more political aims and the military objectives that support them will become the same. When the war's stakes reach the upper most limits, one could imagine also that the willingness to devote resources to that end would grow proportionately.

The idea that military and political perspectives will converge as the stakes in warfare increase is interesting, but may not apply in every case. One way to see this is to drop the assumption Clausewitz generally maintains in *On War* that states are unitary, almost organic entities. Once that assumption is dropped, it becomes clear that one not only has to ask whether national survival is at stake, but increasingly about threats to treasured goals of subnational groups. An example from Clausewitz's political writing may be useful here. In his essay, "On the Political Advantages and Disadvantages of the Prussian *Landwehr*" (1818), Clausewitz makes the argument that the establishment of

regional militias is in Prussia's best interests. However, he realizes that the dilemma is really the following: "The *Landwehr* increases the danger of revolution; disarming the *Landwehr* increases the danger of invasion and enslavement."[128] Preserving the militia may be a valuable means of increasing Prussia's security, but social conservatives would prefer to see it abolished because of the threat that it poses to the existing social order.[129] The question is not just about what is necessary to survival, it is a matter of what exactly one its attempting to preserve. A similar dilemma is discussed in Chapter 26, "The People in Arms," of Book VI of *On War.* In this chapter, Clausewitz recognizes but does not address the objection that arming the people in war puts a society on the path to revolution.[130] If political perspectives are divided, it is unclear that even a constant military perspective will converge with them in any given case.

A second interesting aspect of Clausewitz's discussion of political aims and military objectives in total war is his association of the idea of total war with the military perspective. Clausewitz associates military logic with the pursuit of total victory. Samuel Huntington provides an interesting contrast to this point of view in his 1957 book on civil-military relations, *Soldier and the State*. Huntington argues just the opposite when discussing American civil-military relations in World War II. It was the civilians on a liberal crusade who adopted the goals of total victory; to the extent that military figures adopted this view they were abandoning the professional military perspective that would have led them to more conservative policies.[131] Given these very different interpretations of the abstract "military perspective," it is likely that the predispositions of key military and political decisionmakers are actually a matter for empirical investigation in any given case.[132]

Conclusion.

There are several points concerning civil-military relations and the use of force on which Clausewitz is extremely clear. The first is that, since war is an act of policy, political considerations must dominate the conduct of war. The purpose of war is to achieve some political aim, therefore military objectives must be chosen on this basis. Because politics do not cease to function when war begins, political considerations will exert a continuous influence on the conduct of military operations. In order to carry out the state's policies, it is vital that the commander at the highest level be not only a good general with a thorough understanding of military means, but also a statesman with a strong grasp of national policy and the political context.

A second clear expectation is that political leaders will themselves be very engaged in the conduct of military operations. Clausewitz's working assumption is that, from the initiation of war through the subsequent peace, the political leader's decisions are based on the sum total of the interests of his political community. (At a minimum, Clausewitz seems to be arguing that this is the most useful perspective for the military leader to take regarding the political leader's purposes.) Possibly in conjunction with the military commander, the political leader will determine the means he is willing to devote to a war, taking care to ensure that these means are proportionate to the ends being sought. In planning as well as during operations, it would be ideal if the military commander could sit in the cabinet so that political leaders could be involved in his activities. If a political leader does not have a strong background in military affairs, he can still maintain direction of operations by seeking military advice.

Third, though Clausewitz expects there to be operational details that are beyond the scope of political leaders, he does not draw an immutable line separating the realms proper to political control and military operational expertise. It seems consistent with his depiction of the great potential

diversity of war to argue that this division would be particular to each specific case. When conflict is extremely intense or the purposes are total, it seems unlikely that tensions over minor operational details would arise. The great concerns of both political and military leaders for national survival may make minor operational details less of an issue in this case.

Where Clausewitz is of less assistance is in thinking through any difficulties that may arise between military and political figures at the highest levels. One of the reasons for this is his assumption that "policy knows the instrument it means to use."[133] It is not clear what action Clausewitz expects the military commander to take in a case in which the political leader does not, in fact, know the instrument he or she is attempting to use and gives potentially self-defeating orders. Clausewitz also does not discuss any exigencies in which the military commander must have autonomy in the conduct of military operations.

In the end, Clausewitz issues challenges to both statesmen and commanders. Political leaders should think like strategists, being clear at the outset about purposes and means—recognizing that these may change in the course of events.[134] Political leaders are expected to be the authority on domestic strengths and weaknesses, as well as the international environment. Clausewitz also seems to charge political leaders with the responsibility of being familiar with military means; at a minimum, this means being intelligent consumers of military advice.[135] At the same time, military leaders are also challenged. Not only are they called upon to be the experts in the "grammar" of war, they must always remain aware that war's purposes come from outside itself and that these political purposes must ultimately govern. The reader may decide which of these challenges is the most demanding.

ENDNOTES

1. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated and with an introduction by Samuel B. Griffith, foreword by B.H. Liddell Hart, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963; Oxford University Press Paperback, 1971, p. 11.

2. *Ibid*., pp. 81-84. According to Sun Tzu: "He whose generals are able and not interfered with by the sovereign will be victorious."

3. William Manchester, *The American Caesar*, New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1978, p. 789.

4. Raymond Aron discusses Hitler's leadership in these terms in *Clausewitz Philosopher of War*, trans. Christine Booker and Norman Stone, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1985, pp. 277-289.

5. According to Russell Weigley, "Through much of the Civil War, President Lincoln as an activist Commander in Chief exercised the kind of detailed supervision of the military conduct of the war—of strategy, operations, and on occasion tactics—that a century later was to exacerbate many officers when President Lyndon B. Johnson oversaw the Vietnam War." See Russell F. Weigley, "The American Military and the Principle of Civilian Control from McClellan to Powell," *The Journal of Military History Special Issue*, Vol. 57, October 1993, pp. 37-38.

6. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision,* 2nd ed., New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc., 1999, p. 236.

7. Clausewitz, in an unpublished note on an early version of a theory of war. Republished in Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 63. All citations from *On War* will be from this edition.

8. Aron, p. 235.

9. "Note of 10 July 1827," reprinted in *On War*, p. 70. In a later note Clausewitz wrote: "The first chapter of Book One alone I regard as finished." This latter note is reprinted in *On War* as "Unfinished Note, Presumably Written in 1830," p. 70.

10. This statement agrees with Paret's introductory essay to *On War*, p. 4. Aron also sees Chapter One of Book I as the expression of Clausewitz's most mature views (p. 68). I also find compelling Azar Gat's analysis that Clausewitz's final ideas on the dual nature of war and the primacy of politics begin to show themselves in the latter part of Book Six, "Defense"; Book Seven, "Offense"; and continue to evolve in

Book Eight, "War Plans." In any case, he agrees with Paret and Aron in their assessment of the late date of the revision of the first few chapters of Book I. See Gat's Appendix, "Clausewitz's Final Notes Revisited."

11. "Author's Preface to an Unpublished Manuscript on the Theory of War, Written between 1816 and 1818," reprinted in *On War*, p. 61.

12. An example in which Clausewitz applies this limitation in his own analysis can be drawn from Chapter Two, "Absolute and Real War," of Book VII "War Plans," p. 580. In that chapter, Clausewitz argues that Napoleon managed to approximate absolute war through his mobilization of national resources and energetic conduct of campaigns. However, one cannot reasonably argue that this is the only true form of war, because: " . . . in that case, what are we to say about all the wars that have been fought since the days of Alexander—excepting certain Roman campaigns—down to Bonaparte? We should have to condemn them outright, . . . Worse still, we should be bound to say that in spite of our theory there may even be other wars of this kind [limited wars] in the next ten years, and that our theory, though strictly logical, would not apply to reality." For Clausewitz, this is too high a price to pay to attain logical consistency. Clausewitz makes this point again in Chapter Three-B of the same book, pp. 593-594.

13. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 144.

14. *Ibid*.

15. In a useful discussion of Clausewitz's views on theory, Michael Howard points out that Clausewitz actually rejects three existing positions on theory and war. The first overemphasizes the technical expertise that creates the tools of warfare. The second argues that the qualities that create gifted commanders are a product of individual genius and therefore not subject to analysis. The third approach Clausewitz rejects, and the one I am discussing here, emphasizes the development of absolute and always valid principles of war. This discussion is in Michael Howard, *Clausewitz, Past Masters*, ed. Keith Thomas, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 22-25.

16. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 134.

17. *Ibid*., pp. 135-136. Peter Paret discusses Clausewitz's critique of these two military theorists in "The Genesis of *On War*," an introductory essay to Clausewitz's text, *On War*, pp. 10-11.

18. In a similar vein, Clausewitz writes: "It is even more ridiculous when we consider that these very critics usually exclude all moral

qualities from strategic theory, and only examine material factors. They reduce everything to a few mathematical formulas of equilibrium and superiority, of time and space, limited by a few angles and lines. If that were really all, it would hardly provide a scientific problem for a schoolboy." *On War*, p. 178.

19. Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 138-140.

20. *Ibid*., p. 140.

21. *Ibid*., p. 141.

22. *Ibid*., p. 95.

23. *Ibid*., p. 142.

24. *Ibid*., p. 177.

25. *Ibid*.

26. *Ibid*., p. 143. Clausewitz also addresses this point in Chapter Two, "Purpose and Means in War," of Book I when he writes ". . . we must always consider with the conclusion of peace the purpose of the war has been achieved and its business is at an end."

27. *Ibid*., p. 144.

28. Clausewitz did write on these questions. A particularly relevant piece is "Our Military Institutions," reprinted in Carl von Clausewitz, *Historical and Political Writings*, trans. and eds. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 313-328. However, the fact that Clausewitz writes on these issues elsewhere merely reaffirms the idea that he finds them extrinsic to a theory of war.

29. Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 131-132.

30. This idea that principles are less easy to derive when warfare is indecisive is discussed in at least two places. One of these is Chapter 30, "Defense of a Theater of Operations—Concluded: Where a Decision Is Not the Objective," Book VI, pp. 516-517; another is Chapter 13, "Maneuver," Book VII, p. 542.

31. *Ibid*., p. 604.

32. *Ibid*., p. 222.

33. *Ibid*., p. 187.

34. *Ibid*., p. 178.

35. *Ibid*., p. 113.

36. *Ibid*., p. 101.

37. *Ibid*., p. 119.

38. *Ibid*., p. 120.

39. *Ibid*.

40. *Ibid*., p. 122.

41. *Ibid*., p. 111.

42. *Ibid*., p. 100. The italics are in the original text. Clausewitz tended to use italics frequently, and when quoting him, I will keep to his usage.

43. *Ibid*., p. 149.

44. "Essentially war is fighting, for fighting is the only effective principle in the manifold activities generally designated as war." Even though war depends on other products of human development for its tools, ". . . fighting itself still remains a distinct activity; the more so as it operates in a peculiar element—that of danger." *On War*, p. 127.

45. See Chapter Three, "On Military Genius," Book I, *On War*, pp. 100-112.

46. *Ibid*., p. 605.

47. *Ibid*.

48. *Ibid*.

49. *Ibid*.

50. "Unfinished Note, Presumably Written in 1830," reprinted in *On War*, p. 70.

51. The summary in this paragraph and the next is drawn from *On War*, pp. 75-87.

52. *Ibid*., p. 78.

53. In another useful summary, Clausewitz states that in the abstract world, "since the extreme must always be the goal, the greatest effort must be exerted. However, any such pronouncement would be an abstraction and would leave the real world quite unaffected." *On War*, p. 78.

54. *Ibid*., p. 87.

55. *Ibid*., p. 89.

56. *Ibid*., p. 605.

57. Although Clausewitz makes this point in several chapters of *On War*, he was apparently dissatisfied with his treatment of it. Based on his note of 1827, Clausewitz wanted to bring two themes out more clearly while revising the entire book. The first of these is that there are two kinds of war: in the first, "the objective is to overthrow the enemy"; in the second, the objective is "merely to occupy some of his frontier-districts." There may be a transition between the two kinds of war, but the aims are quite different, "and their points of irreconcilability" must be brought out. This discussion is from Clausewitz's "Note of 10 July 1827," reprinted in *On War*, p. 69.

58. *Ibid*., p. 94.

59. This theme is reflected in Chapter One, Book I, and elaborated on in Chapter Two, "Purpose and Means in War." "But the aim of disarming the enemy, the object of war in the abstract . . .) is in fact not always encountered in reality, and need not be fully achieved as a condition of peace. . . . The reason why the object of war that emerges in theory is sometimes inappropriate to actual conflict is that war can be of two different kinds, a point we discussed in the first chapter." *On War*, p. 91.

60. *Ibid*., p. 81.

61. *Ibid*.

62. *Ibid*., p. 86.

63. *Ibid*., p. 89.

64. *Ibid*., p. 92.

65. *Ibid*., p. 87.

66. *Ibid*.

67. *Ibid*., p. 605.

68. *Ibid*., p. 92.

69. *Ibid*., p. 94.

70. *Ibid*., p. 111.

71. *Ibid*., pp. 607-608. Peter Paret recounts an incident in which Clausewitz was sent two academic strategy problems by a friend, and asked to evaluate them. Clausewitz sent them back without solutions. He wrote to his friend that a solution would not make any sense unless there were more information given about the military aims of each side, and the overall relations between the two countries and other powers. See Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 379.

72. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 607.

73. Peter Paret discusses the impact of this experience in Chapter 7, "The Ideal of German Liberty," of *Clausewitz and the State*.

74. Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 515, 593.

75. *Ibid*., p. 609.

76. *Ibid*., p. 220.

77. *Ibid*., p. 609.

78. *Ibid*., p. 179.

79. *Ibid*., p. 583.

80. *Ibid*., p. 584.

81. *Ibid*., p. 569.

82. Clausewitz addresses these issues in his political writings. See fn. 28.

83. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 177.

84. For a differing interpretation, see Michael Handel, *Masters of War*, London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1992, pp. 10-11. Handel argues that the Weinberger Doctrine, which sets limiting conditions on when U.S. military forces should become engaged in armed conflict, is

Clauswitzian—a proposition with which I would disagree on several counts. The most relevant here is the Weinberger Doctrine's injunction against "half-hearted" measures. Given very limited political goals, I believe Clausewitz would instead find that what some would call "half-hearted measures" would be appropriate—as long as the user remained aware that his ability to get away with employing limited means also depends on enemy actions.

85. Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 78, 585.

86. As Clausewitz clarifies, domestic concerns are only one factor that affects the amount of effort to be applied in war. See *On War*, p. 602.

87. *Ibid*., p. 91.

88. *Ibid*., p. 93.

89. *Ibid*., p. 75.

90. *Ibid*., p. 98.

91. *Ibid*., pp. 95, 386.

92. *Ibid*., p. 99.

93. *Ibid*., p. 97.

94. *Ibid*.

95. *Ibid*., p. 181.

96. In Book V, "Military Forces," Clausewitz recognizes that one way to decide upon the optimum mix of branches in the armed forces would be to weigh the relative costs of establishing them against their relative effectiveness on the battlefield. However, he quickly acknowledges the difficulty of doing this in any reliable way. One of the intangibles, of course, is the value of human life—a value ". . . on which no one would be willing to set a price in cold figures." *On War*, p. 286.

97. In his chapter on the "The People in Arms," he considers whether bringing the people into warfare as a last ditch effort at homeland defense has justifiable costs. He seems to conclude that it does. "There will always be time enough to die; like a drowning man who will clutch instinctively at a straw, it is a natural law of the moral world that a nation that finds itself on the brink of an abyss will try to save itself by any means." *On War*, p. 483.

98. *Ibid*., p. 87.

99. *Ibid*., p. 602.

100. *Ibid*., p. 607.

101. *Ibid*., p. 608. Clausewitz is careful to clarify here that he is not trying to suggest that military leaders make the best policymakers. For example, he argues that "the military and political affairs of France were never in worse hands than when the brothers Belle-Isle and the Duc de Choiseul were responsible—good soldiers though they all were."

102. *Ibid*. Clausewitz argues, "What is needed in the post [political leader] is distinguished intellect and strength of character. He can always get the necessary military information somehow or other."

103. This is the position Samuel Huntington takes in his classic work on American civil-military relations, though he also assumes that actions at lower levels will lack political implications. For example, he argues, "The statesman has no business deciding, as Hitler did in the later phases of World War II, whether battalions in combat should advance or retreat." Samuel Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 77.

104. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 87.

105. *Ibid*., p. 606.

106. For an analysis that takes a different perspective, see Handel's *Masters of War*. Handel's interpretation is that Clausewitz, like Sun Tzu and Jomini, warns of political interference in the lower level details of running a war. See particularly p. 12 and pp. 49-57 of Handel's book. I cannot agree with Handel's interpretation of Clausewitz's views on this point. Although Clausewitz recognizes that political leaders may lack detailed operational expertise, his solution is not to argue that they must not be involved.

107. Clausewitz argues that, before a war begins: "The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature." *On War*, p. 88. Similarly, such awareness is necessary for the prosecution of a war to a successful conclusion. "To bring a war, or one of its campaigns, to a successful close requires a thorough grasp of national policy. On that level strategy and policy coalesce: the commander-in-chief is simultaneously a statesman." *On War*, p. 111.

108. *Ibid*., pp. 583-584.

109. *Ibid*., p. 222.

110. *Ibid*., p. 81. See also Clausewitz's Chapter 18, "Tension and Rest," of Book III, especially p. 222.

111. *Ibid*., pp. 585-596.

112. *Ibid*., p. 112.

113. *Ibid*., p. 608.

114. *Ibid*., p. 89.

115. *Ibid*., pp. 196, 360.

116. *Ibid*., p. 337.

117. *Ibid*., p. 608.

118. *Ibid*., pp. 608-609.

119. *Ibid*., p. 569.

120. *Ibid*., p. 607.

121. *Ibid*., p. 603.

122. *Ibid*., p. 604.

123. Peter D. Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz and the Question of Civilian Control," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Winter 1996, p. 154.

124. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 581.

125. *Ibid*., p. 81.

126. *Ibid*., p. 87-88.

127. *Ibid*., pp. 112, 586.

128. Clausewitz, *Historical and Political Writings*, p. 332.

129. For a valuable discussion of Clausewitz's involvement in the Prussian military reform movement, see Chapter 8, "The Military Reformers," of Paret's *Clausewitz and the State*.

130. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 479.

131. Huntington, pp. 326-335.

132. Morris Janowitz discusses the presence of divergent views among senior leaders in the U.S. military in Chapter 13, "The Logic of War," of his *Professional Soldier*, London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1960; New York: The Free Press, 1964, pp. 257-279.

133. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 607.

134. *Ibid*., p. 579.

135. *Ibid*., p. 608.

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