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Carl von Clausewitz and his Philosophy of War

Hughes, R. Gerald

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tel: +44 1970 62 2400
email: is@aber.ac.uk

Clausewitz, still the Master of War? On Strategy in the Twenty-first Century

Abstract This article is concerned with the work of the Prussian soldier and philosopher of war, Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831). The article examines recent developments in debates about the cotemporary relevance of Clausewitz for strategic thought. The piece surveys the history of misperception and misinterpretation directed at Clausewitz since his death in 1831 as a prelude to arguing for his continued relevance. It argues that much of the criticism directed at Clausewitz is prompted not by any real demonstration of his obsolescence, but is more often rooted in a visceral dislike of past proponents of Clausewitz for their aggressive and militaristic policies. Only an appreciation of the history of the misappropriation of, and the misconceptions surrounding, has the added advantage of assisting the reader in his/her interpretation of Clausewitz. Clausewitz's Universalist appeal renders him more useful than ever in the twenty-first century, an era of globalisation and fragmentation.

'Clausewitz's greatest lesson for my profession was that the soldier, for all his patriotism, valor, and skill, forms just one leg in a triad. Without all three legs engaged, the military, the government, and the people, the enterprise cannot stand.' General Colin L. Powell, United States Army, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1989-93.¹

'You will be horrified to hear that I have never read Clausewitz or Delbrück or Haushofer. The opinion on Clausewitz in our general staff was that of a theoretician to be read by professors.' Former German General Leo Geyr von Scharpenberg to Basil H. Liddell Hart, 24 September 1961.²

In the nineteenth century the philosophies of the Prussian military thinker Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) became a canon of faith amongst all the world's leading militaries. The holy book of this enduring faith was (and is) Clausewitz's posthumously-published book, *Vom Kriege* (*On War*). Today, interest in Clausewitz shows no sign of abating and the latest renaissance in Clausewitzian studies has been spearheaded by many eminent scholars.³ A large proportion of

¹ Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *A Soldier's Way: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1995), p. 208.

² Williamson Murray, 'A Whale against an Elephant; Britain and Germany' in James Lacey (ed.), *Great Strategic Rivalries: From the Classical World to the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 604 (n.9).

³ See, for instance, Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Andreas. *Clausewitz's Puzzle: The Political Theory of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jan Willem Honig, 'Clausewitz's *On War*: Problems of text and translation' in Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Andreas, Jan Willem Honig and Daniel Moran (eds), *Clausewitz: The State and War* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011), pp. 55-73; Patrick Porter, 'Good anthropology, bad history: the cultural turn in studying war.' *Parameters*, 37/2 (2007), pp. 45-58; Beatrice Heuser, 'Clausewitz's Ideas of Strategy and Victory' in Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 138-62; Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War*:

the scholarly debates on Clausewitz continue to revolve around the question of whether he is still ‘relevant’.⁴ And some scholars have built their careers on critiquing Clausewitz. The Israeli scholar Martin van Creveld, for instance, did just that in his 1991 text *On Future War* - advertised as ‘The most radical reinterpretation of armed conflict since Clausewitz’. Van Creveld cast doubt on Clausewitz’s contemporary relevance because *On War*, as with all ‘classical strategy’, was held to be the ‘product of specific periods and circumstances.’⁵ (That said, van Creveld still rated Clausewitz’s *On War* ‘The second best book on war ever written’!)⁶ The military historian John Keegan, on the other hand, had little of van Creveld’s evenhandedness and his views on Clausewitz has provoked reactions on several occasions.⁷

In truth, many of those who deny the applicability to his theories in the twenty-first century have an agenda to undermine Clausewitz as they believe that his predominance has normalised and even promoted war as a viable policy option. Following his death from typhoid in 1831, the subsequent deification of Clausewitz as a strategist was due, not least, to the outstanding success of Prussian arms in the three wars of German unification between 1864 and 1871.⁸ Henceforward, Clausewitz’s star rose in tandem with that of the new Imperial German army as the latter became acknowledged as *the* leading national exponent of the martial arts. In short, Clausewitz and the Prussian-German military system became a model that was universally admired.⁹ (Some armies even adopted the spiked helmet, the *Pickelhaube*, and the ‘goose-step’ (*Stechschritt*) drill-march). Signally, Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke, chief of staff of the Prussian/German army between 1857 and 1888, described Clausewitz as ‘the military mind which most influenced my work.’¹⁰ In truth, Otto von Bismarck, Minister President of Prussia from 1862 to 1890,¹¹ had only resorted to conflict with extreme reluctance: ‘I would have grasped at any solution that led to the expansion of Prussia and German unity without war.’¹² Yet, when we recall the foundation of the Second Reich, we remember Bismarck’s self-declared policy of ‘Blood and Iron’, and the success of German arms, we forget Bismarck’s aversion to war except as a last resort. Such a policy would have found favour with Clausewitz himself.

A Biography (London: Atlantic Books, 2007); and Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, ‘Introduction’ in Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1-13.

⁴ For an example of an article assessing the debates on the contemporary relevance of Clausewitz, see Colin M. Fleming, ‘New or Old Wars? Debating a Clausewitzian Future.’ *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32/2 (2009), pp. 213-41.

⁵ Martin van Creveld, *On Future War* (London: Brassey’s, 1991), p. 206.

⁶ Van Creveld, *On Future War*, p. 231.

⁷ See, for example, Christopher Bassford, ‘John Keegan and the Grand Tradition of Trashing Clausewitz’, *War in History*, 1/3 (1994), pp. 319–36.

⁸ On these, see Dennis E. Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2nd rev. edn. 2015).

⁹ R. Gerald Hughes, ‘War as Political Violence’ in Marie Breen-Smyth (ed.) *The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Violence* (Farnham (UK): Ashgate, 2012), pp. 355-6.

¹⁰ Van Creveld, *On Future War*, p. 34.

¹¹ Bismarck was also Chancellor of the German Empire between 1871 and 1890. On this era, see Gordon A. Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, rev. edn. 1981), pp. 61-179.

¹² Marcus Jones, ‘Strategy as Character: Bismarck and the Prusso-German Question, 1862–1878’ in Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich and James Lacey (eds), *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 86.

Bismarck had been all too aware of the danger of using war to achieve national goals.¹³ His successors, most notably Wilhelm II and Hitler, were not. In crude terms, it was often asserted that, after Bismarck departed the scene in 1890, the leadership of Germany disastrously neglected many fundamentals pertaining to the conduct of politics *and* war.¹⁴ Clausewitz was no longer read, and his insistence that political ends should drive military strategy was turned on its head as the German army insisted that ‘military necessity’ should drive policy and strategy.¹⁵ This did not prevent British commentators from attaching Clausewitz to any unpleasant German practice. During the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21), the MP Oswald Moseley denounced the policy of official British government reprisals as being ‘copied and taken *en bloc* from the doctrines of the German military...[and] closely pursued by that nation throughout the War.’ For Moseley, British policy in Ireland was ‘the old, well-known system, outlined in the doctrines of Clausewitz and others, of collective punishment.’¹⁶ But the widespread notion that Clausewitzian method was effective, if barbaric, was undermined by the shattering defeats of the German state in two world wars. These destroyed the Universal admiration for the German military machine. After 1918 Imperial Germany, it was acknowledged, had achieved amazing feats of arms, but had entirely neglected the relationship between (military) means and (political) ends. Germany had embarked up multi-front wars against multiple opponents with violence as an end in itself.¹⁷ In all probability, Clausewitz would never have endorsed such a strategy but he was now (wrongly) dismissed as a nihilistic advocate of aggressive war for its own sake, found himself indicted as the progenitor of the endlessly destructive mindset of German militarism.¹⁸ A number of the scholarly pieces on Clausewitz engage in counterfactual speculation. Some writers have set up debates on real life case studies: *viz.* effectively asking the question *What would Clausewitz have done?*¹⁹

A major problem for Clausewitzian thinking, as with the concept of appeasement, undoubtedly lies in the association with the person of Adolf Hitler.²⁰ Until recently scholars usually asserted that, despite the board brush of Nazi progenitor applied to Clausewitz, there was no real

¹³ Jones, ‘Strategy as Character’, pp. 109-10. On the limited political utility of war for the European state in the Bismarckian era, see Karl-Ernst Jeismann, *Das Problem des Präventivkrieges im europäischen Staatensystem: mit besonderem Blick auf die Bismarckzeit* (Freiburg and Munich: Karl Alber, 1957).

¹⁴ In his history of Germany Gordon Craig wrote: ‘When the great star fell, many Germans had a chilling presentiment that their country had suffered an irreplaceable loss governed with such intelligence and assurance. Time was to prove them correct...’. Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945*, p. 178.

¹⁵ Murray, ‘A Whale against an Elephant; Britain and Germany’, pp. 372-3.

¹⁶ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 5th Series, volume 142, column 1174, 1 June 1921.

¹⁷ On this, see Michael Geyer, ‘German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare, 1914-1945’ in Peter Paret (ed.), with Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2nd edn. 1986), pp. 527-97.

¹⁸ On Clausewitz, ‘The Apostle of Total War: 1914-1945’, see Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 113-94.

¹⁹ In his recent book, Christopher Coker constructs three fictional scenarios. The first one places Clausewitz in a seminar at the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point; the second one sees his debate the course of post-2001 ‘War on Terror’ at an imaginary think-tank in Washington DC; and, the third scenario envisages his participation in a lively seminar concerned with a Hegelian-type debate on the utility of reading history. This third exchange is situated at a meeting of the Military History Circle in London. See Christopher Coker, *Rebooting Clausewitz: On War in the 21st Century* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017). In his recent piece, Honig constructed a transcript of an imaginary between Clausewitz and himself. See Jan Willem Honig, ‘A Brief Encounter with Major-General Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831).’ In Richard Ned Lebow, Peer Schouten and Hidemi Suganami (eds), *The Return of the Theorists: Dialogues with Great Thinkers* (Basingstoke (UK): Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 126-33.

²⁰ On this, see Norbert Krueger, ‘Adolf Hitler Clausewitzknettness’, *Wissenschaft Rundschau*, 18 (1968), pp. 467-71.

evidence that Hitler ever studied Clausewitz in any depth.²¹ (And Clausewitz most assuredly did not advocate aggressive racial wars and endless expansionism as state policy). It is true that the standard English translation of *Mein Kampf* makes only two (banal) direct references to Clausewitz,²² but editors of the authoritative recent version in the original German highlight portions of the book where Hitler was clearly influenced by Clausewitz ('with whose writings Hitler repeatedly engaged').²³ Signally, Karl Haushofer testified in 1945 that, in 1924, he had introduced Rudolf Hess to Clausewitz and Ratzel.²⁴ This tends to support the notion that Hitler was familiar with Clausewitz (due to Hess's close relationship with Hitler at the time).²⁵ This view had been strengthened by Hitler's political testament, dictated on 29 April 1945, and which was widely publicised after his death. In this document, Hitler urged the German people to continue the struggle, after his death, 'against the enemies of the Fatherland, no matter where, true to the creed of the great Clausewitz.'²⁶ The notion of Hitler as Clausewitz devotee was encouraged by the statements of individuals like Ernst 'Putzi' Hanfstaengl, a onetime confidante of Hitler, who later wrote that Hitler's 'other politico-military master was Clausewitz, whom he could quote by the yard'.²⁷ Hitler undoubtedly got a great deal wrong in his reading of Clausewitz (not least in seeing confirmation in his works of the danger of a 'drop of poison in the blood of a people' undermining racial purity).²⁸ Konrad Heiden, a journalist who wrote an early biography of Hitler, noted that while the German General Hans von Seeckt followed the Clausewitzian notion that the aim of war was peace, Hitler saw no difference between the two as 'There is always struggle.'²⁹ The editors of the 2017 edition of *Mein Kampf* nevertheless assert that many of Hitler's thoughts and statements were inspired by Clausewitz (for instance: '[t]he war leader who takes no risks gains no prize').³⁰ Maybe so, but the notion that Clausewitz had advocated unlimited aggressive wars against multiple opponents (as was the case in 1914-8 and 1939-45) was, and is, nonsensical. But, as with Martin Luther, Friedrich Nietzsche and Richard Wagner, Clausewitz was deemed a source of intellectual inspiration for the murderous racial empire of the Nazis.³¹ (And, as with all such figures, it seems likely that any of Hitler's familiarity with Clausewitz was derived from cheap popular pamphlets).³² In such circumstances, it seemed unlikely that Clausewitz's reputation would ever fully recover. In the event, like the German nation itself, Clausewitz made a remarkable recovery after Germany's *stunde null*.

After the defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, militarism was utterly discredited as a basis for national policy. By association, however mistakenly constructed, this impacted upon

²¹ Wallach, 'Misperceptions of Clausewitz' *On War by the German Military*, 218-9.

²² Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim; intro. D.C. Watt (London: Pimlico, 1994), pp. 610, 612.

²³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf: Eine kritische Edition*, edited by Christian Hartmann, Othmar Plöckinger, Roman Töppel, and Thomas Vordermayer (Munich: Institut für Zeitgeschichte/ Berlin IfZ, 2017), p.1018 (n.47).

²⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 2017, p. 394 (n.72).

²⁵ Hitler dictated *Mein Kampf* to Hess whilst in Landsberg prison. Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London, Allen Lane, 1998), p. 242.

²⁶ Adolf Hitler, 'My Political Testament', 29 April 1945. Jeremy Noakes (ed.). *Nazism 1919-1945*, Volume 4, *The German Home Front in World War II: A Documentary Reader* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1998), p. 669.

²⁷ Ernst Hanfstaengl, *Unheard Witness* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1957), p. 41.

²⁸ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 2017, p. 1693.

²⁹ Konrad Heiden, *The Fuehrer*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (London: Robinson, 1999 [1944]), p. 248.

³⁰ Conversation of 25 August 1942. *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944: His Private Conversations*, intro. H.R. Trevor-Roper, trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (London: Phoenix, 2000 [1953]), p. 659. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 2017, p. 1269 (n.7). Hitler's words are rendered here as 'Whoever does not take risks in the pursuit of war can achieve nothing.'

³¹ P.M. Baldwin, 'Clausewitz in Nazi Germany', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16/1 (1981), p. 6.

³² Heiden, *The Fuehrer*, p. 297.

negatively upon Clausewitz's reputation in the United States, Britain and elsewhere.³³ However, the idea that Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan had followed the ideas espoused in *On War* as a template for their pursuit of their wars of aggression, is not borne out by an examination of the central tenets of Clausewitz's thinking.³⁴ Indeed, the eminent British strategist Colin Gray utilised German policy in both World Wars, and Japan's decision to attack the United States in 1941, as 'negative illustration[s] of the wisdom in the Clausewitzian explanation of the proper connection between politics and war.' In 'great war after great war Germany effectively lost the political plot...[waging] warfare more as an end in itself than for reasonable and plausibly attainable political objectives.' Imperial Japan's 1941 decision to attack the United States 'for limited, albeit ambitious, goals' was an 'error of stunning magnitude'.³⁵

Clausewitz had specifically warned that offensives *always* lost momentum as they were weakened by the very act of the advance.³⁶ This phenomenon was partly down to what Clausewitz termed 'friction'.³⁷ ('Friction...is the force that makes the apparent easy so difficult.')³⁸ Indeed, as Humboldt University's Rolf-Dieter Müller notes, the invasion of Poland in 1939, whilst appearing to represent an 'easy' German victory, had already demonstrated a significantly higher level of 'friction' than had been anticipated.³⁹ Despite this, planning for Operation *Barbarossa* (the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in June 1941) seemed to involve minimal discussion of the 'friction' that would undoubtedly arise in such a venture.⁴⁰ Erich von Manstein, regarded as Germany's ablest strategist in the Second World War, blames Hitler and charges him with violating Clausewitzian notions of the balance between political ends and military means: 'his political measures in the east ran entirely counter to the requirements of his strategy, depriving it whatever chance it may have of a speedy victory.'⁴¹ In truth, German planning was flawed at a more fundamental level. And, whilst acknowledging Hitler's mistakes, the German army certainly cannot be absolved of blame. David Stahel recently framed a monograph on German planning for Operation *Barbarossa* around a fatal violation of a basic principle of Clausewitz's philosophy of war.

A short explanation of Germany's defeat in [1941] might best be provided by a simple theoretical concept devised by the renowned German strategist and historian Carl von Clausewitz. Based in large part on his first-hand observations of the Napoleonic wars, Clausewitz's timeless study *Vom Kriege* (*On War*) established numerous maxims of war, which in many cases

³³ Bassford, *Clausewitz in English*, pp. 197-200.

³⁴ On Clausewitz and the Third Reich, see Baldwin, 'Clausewitz in Nazi Germany', 5-26.

³⁵ Colin S. Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History* (London: Routledge, 2nd edn. 2012), p. 25.

³⁶ Frank McLynn, *Napoleon: A Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1998), pp. 375-6. McLynn asserts that Napoleon's advance deep into Russia in 1812 conformed to Clausewitz's dictum that to advance deep into enemy territory represents a kind of defeat. It is clear what Clausewitz would have made of Hitler's decision to attack the Soviet Union and Japan's attempt to create a 'Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere' in June and December 1941, respectively.

³⁷ Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Der Feind steht im Osten: Hitlers geheime Pläne für einen Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion im Jahr 1939* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2011), p. 61.

³⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Introductory essays by Peter Paret, Michael Howard and Bernard Brodie. Commentary by Bernard Brodie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984 (1976)), p. 121.

³⁹ Müller, *Der Feind steht im Osten*, p. 173.

⁴⁰ Müller, *Der Feind steht im Osten*, p. 238.

⁴¹ Erich von Manstein, trans. and ed. Anthony G. Powell; intro. Martin Blumenson; foreword by B.H. Liddell-Hart, *Lost Victories* (London: Greenhill Books, 1987 (1955/1958)), p. 176.

are still upheld today. Clausewitz's theory of the culminating point of the attack provides a useful intellectual framework through which to view Operation Barbarossa. Put simply, Clausewitz established that most attacks diminish in strength the longer they continue, whereupon a critical point is eventually reached at which the power of the attack is superseded by the strength of the defence. This he determined to be the culminating point or climax of the attack, which he then added was usually, but not always, followed by an extremely powerful enemy counter-blow. This basic hypothesis formed an intriguing theoretical starting point for my own questioning of the literature concerning Operation Barbarossa and posed the problem of whether it was possible to pre-date the German military failure in 1941. As a result, Clausewitz's culminating point formed a conceptual beginning to what I believe subsequent research has confirmed - that German operations in the east had failed by the middle of August 1941.⁴²

After 1945, Clausewitz's name was a dirty word and matched by the reputation of the German people, which was at a historical nadir.⁴³ In wartime Allied works on Germany, Clausewitz was lumped in with some fairly unsavoury characters. In 1943 Julius Braunthal, an Austrian-born Jewish socialist, wrote that: 'The complex of ideas commonly denounced as German thought should rather be termed Prussian tradition'. This included Friedrich von Bernhardi, Heinrich von Treitschke, Clausewitz and the Pan-German League, all of whom 'expressed accurately the ideology of a considerable proportion of the German people.'⁴⁴ And yet, by putting ideology aside, the Soviets recognised enough virtue in Clausewitz to exploit him for propaganda purposes for the Committee for a Free Germany (formed from German prisoners after the defeat at Stalingrad in 1943). In this narrative Clausewitz, along with other Prussian reformers such as Yorck, Stein and Gneisenau, was lauded for their refusal to participate in Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812.⁴⁵ This was hardly the view of Prussian militarism prevailing in Britain, however. In the opinion of Lord Vansittart,⁴⁶ a senior diplomat and an arch-enemy of Germany,⁴⁷ the person of Clausewitz and the mass of the German people were synonymous. In the House of Lords, he duly identified three goals vis-à-vis defeated Germany.

[F]irst, to bring home to the German nation a sense of national responsibility; secondly, to ensure that at some distant date the German people should not be told that all these abominations were just a fiction of Allied propaganda; and thirdly, if possible - I say "if possible" - to ensure a national repentance. If we could secure that, it would indeed be a great safeguard for the future. But we shall most certainly not succeed in that object unless we realize that we are dealing not with isolated phenomena but with a continuity. All modern Germany is a continuity. Great cruelties were perpetrated in the last war and

⁴² David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 3.

⁴³ It was at this time that Alan Taylor published his infamous history of modern Germany. See A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: Survey of the Development of German History Since 1815* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945).

⁴⁴ Julius Braunthal, *Need Germany Survive?* (London: Victor Gollancz for the Left Book Club, 1943), p. 66.

⁴⁵ Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 674.

⁴⁶ Robert Vansittart (1881-1957), 1st Baron Vansittart from 1941, was a senior British diplomat before and during the Second World War.

⁴⁷ On this, see especially Sir Robert Vansittart, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941).

they were due to a very simple cause. All students of German political and military literature will realize that the theme of ruthlessness and its extension frightfulness was heavily plugged throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and the earlier part of the twentieth century. Illustrations of course abound. I will just take one of the most impressive ones. In October, 1870, Bismarck declared that every French village where resistance was offered should be gutted, to use his exact word, and all the male population hanged. The story goes back a good deal further than that. It goes back to Clausewitz. He was also an apostle of thoroughness.⁴⁸

For many observers, Clausewitz was now not only immoral, he was obsolete. Three months after the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, the Labour MP Major Donald Bruce told the House of Commons: ‘The old diplomacy is completely dead. With the coming of the atomic bomb, we could, if we wished, tear up completely Clausewitz’s classic “On War.”’⁴⁹ But, gradually, and from a lowly reputational base, Clausewitz was to experience a renaissance of remarkable longevity. In the United States during the 1950s, the strategy of nuclear deterrence developed as per President Eisenhower’s reading of Clausewitz as an army officer after the First World War.⁵⁰ Eisenhower was intrigued by Clausewitz’s denial of the possibility of ‘absolute war’ and whether, or not, the advent of nuclear weapons had changed the fundamental nature of major power conflict.⁵¹ The Eisenhower administration thus significantly expanded the US nuclear arsenal to give credence to the doctrine of ‘Massive retaliation’ (a phrase coined by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in a speech of January 1954).⁵² In a nuclear age, so the thinking went, no opponent would risk an ‘absolute war’ with the United States.⁵³ US nuclear strategy was bolstered by academic Neo-Clausewitzians, such as Henry A. Kissinger and Raymond Aron, who sought to rationalise (to critics, ‘normalise’) nuclear weapons in terms of traditional power politics.⁵⁴ The nuclear strategist Herman Kahn made clear his Clausewitzian lineage by titling his 1960 book *On Thermonuclear War*⁵⁵ (although it seems likely that he was barely familiar with *On War*).⁵⁶ In 1962, Kahn published a book urging that mankind plan seriously for nuclear war because of the necessity of ‘thinking the unthinkable’.⁵⁷ Some claimed that Clausewitz had never intended his ideas to be interpreted thus, whilst others recoiled in horror from what they saw as a typically Clausewitzian amoral recipe for suicide. In 1968, the American biologist, musician, and game-theorist Anatol Rapoport observed of the Neo-Clausewitzians that ‘In the name of realism they perpetuate an obsolete collective state of mind which has brought humanity to the brink of disaster.’⁵⁸

⁴⁸ *Hansard*, HL Deb, 5th Series, volume 136, columns 75-6, 1 May 1945.

⁴⁹ *Hansard*, HC Deb, 5th Series, volume 415, column 1323, 7 November 1945.

⁵⁰ Van Creveld, *On Future War*, p. 34.

⁵¹ Bassford, *Clausewitz in English*, pp. 157-62.

⁵² Fred Kaplan, foreword by Martin J. Sherwin, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991 (1983)), pp. 174-5.

⁵³ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 233-4.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Henry A. Kissinger, foreword by Gordon Dean, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations/Harper & Brothers, 1957); and Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

⁵⁵ Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

⁵⁶ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 160.

⁵⁷ Herman Kahn, *Thinking about the Unthinkable* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962).

⁵⁸ Anatol Rapoport, ‘Introduction’, Carl von Clausewitz, ed. and intro. Anatol Rapoport, *On War* (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 80.

In the United States, Clausewitz experienced an upswing in influence following that country's defeat in the Vietnam War.⁵⁹ For an American military establishment in deep institutional shock, Clausewitz's theories provided a blueprint for starting over again with a rethink of the meaning, and formulation, of strategy.⁶⁰ In 1982, Colonel Harry Summers Jr., a veteran of Korea and Vietnam (and professor at the US Army War College), published his influential Clausewitzian take on recent history: *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*.⁶¹ Two years later, the US Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, enunciated the so-called Weinberger Doctrine. In his announcement, Weinberger stated that the US would not go to war unless several conditions were met. This entailed a continual reassessment of the relationship between objectives and military capabilities; a clear intention of winning; an assurance of support from the American people and Congress; and war must be a last resort. Having subscribed wholeheartedly to Clausewitzian thought, Weinberger then quoted him directly. 'As Clausewitz wrote, 'No one starts a war - or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so - without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war, and how he intends to conduct it.''⁶² By 1990 Summers could observe that 'What we found to our amazement is that Clausewitz spoke almost directly to the American experience, like no one else did'.⁶³ In 1995, Edward J. Villacres and Christopher Bassford opined that 'Our military educators' often annoying fixation on Clausewitz's work has brought a much-needed professional sophistication to the thinking of America's military institutions in the generation since Vietnam. There is nothing better on the horizon.'⁶⁴ In 1999, the Conservative Peer Lord Burnham attacked the NATO intervention in Kosovo, invoking Clausewitz.

Nearly 200 years after Clausewitz educated the world in the principles of warfare, it is still necessary to quote him to solve our political problems. At the beginning of the crisis in Kosovo the leaders of all the countries which were to be involved should have been repeating Clausewitz, as Sir Michael Howard emphasised, when he said, "Nobody starts a war, or rather no one in his senses should do so, unless he knows what he intends to achieve by it". There is little doubt that the NATO countries failed adequately to think through the consequences of their actions.⁶⁵

Michael Handel, Professor of Naval Strategy at the US Naval War College until his death in 2001, and one of Clausewitz's most important modern advocates, was insistent upon the contemporary relevance of Clausewitz. 'In a time when many military men and strategists tend to regard material and technological factors as a panacea, Clausewitz's...observations serve as

⁵⁹ Richard R. Muller, 'The Airpower Historian and the Education of Strategists' in Richard Bailey, James W. Jr. Forsyth and Mark O. Yeisley (eds), *Strategy: Context and Adaptation from Archidamus to Airpower* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016), p. 120.

⁶⁰ Stephen Melton, *The Clausewitz Delusion: How the American Army Screwed Up the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (A Way Forward)* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2009), pp. 4-6. On Clausewitz and the United States, see Stuart Kinross, *Clausewitz and America: Strategic Thought and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁶¹ Colonel Harry Summers Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2007 (1982, 1983)). In 1992, Summers published another Clausewitzian take on a war involving the United States. See Colonel Harry Summers Jr., *On Strategy II: A Critical Analysis of the Gulf War* (New York: Dell, 1992). New York: Presido Press, 1995 (1982)).

⁶² Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (London: Frank Cass, rev. 3rd edn. 2001), p. 240. Clausewitz's statement taken from *On War*, p. 579.

⁶³ Joel Achenbach, 'War and the Cult of Clausewitz.' *Washington Post*, 6 December 1990.

⁶⁴ Edward J. Villacres and Christopher Bassford, 'Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity', *Parameters*, 25/3 (1995), p. 9.

⁶⁵ *Hansard*, HL Deb, 6th Series, volume 600, column 897, 6 May 1999.

increasingly important caveats.⁶⁶ Colin Powell typified the attitudes of many of his contemporaries when he wrote that the work of ‘That wise Prussian Karl [*sic*] von Clausewitz was an awakening for me.’⁶⁷ Vietnam, it seemed, was an object lesson in everything that Clausewitz had warned against. His maxims and theories seemed eminently suitable for a nuclear Superpower, nearly one hundred and fifty years after his death. The argument ran that the US attempt to ‘save’ South Vietnam had neglected Clausewitz’s insistence that one must not begin a war without knowing exactly who you were fighting and for exactly what political objective. To ensure success, the state’s political leadership must not only dictate a central war aim that its military must pursue, but the people of the state must also support the war wholeheartedly. One does not need to be a brilliant strategist to note the dislocation between these three elements in the history of the US involvement with Vietnam. Ideally, while the armed forces seek to achieve clearly-identifiable objectives, the population must also contribute to the war. In Vietnam, the politicians did not know the capabilities and limits of its military; the military did not know what its primary objective was; and the population came to increasingly distrust its leaders and fear that its military was waging an aggressive, unnecessary and barbaric war.⁶⁸ The United States had a real problem: how does one translate overwhelming power into an ability to attain political goals by military means? This problem persists to this day, as the post-2001 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate. Yet, despite persuasive counterfactuals based around the notion that ‘Clausewitz would have not lost in Vietnam’, the Prussian’s detractors remained unimpressed. To their mind, it was a Clausewitzian mindset, a belief in the utility of war as a policy instrument, which lay at the heart of the US decision to intervene in Vietnam and in the subsequent excesses committed in South-East Asia. Clausewitz acknowledged that policy could be an alien element in war.⁶⁹ In major conflicts, as one might expect, war and policy are synonymous but the scope for divergence in ‘limited’ or so-called ‘discretionary’ wars is all too real.⁷⁰ In 2009 Stephen L. Melton wrote a polemic decrying the Clausewitzian roots of failure in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The historicism of Clausewitz has served us poorly in the thirty years since military theoreticians made him the centrepiece of our new joint doctrine. Center of gravity analysis confounds military planners and leads only to wishful thinking, implicit in our doctrine, that a general’s strategies and decisive battles can reduce or avoid the need for attrition warfare. There is no historical proof of such a claim.⁷¹

This attack on ‘historicism’ rather neglects the Universal as envisaged by Clausewitz. And here, the most well-known theoretical model employed by Clausewitz (the ‘paradoxical trinity’ of ‘primordial violence, hatred, and enmity’), although explicitly mentioned on only one page of *On War*,⁷² is crucial to understanding his thinking. Peter Paret has asserted that ‘[r]eal war, Clausewitz declared, was a composite of three elements: violence and passion; the scope afforded by all human intercourse to chance and probability, but also to genius, intelligence, [and] courage; and its subordination to politics, which, Clausewitz characteristically argued,

⁶⁶ Handel, *Masters of War*, p. 5.

⁶⁷ Powell with Persico, *A Soldier’s Way*, p. 208.

⁶⁸ Andreas Herberg-Rothe, ‘Ein Preuße in den USA’, *Europäische Sicherheit*, 10 (2003), pp. 48-9.

⁶⁹ Strachan, *Clausewitz’s On War*, pp. 169–71.

⁷⁰ Hew Strachan, ‘Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the Operational Level of War’, *Survival*, 52/5 (2010), p. 165.

⁷¹ Stephen L. Melton, *The Clausewitz Delusion: How the American Army Screwed Up the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (A Way Forward)* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2009), p. 243.

⁷² Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 89.

made it subject to reason.’⁷³ Thomas Waldman recently observed that ‘Context, properly understood, is not part of the nature of war itself, but that nature, as expressed in the trinity, cannot be understood without reference to context, as it helps us explain why war’s nature manifests itself in divergent ways throughout history.’⁷⁴ Crucially, and in order to grasp this, one needs excellent intelligence. When General Stanley McChrystal ordered his chief intelligence officer in Afghanistan, General Michael Flynn, to assess the situation on the ground there in 2009, his report was scathing: ‘eight years into the war in Afghanistan the U.S. intelligence community is only marginally relevant to the overall strategy’.⁷⁵ A year later, Robert Jervis, Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Affairs at Columbia University, published a celebrated book about intelligence failure. Jervis acknowledged that the US Intelligence Community’s (IC) strong point was its ability to convey a great deal of information to policymakers quickly and concisely. Jervis was, nevertheless, struck by ‘the bland writing style that often buries the important [points]’ and thus inhibits analysis through opacity.⁷⁶ Both Flynn and Jervis highlighted two problems: *viz.* the reduced strategic relevance of the US IC; and exactly how intelligence agencies deal with the inevitable uncertainty in their line of work. Both concerns are age-old and are the very essence of war as a societal activity.

Intelligence is such an important part of the national security state today, and Clausewitz is often denigrated for being too dismissive of intelligence as a war-fighting asset. This is a point usually made by means of the quotation of well-worn Clausewitzian maxims, especially: ‘Many intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain ... In short, most intelligence is false, and the effect of fear is to multiply lies and inaccuracies’.⁷⁷ If he were alive today, the massive technological advances that have afforded modern intelligence such impressive capabilities would surely be embraced by Clausewitz,⁷⁸ while his paradox would remain intact. The misperception of Clausewitz here is entirely typical: he remains one of the misquoted figures in history. In 2007, Hew Strachan noted that ‘[t]hose who blamed Clausewitz for the slaughter of the First World War were not guilty of finding things in the text of *On War* that were not there.’⁷⁹ Strachan developed this theme in the 2010 George C. Marshall Lecture in Military History when he argued that that English-language authors had blamed Clausewitz twice over for the supposed role of his writings in the First World War. Basil Liddell Hart ascribed the notion of ‘absolute war’, embraced by all of the major powers’ general staffs, to Clausewitz.⁸⁰ In 1931 Liddell Hart had written that ‘Clausewitz had proclaimed the sovereign virtues of the will to conquer, the unique value of the offensive carried out with unlimited violence by a nation in arms and the power of the military action to override everything else. He had argued that to overthrow the main enemy in battle should be the primary aim.’⁸¹ Strachan notes that later writers depicted the First World

⁷³ Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State: The Man, His Theories, and His Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007 edn, with new preface (1985)), p. 368.

⁷⁴ Waldman, Thomas. *War, Clausewitz and the Trinity* (Farnham (UK): Ashgate, 2013), p. 72.

⁷⁵ James Kitfield, ‘How Mike Flynn Became America’s Angriest General.’ *Politico*, 16 October 2016. <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/10/how-mike-flynn-becameamericas-angriest-general-214362> (accessed 14 July 2017).

⁷⁶ Response by Robert Jervis to H-Diplo Roundtable Review of Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, 9 July 2010. *H-Diplo Roundtable Review*, 11/32 (2010), p. 28.

⁷⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 117.

⁷⁸ R. Gerald Hughes, ‘Strategists and Intelligence’ in Rob Dover, Michael Goodman and Claudia Hillebrand (eds), *Routledge Companion to Intelligence Studies* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014), pp. 52-4.

⁷⁹ Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz’s On War: A Biography* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), p. 146.

⁸⁰ Hew Strachan, ‘Clausewitz and the First World War’ in *Journal of Military History*, 75/2 (2011), pp. 367-91.

⁸¹ Basil Liddell Hart, *Foch: The Man of Orleans* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1931), p. 22.

War as lacking any coherent political rationale and so contradicting the most well-known of the dictums outlined in *On War*.

In damning the generals of the First World War...Liddell Hart set in train a debate from which all subsequent English-language writing has struggled vainly to escape. John Keegan and David Stevenson are but the latest in a line of succession from Liddell Hart in their portrayal of the war in terms of waste, futility, and meaninglessness. The irony is that, although Keegan and Stevenson have this view in common with Liddell Hart, they base it on a diametrically opposed interpretation of Clausewitz. Liddell Hart appeared oblivious to the fact that Clausewitz ever even mentioned the relationship between war and policy. Too many recent historians seem to be unaware that he ever wrote about anything else.⁸²

In 1990, John E. Shepherd had stressed the necessity of avoiding such misjudgements for readers of Clausewitz, noting that ‘modern soldiers and statesmen cannot redeem the full value of Clausewitz’s legacy if they fail to subject his propositions to serious debate.’

Unfortunately, Clausewitz is more often quoted than read, more venerated than understood. Many of his ideas on the purposes, nature, and conduct of war have been reduced to mere aphorisms to decorate the pages of field manuals. Clausewitz would hardly be pleased by this sort of idolatry. As an empiricist who tried to develop his theory scientifically, he was acutely aware of the need to test his hypotheses against reality. When the realities of warfare change over time, then old, previously accepted hypotheses need retesting and, if necessary, modification.⁸³

Clausewitz continues to figure in debates on strategy and his relevance is often called into question. Antulio Echevarria notes that the essential elements of war are unchanged since Clausewitz’s time, although he pointedly states that ‘Anything that stands or falls principally on the notion of relevance is likely to have a brief shelf life, especially in an era where change appears ever more rapid.’⁸⁴ Clausewitz is nonetheless often dismissed for his state-centric worldview by critics who cite technological advances, information war, proxy wars, and the importance of non-state actors as proof of the manner in which war has been fundamentally transformed since Clausewitz’s lifetime.⁸⁵ Some of Clausewitz’s critics undoubtedly make very eloquent cases. Anatol Rapoport, for instance, argued that, in a nuclear age, a Clausewitzian view of war was obsolete and highly dangerous promoting, as it did, a zero-sum notion of international politics, whilst undermining rational thinking amongst policymakers.⁸⁶ This view is far from prevalent and has never ceased to be attacked. In 2009, David Kaiser of the US Naval War College noted that

[Carl von Clausewitz’s] *On War* is in one sense an optimistic book in so far as it holds out the model of rational policy controlling war at least as an ideal type to strive for in reality. As such it reflects the age in which it was written,

⁸² Strachan, ‘Clausewitz and the First World War’, p. 391.

⁸³ John E. Shepherd Jr., ‘*On War*: Is Clausewitz Still Relevant?’, *Parameters*, 20/3 (1990), p. 85.

⁸⁴ Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

⁸⁵ Hugh Smith, *On Clausewitz: A Study of Military and Political Ideas* (Basingstoke (UK): Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 49.

⁸⁶ Rapoport, ‘Introduction’, pp. 73-7.

both intellectually (Clausewitz was a child of the Enlightenment) and politically since war, especially for Napoleon's enemies, had genuinely in the end served rational political aims.⁸⁷

In his recent book, Christopher Coker has Clausewitz dismantling the big fads of the day – 'new wars', 'big data', and the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA).⁸⁸ Mary Kaldor asserts that 'new wars' (her term) can 'only be defined in contrast to what went before and our understanding of what went before depends heavily on what we learn from reading [Clausewitz's] *On War*.'⁸⁹

New Wars are the wars of the era of globalisation. Typically, they take place in areas where authoritarian states have been greatly weakened as a consequence of opening up to the rest of the world. In such contexts, the distinction between state and non-state, public and private, external and internal, economic and political, and even war and peace are breaking down. Moreover the [breakdown] of these binary distinctions is both a cause and a consequence of violence.

New wars have a logic that is different from the logic of what I call 'old wars' - the idea of war that predominated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the original version of the argument, I derived this logic from the differences between old and new wars in actors, goals, methods and forms of finance.⁹⁰

'Big data' is important in modern national security applications as it involves data sets so large or complex that traditional data processing application software is now wholly inadequate. Indeed, as Kenneth Cukier, an author specialising in technology and society, notes: 'The amount of digital information increases tenfold every five years. Moore's law, which the computer industry now takes for granted, says that the processing power and storage capacity of computer chips double or their prices halve roughly every 18 months.'⁹¹ And, given the technological sophistication of modern warfare, the challenges for the consumer include capture, storage, analysis, data-sharing, information-transfer, visualisation, and data security. The analysis of such sizeable data sets allows the consumer to identify correlative patterns in business, medicine, crime and warfare. Organisations such as the US Department of Defense, the United Nations, and the Central Intelligence Agency have all launched 'big data' initiatives, the goals of which are to predict and anticipate 'political crises, disease outbreaks, economic instability, resource shortages, and natural disasters.'⁹² Whilst Clausewitz asserted that 'War is

⁸⁷ David Kaiser, 'Back to Clausewitz', review essay of Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War: A Biography* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007); Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32/4 (2009), p. 683.

⁸⁸ See for instance, Coker, *Rebooting Clausewitz*, pp. 22, 58, 130-1, 143, 99-100.

⁸⁹ Kaldor, Mary. 'Inconclusive Wars: Is Clausewitz Still Relevant in these Global Times?' *Global Policy*, 1/3 (2010), p. 272.

⁹⁰ Mary Kaldor, 'In Defence of New Wars.' *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2/1 (2013), pp. 1-16; and Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 3rd edn. 2012).

⁹¹ Interview with Kenneth Cukier, 'Data, data everywhere.' *The Economist*, 25 February 2010.

⁹² Bernard Marr, 'How AI, Drones and 'Big Data' are reshaping the future of Warfare', *Forbes Magazine*, 6 October 2016. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2016/10/06/how-ai-drones-and-big-data-are-reshaping-the-future-of-warfare/> (accessed 15 July 2017).

the realm of Chance’,⁹³ some authors have asserted that the Revolution in Military Affairs had transformed war and relegated ‘chance’ to negligibility.⁹⁴ RMA became a common, and much-discussed, term in military, defence and academic circles in the early 1990s after the 1991 war against Iraq to liberate Kuwait had seemed to herald a fundamental shift in the nature of warfare.⁹⁵ The RMA is rooted in the notion of a Military Revolution (MR), a term coined by the historian Michael Roberts in the 1950s, in connection with developments in 16th and 17th century Sweden.⁹⁶

Clausewitz recognised and acknowledged the utility of unifying theories. In *On War* he opined: ‘Theory will have fulfilled its main task when it is used to analyze the constituent elements of war, to distinguish precisely what at first sight seems fused, to explain in full the properties of the means employed and to show the probable effects, to define clearly the nature of the ends in view, and to illuminate all phases of warfare in a thorough critical inquiry.’⁹⁷ Such quotes are often used against him but, contrary to the opinions of many of his detractors, Clausewitz was no militarist (even though he was fascinated by war). War was something that resided, however unfortunately, in the human condition. The business of the strategist was to ameliorate the impact of this ‘very imperfect political instrument’,⁹⁸ by seeking to minimise its duration and the effects on the society from which the strategist emerged. This necessitates a proper understanding of the relationship between political ends and military means in any given state and/or collection of states bound in alliance.

No one starts a war-or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so-without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose; the latter its operational objective. This is the governing principle which will set its course, prescribe the scale of means and effort which is required, and make its influence felt throughout down to the smallest operational detail.⁹⁹

Winning requires a proper understanding of war. Clausewitz’s definition of war was crystal clear. ‘War therefore is an act of violence to compel our opponent to fulfil our will.’¹⁰⁰ This simple formulation belies the fact that there exists a variety of victories, and different modes of will and assorted clashes of combatant will.¹⁰¹ Clausewitz’s trinity casts the nature of war as the interplay of three fundamental elements: reason, passion, and chance. The expanding complexity of the world today incentivises the adoption of Clausewitzian analytical method (rather than the other way around). To attain victory, one must understand the relationships between these elements, the continuities and differences in war, and then see how they shape

⁹³ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 101.

⁹⁴ Richard J. Bailey Jr., ‘Four Dimensions to the Digital Debate: How Should We Think Strategically about Cyberspace and Cyberpower?’ in Richard J. Bailey Jr., James W. Forsyth Jr. and Mark O. Yeisley (eds), *Strategy: Context and Adaptation from Archidamus to Airpower* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016), p. 190.

⁹⁵ Michael J. Thompson, ‘Military Revolutions and Revolutions in Military Affairs: Accurate Descriptions of Change or Intellectual Constructs?’, *Strata*, 3 (2011), p. 82. On the history of RMA, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution, 1500-1800: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn. 1996); and MacGregor Knox and William Murray (eds), *The Dynamics of Military Revolution 1320-2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁹⁶ Michael Roberts, *The Military Revolution, 1560-1660: An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the Queen’s University of Belfast* (Belfast: M. Boyd, 1956). RMA is now as widely accepted a concept as is MR.

⁹⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 141.

⁹⁸ Coker, *Rebooting Clausewitz*, p. 10.

⁹⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 579.

¹⁰⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 75.

¹⁰¹ Coker, *Rebooting Clausewitz*, p. 34.

the conflict at hand. It all comes back to the need for a unifying theory of everything. In short, to know what kind of intelligence to collect, what type of strategy to design, you need a theory. Of Clausewitz's universalism, Jon Sumida observes that 'Clausewitz's approach to theory may be seen not only in terms of how it might improve an individual's decision-making capacity in war and politics, but also in terms of how it might be a pedagogical model applicable to the development of the ability to do anything that is difficult, complex, contingent, and dangerous.'¹⁰² As well as being a professional Prussian soldier, strategist and historian, Clausewitz was a product of the post-Enlightenment intellectual flowering of German Romanticism.¹⁰³ On occasion, the creativity displayed by the German nation appeared boundless.¹⁰⁴ The enduring value of this surge in creative thought was hardly transitory: to which the contemporary reputations of Clausewitz, Fichte, Goethe, Hegel, Heine, Herder, Kant ('Clausewitz's great inspiration'),¹⁰⁵ Marx, Nietzsche, Schiller, and Schopenhauer are all testament. Clausewitz's *On War* typified the deep philosophical bent in German scholarly and intellectual life. Indeed, as H.L. Mencken observed, '[it is] in the German universities... where, since [Martin] Luther's day, all the world's most painful thinking has been done'.¹⁰⁶ Many modern institutions could learn from such a heritage. For instance: one of the biggest criticisms that the US Intelligence Community (IC) has faced recently is that it does not 'do' theory.¹⁰⁷ The IC needs to engage with interpretations of alternative trends, and pinpoint the degrees of plausibility of its evaluations, so that policy makers do not overestimate the degree to which the evidence supports the conclusions. This will clash with what Robert Jervis terms '[the policymaker's] desire for greater certainty and the intelligence business model which now thrives on speed more than accuracy'.¹⁰⁸

In war, good intelligence is nearly always a prerequisite of victory. In late 2016 the retired US Army general Michael Flynn,¹⁰⁹ then a Trump campaign adviser, was singing from the Clausewitzian hymn sheet when he stressed the necessity of aimed for population-centric information. Such sources may offer 'few clues about where to find insurgents', but they will 'provide elements of ever great strategic importance – a map for leveraging popular support and marginalizing the insurgency itself'.¹¹⁰ Matt C. Zeller, a US Army veteran of the Afghan

¹⁰² Jon T. Sumida, *Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to On War* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 2008), p. 5.

¹⁰³ For a work setting Clausewitz in his proper context, see Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹⁰⁴ On this, see Rüdiger Safranski, *Romantik: Eine deutsche Affäre* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2007), p. 178.

¹⁰⁵ Coker, *Rebooting Clausewitz*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis S. Feuer, *Ideology and the Ideologists*, intro. Irving Lewis Horowitz. New York: Routledge, 2017 (1975, 2010)), p. 37. Henry Louis Mencken (1880-1956) was a journalist, satirist and critic was known as the 'Sage of Baltimore' and the 'American Nietzsche'.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Jervis, 'The Politics and Psychology of Intelligence and Intelligence Reform', *The Forum*, 4/1 (2006), pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 181.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Flynn served in the US Army from 1981 until 2014. After a distinguished career, Flynn briefly served as President Donald Trump's National Security Advisor in 2017. He was forced to resign after only 22 days after it emerged that he had lied to Vice-President Mike Pence about his communications with Sergey Kislyak, Russian ambassador to the US. Derek Hawkins, 'Flynn sets record with only 24 days as national security advisor: The average tenure is about 2.6 years', *Washington Post*, 14 February 2017. In December 2017 Flynn admitted lying to the FBI and declared a willingness to testify against President Trump. Rozina Sabur, Nick Allen and Ben Riley-Smith, 'Michael Flynn 'prepared to testify against Donald Trump' over Russia links', *The Daily Telegraph* (London), 2 December 2017.

¹¹⁰ Michael Flynn quoted in Spencer Ackerman, 'Michael Flynn: From Subtle Intelligence Chief to Muslim-Baiting Ideologue.' *The Guardian* (London), 18 November 2016.

War, pithily terms counterinsurgency (COIN) as ‘a thinking man’s fight’.¹¹¹ Coker has little time for approaches that reduce the conduct of war to simple perceptions about power that ‘raid’ history merely for justificatory data. Context is everything, as it helps us attach value to the elements of the trinity of reason, passion, and chance.¹¹² In and of itself, ‘big data’ collection cannot shed adequate light on emerging (and accelerating) patterns of social dynamism. This is the central problem with the Western way of war today. Pentagon planning for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, for example, typified the flawed thought process whereby such powerful institutions think they have re-invented and tamed war.¹¹³ A year after the invasion, Yale University’s Paul Kennedy was forthright in his criticism of US policymakers.

[I]t now appears that many army generals warned that maintaining law and order in Iraq would be much more difficult than simply ousting Saddam, that urban warfare would be horrible, and that casualties would rise. But the Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz¹¹⁴ team had no intention of listening to professionals - unless of course the soldiers agreed with their own rosy interpretation of how the war would go...[But] War is Hell [and as] Clausewitz so frequently warned, it rarely ends up where it was planned to conclude. This is something the neo-conservative strategists never thought about. Moral degeneration in war is something that the higher military leaders, although they worried that the post-battle situation would not be pleasant, did not anticipate.¹¹⁵

Three years later, the Argentine academic José Fernández Vega deployed Immanuel Kant and Hannah Arendt to trace ‘Clausewitz’s concept of action back to that of judgement, an indispensable concept for the use of force by modern armies.’¹¹⁶ This led Vega to a depressing conclusion.

The method that led to the [2003] war in Iraq was not the reflexive judgement, the *Takt*, the *Kritik*, the universal standpoint. It was rather imperialist arrogance. The West has all the military means to crush its enemies, but it had no clear policies left to continue the military victory. The military power of the United States is in theory unbeatable; but that supremacy has not yet come up with a viable and acceptable model of society for the countries it occupies or just bombs from the air. This is war without

¹¹¹ Matt Zeller, *Watches Without Time: An American Soldier in Afghanistan* (Charlottesville, VA: Just World Books, 2012) p. 221.

¹¹² Coker, *Rebooting Clausewitz*, p. 125.

¹¹³ For a discussion of the numerous errors associated with the 2003 invasion of Iraq, see Clayton Dennison, ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom: What Went Wrong? A Clausewitzian Analysis.’ *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, 9/3 (2007), pp. 1-34.

¹¹⁴ Dick Cheney (US Vice-President, 2001-9); Donald Rumsfeld (US Secretary of Defense, 2001-6); and Paul Wolfowitz (US Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2001-5). On the lobbying campaign by Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz for the deposition of Saddam Hussein and regime change in Iraq, see Michael A. Reynolds, ‘The Wars’ Entangled Roots: Regional Realities and Washington’s Vision’ in Beth Bailey and Richard H. Immerman (eds), *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), pp. 43-4.

¹¹⁵ Paul Kennedy, ‘The degeneration of war: Once you start a war, it is very difficult to control its degeneration and its consequences - a fact that President Bush probably failed to consider.’ *The Guardian* (London), 11 May 2004.

¹¹⁶ Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, ‘Introduction’ in Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 12.

politics; its faculty of imagination appears to be empty. In this way, violence becomes militarized and permanent.¹¹⁷

Other cultures still fight differently from the Western (or the American) way of war. As war constantly mutates, vain attempts at disciplinary ‘gate-keeping’ of the definitions of the ‘meaning of war’ will only put one at a potentially-lethal disadvantage. The idea of ‘new wars’ is based on such a fallacy, detracting from the complexity of the phenomenon.¹¹⁸ Once you start demarcating forms of ‘knowledge’, dismissing the Islamic State group (ISIS) as a throwback to the Medievalism becomes all too easy. In today’s turbulent world, digesting military history teaches us not to underestimate one’s enemies. Clausewitz knew this and it typifies the soundness of the philosophical tenets with which he sought to understand war. David Kaiser has argued that

Clausewitz has provided the framework with which to analyze [the] problem [of how to use military means to achieve political ends], but the solution, as he understood so well, depends upon the correct appreciation of a multitude of political and military factors which he could not possibly have anticipated. The task of the political leader and the strategist – as in 1792, 1914, and 1965 – begins anew. Success or failure depends upon the measure of political and military genius which they can bring to bear upon it.¹¹⁹

A case in point being the adoption of an ambiguous view of Clausewitz on the issue of victory. Traditional takes on Clausewitz’s view of victory have argued that he more focused on military victory than anything else. But, in truth, Clausewitz’s views on this continued to evolve.¹²⁰ The persistence of a universal interest in Clausewitzian thought makes his work of particular interest in China, for instance.¹²¹ Clausewitz’s assertions regarding the utility of force, and of the necessity of keeping political and military goals in close alignment continues to shape international politics.¹²² In 1986, Michael Handel asserted that ‘no theoretical text has yet surpassed...*On War* (1832) in its richness of wisdom and heuristic value.’¹²³ In accord with this view, in 2009 David Kaiser asserted that ‘A new and very Clausewitzian drama has begun.’¹²⁴ In the run-up to the Gulf War of 1991, General Colin Powell, testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee, stated that: ‘The fact that military planning must flow from clear political direction is not a new theory. Although we may have had to rediscover it in recent years, I think history will show that it drove [Generals] Eisenhower and Marshall and Pershing and Grant and Washington, and you can discover that theory in the works of Clausewitz.’¹²⁵ In a recent assessment of a recently-published collection of Clausewitz’s works on small wars, Jack Levy recently noted that ‘Clausewitz attempted to develop a general theory

¹¹⁷ José Fernández Vega, ‘War as ‘Art’: Aesthetics and Politics in Clausewitz’s Social Thinking’ in Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 137.

¹¹⁸ Kaldor, ‘Inconclusive Wars’, pp. 271-81.

¹¹⁹ Kaiser, ‘Back to Clausewitz’, p. 685.

¹²⁰ See Heuser, ‘Clausewitz’s Ideas of Strategy and Victory’, pp. 138-62.

¹²¹ On Clausewitz and China, see Yu Tiejun, ‘The Western Master and Bible of War: Clausewitz and his “On War” in China’ in Reiner Pommerin (ed.), *Clausewitz goes global: Carl von Clausewitz in the 21st Century* (Berlin: Miles-Verlag, 2014), pp. 42-59.

¹²² Hughes, ‘War as Political Violence’, p. 358.

¹²³ Michael I. Handel, ‘Clausewitz in the Age of Technology’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 9/2-3 (1986), p. 51.

¹²⁴ Kaiser, ‘Back to Clausewitz’, p. 685.

¹²⁵ Powell to Senate Committee on Armed Services, 3 December 1990. Quoted in Pearlman, *Warmaking and American Democracy*, 5.

of war, one not bound by time and place, but one that could be usefully applied to the variety of conflicts in different historical eras.’ In this he was hugely successful.

Those who dismiss the relevance of Clausewitz for understanding the low-intensity conflicts of the contemporary era make the mistake of neglecting Clausewitz’s enduring trinity of forces (primordial violence, chance, and politics) and focusing instead on his analysis of the actors (people, army, and government) interacting with those forces in one period of time. In other periods, wars have centered around other kinds of political communities and organizations. It is hardly a surprise that Marxist–Leninists and theorists of insurgency and revolution view war in Clausewitzian terms as a continuation of the class struggle or the anti-imperialist struggle.¹²⁶

Clausewitz famously asserted that ‘Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult.’¹²⁷ And Hew Strachan has identified the manner in which Clausewitz kept strategy as a clear and identifiable entity,¹²⁸ without seeking to define policy. Clausewitz focussed on the nation and the state - not on party politics. Surveying matters in 2017, Clausewitz’s definition of strategy has the advantage of being that much more restricted than it is today.¹²⁹ A Universalist approach is essential in the practise of war. This is provided by *On War* and it is with good reason that Clausewitz remains required reading in military academies and universities worldwide.¹³⁰ Even now, nearly two hundred years after his death, only a fool would discount the Prussian Master of War.

¹²⁶ Jack S. Levy, ‘Clausewitz and People’s War’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40/3 (2017), pp. 454-5, 455.

¹²⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 119.

¹²⁸ Defined as ‘the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war’. Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 177.

¹²⁹ Hew Strachan, ‘The lost meaning of strategy’, *Survival*, 47/3 (2005), p. 34.

¹³⁰ Giuseppe Caforio, *Social Sciences and the Military: An Interdisciplinary Overview* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 221.