

## Few Words About Clausewitz

Clausewitz's endeavor to craft a timeless masterpiece truly bore fruit, ensuring his legacy among future generations. His seminal work, "On War," distinguished itself starkly from the military treatises of his era, a departure from the ancient works of Vegetius to the contemporary writings of Frederick the Great and his esteemed mentor, Scharnhorst. Unlike its predecessors, which merely served as manuals for battle tactics, Clausewitz's magnum opus sought to delve deeper into the essence of warfare. Rather than offering a mere compendium of battlefield strategies, Clausewitz embarked on a relentless pursuit to comprehend the intricacies of war's moral and material dimensions through firsthand, unflinching observation.

His refusal to shy away from the harsh realities of conflict set his work apart. Instead of delineating idealistic notions or convenient abstractions, Clausewitz embraced the unvarnished truths of warfare, no matter how audacious or unsettling they may have seemed to his contemporaries. It is this unwavering commitment to truth that renders his work enduring and influential. Clausewitz's legacy endures not merely as a manual of tactics, but as a profound exploration of the very nature of war itself.

Clausewitz's "On War" often finds itself juxtaposed with the seminal work of the ancient Chinese military strategist, Sun Tzu, a comparison primarily rooted in their divergent conceptual approaches. However, such contrasts serve more to underscore Clausewitz's place within a broader spectrum of strategic thinking rather than elevating him to an exclusive pedestal. It's noteworthy that Sun Tzu's enduring relevance, spanning over 2,000 years, owes much to the ongoing dialogue initiated by Clausewitz.

Indeed, Sun Tzu's timeless wisdom is continually revitalized through the lens of Clausewitzian thought, enriching contemporary strategic discourse with ancient Eastern insights. In essence, Sun Tzu's enduring relevance in modern military theory owes as much to the dynamic interaction fostered by Clausewitz as it does to the inherent wisdom of the Chinese master strategist. This interplay between Western and Eastern strategic thought highlights the universality and adaptability of military principles across diverse historical and cultural contexts.

Interest in Clausewitz persists today, undiminished despite historical fluctuations and occasional neglect of his work. The enduring complexity of his text has contributed significantly to this mixed reception. Often, readers grapple with Clausewitz's convoluted prose, struggling to discern his intended meaning amidst tangled passages. The work's interpretive variability has led to divergent readings and multiple, sometimes contradictory, understandings.

This inherent complexity stems not only from the philosophical depth of Clausewitz's insights but also from his admitted limitations in grammar and writing proficiency. He candidly assessed his own education as "modest" and "insufficient," acknowledging the challenges his writing presents to readers. Additionally, Clausewitz's untimely death during the writing and revision process left his magnum opus unfinished, further complicating its interpretation and reception.

Despite these challenges, Clausewitz's penetrating observations on war and strategy endure. His profound insights transcend the limitations of his prose, offering invaluable perspectives on the nature of conflict. Understanding Clausewitz's background illuminates the context of his work. His experiences and education shape his unique perspective, enriching our appreciation of his contributions to military theory and strategic thought.

Carl Clausewitz was born in 1780 near the Burg in Prussia, into a modest civil servant family that lacked aristocratic standing or means to provide him with a privileged education. At the tender age of 11, Clausewitz embarked on a path to military service, joining the Prussian army as a cadet, or "junker." This early induction into military life exposed him to the tactical intricacies of the era, where artillery reigned supreme on the battlefield. As such, military education emphasized mathematics and geometry, essential for understanding the dynamics of artillery warfare.

In 1793-94, Clausewitz, still a teenager, found himself thrust into military operations in the Rhineland, marking his initiation into the realities of armed conflict. As he continued his service in various garrisons, doubts began to germinate in his young mind regarding the conventional wisdom guiding Prussian military doctrine. It was during these formative years that Clausewitz first questioned the efficacy and propriety of prevailing Prussian strategies for waging war.

The emergence of the French revolutionary army and the contrasting conservative war strategies of the Prussian forces underscored the glaring inadequacies within their respective military educations. Prior to 1801, when Carl Clausewitz enrolled in the Scharnhorst Academy, his tactical knowledge likely adhered to the prevailing standards of the time. However, his grasp of technical matters such as orthography and grammar remained lacking—an unfortunate deficiency for which he was not renowned.

At the Scharnhorst Academy, Clausewitz encountered a transformative educational environment. Here, he delved into a comprehensive array of compulsory disciplines, including mathematics, geometry, geography (particularly map reading), and military history. Most significantly, the academy introduced him to the Scharnhorstian philosophy, which prioritized teaching "war as it really is" over prescribing idealized conceptions of warfare prevalent during the Enlightenment era.

This shift in pedagogical focus aimed to equip students like Clausewitz with a practical understanding of military strategy and the complexities of armed conflict, diverging from the theoretical abstractions of preceding educational models. Through the Scharnhorstian approach, Clausewitz gained invaluable

insights into the realities of warfare, laying the groundwork for his future contributions to military theory and strategic thought.

Clausewitz's thinking was equally influenced by the study of the history of wars, campaigns and battles in academia and by observation of real life. On the one hand, the revolutionary French war with a qualitatively new style of state and politics, and on the other hand, the transitional era in the romanticism of the Enlightenment, in turn, can be said to have given impetus to Clausewitz's views on the impossibility of systematizing the rules, laws and principles of war.

Probably, in addition to the current subjects during the years of the academy, he should have been introduced to physics, the thought of Newton and Euler. Later, he uses the approaches and visions of both authors in his own work, in contrast to the political ideologues of the era, who have almost no use in his main work, even though he was familiar with political ideas and concepts.

Following his tenure at the academy, Clausewitz assumed roles of significant responsibility. In 1804, he became an aide to Prince Augustus of Prussia and was appointed to the Prussian General Staff.

The pivotal moment in Clausewitz's career came with the harrowing defeat of Prussia against France in 1806. This crushing blow deeply impacted his critical thinking. During the fateful battle, Clausewitz stood alongside Prince Augustus, who steadfastly refused to capitulate despite the dire circumstances and imminent defeat. Their defiance led to their capture by the French forces.

Upon his return a year later from captivity, Clausewitz, in collaboration with figures like Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, embarked on the arduous task of rebuilding and reorganizing the Prussian army. Concurrently, he assumed the role of personal military instructor to the heir to the throne, Friedrich William.

This period marked a turning point in Clausewitz's career, as he grappled with the realities of warfare and dedicated himself to the revitalization of Prussian military strength in the aftermath of defeat. His experiences during this tumultuous period would profoundly shape his future contributions to military theory and strategy.

Following the cessation of French occupation in Berlin, an unexpected turn of events marked a significant decision in Clausewitz's life: the signing of an alliance agreement with France. While Clausewitz harbored deep reservations about the organization and management of the Prussian state and its military apparatus, he held a particular disdain for the Napoleonic style of warfare and the imposing French army.

Despite his acknowledgment of Napoleon's military prowess and repeated recognition of the Emperor's strategic genius in his writings, Clausewitz found himself at odds with the Prussian establishment. The peace treaty signed with Napoleon in 1811 served as the catalyst for his dissent. Alongside 30 fellow

officers, Clausewitz chose to resign from the Prussian army, citing Prussia's perceived subservience and fear of Napoleon's dominance.

In an act of protest and assertion of autonomy, Clausewitz voluntarily sought refuge at the court of the Russian king. This bold move underscored his unwavering commitment to principles he held dear, even at the cost of his military career within his homeland. Clausewitz's decision reflects the complex interplay between personal conviction, political allegiance, and the exigencies of wartime diplomacy during this tumultuous period in European history.

This curious action might have been perceived as a patriotic protest under different circumstances, were it not for the critical context of the impending Russo-French conflict. Prussia, along with two of Clausewitz's brothers in its army, stood aligned with France—a fact that complicates the narrative of his departure. In opting to counsel Alexander I, Clausewitz displayed a resolute personal antipathy toward Napoleon, one that outweighed his loyalty to his country and family.

The magnitude of Clausewitz's animosity toward Napoleon led him to take a stance diametrically opposed to his homeland and kin. King of Prussia rightly interpreted the officers' actions as treasonous. Napoleon, upon hearing the "protests" of the 30 officers, responded with characteristic pragmatism, remarking that he "preferred an open enemy to a doubtful ally."

This episode underscores the depth of personal conviction and enmity that permeated the political and military landscapes of the era. Clausewitz's divergence from national allegiance in favor of his steadfast opposition to Napoleon highlights the complexities of loyalty and allegiance in times of war and ideological fervor.

Without command of the Russian language, Clausewitz found himself at the court of Alexander I, where he bore witness to pivotal moments in the campaign, including the battles of Smolensk and Borodino, as well as the fall of Moscow. It is within the context of the Russian campaign that Clausewitz's well-articulated argument for the superiority of defensive warfare over offensive tactics finds its roots.

His observations during this campaign played a significant role in shaping his understanding of military strategy, particularly regarding the principle of geography and the defensive advantages inherent in one's own territory, particularly for weaker powers. Clausewitz recognized that venturing deep into own territory provided a defensive edge, a principle vividly illustrated by the Russian campaign.

Moreover, Clausewitz's immersion in the Russian theater of war afforded him a firsthand appreciation for the effectiveness of guerrilla warfare—a tactic he had previously recognized during the anti-French uprisings in Tyrol in 1809. This experience prompted him to advocate actively for the organization of partisan resistance in Prussia, even while he was still in his homeland.

Clausewitz's insights from the Russian campaign not only refined his understanding of military strategy but also underscored the critical role of geography and unconventional warfare in shaping the outcome of conflicts. His experiences during this tumultuous period enriched his strategic vision and contributed significantly to the development of his seminal work on the nature of war.

Following the decline of Napoleon's offensive campaign, Clausewitz engaged in negotiations with the Russian side to broker a neutrality agreement with Prussia. Consequently, Prussia declared its neutrality, paving the way for its eventual alliance with the anti-French coalition at the onset of 1813. In a pivotal move, Clausewitz transitioned from the Russian army to serve on Blücher's staff, where he played an instrumental role in the campaigns spanning 1813 to 1815.

Although present at Blücher's headquarters during Napoleon's return from the Elbe, fate did not place Clausewitz in the heart of the main battle of Waterloo. Nonetheless, on June 18, 1815, the historic day of the Battle of Waterloo, he found himself at Wavre, contributing to another facet of the same conflict.

Clausewitz's strategic acumen and unwavering commitment to the anti-French cause positioned him at the forefront of military operations during this tumultuous period. While circumstances may have prevented his direct participation in certain engagements, his contributions to the broader campaign efforts were nonetheless invaluable.

Throughout these years, Clausewitz meticulously observed battles, campaigns, and wars, scrutinizing the reactions of individuals, the army, and the state through a figurative "magnifying glass." Following Napoleon's ultimate defeat, Clausewitz, armed with unparalleled experience, assumed the role of director at the Berlin Military Academy. He perceived this appointment as a form of retribution for his earlier departure from active military service and alignment with the Russians.

It was during his tenure at the academy that Clausewitz embarked on the monumental task of crafting his magnum opus, "On War," a project that commenced in 1818. From the outset, he embraced a dialectical style of writing, reflecting his philosophical approach to the subject matter. However, the complexity of his writing style, coupled with his imperfect command of language, contributed to the inherent ambiguity of the work.

Furthermore, the unfinished nature of "On War" compounded its enigmatic character. Clausewitz remained actively engaged in revising the manuscript until his untimely death in 1831. The perpetual evolution of the text, left incomplete by Clausewitz's passing, adds layers of complexity and depth to the enduring legacy of his seminal work.

In 1827, Clausewitz embarked on a significant overhaul of his still incomplete work, adopting new perspectives and approaches. This period of revision marks a pivotal juncture in the evolution of his ideas, contributing to the seeming contradictions and ambiguities that characterize the completed text. Indeed,

the revisions undertaken by Clausewitz reflect a transition from the idealism of his earlier writings to the seasoned realism borne of life experience.

This dual persona within Clausewitz—part youthful idealist, part seasoned realist—further complicates the comprehension of his work, presenting readers with a nuanced and sometimes perplexing narrative. The interplay between these contrasting perspectives underscores the depth and complexity of Clausewitz's intellectual journey.

For casual readers, this dichotomy may prove bewildering, inviting speculation among researchers regarding the trajectory of Clausewitz's views on warfare and the potential development of his philosophy had he not succumbed to cholera during his military mission to Poland in 1831. At the time of his untimely demise, he was deeply engrossed in his scholarly pursuits, leaving behind a legacy ripe for scholarly exploration and interpretation.

In fact, this event only complicates the already difficult text, but does not create any dramatic picture. As an illustration, I will bring this "two Clausewitz" approach to the main object of the work - war: the first - the young Clausewitz sees the battle as main essence of war, and the second - the experienced Clausewitz believes that war is the continuation of politics by another means. If we look carefully, we will easily realize that the views do not contradict each other at all, they do not create any conflict. This is the case with all other concepts. Therefore, the arrangement of sentences and words should not give us the impression that the author was undergoing some fundamental change and intended to make this kind of revision.

From this point of view, the work is divided into books II, III, IV and V written by the idealist Clausewitz and books VII, VIII and book I written by the realist Clausewitz, in which he had time to make corrections before his death. One thing that can be clearly shown by the observation of this process is that Clausewitz would have managed to complete and revise the work completely, there would have been an attempt to discuss the war in a broader political process, and he would not have reduced anything from the already formed concept. For example, in relation to the destruction of the enemy, Clausewitz writes about the importance of his physical destruction, which does not come into conflict with the view of the psychological destruction of the enemy, on the contrary, the views complement each other. So the content value of the text is not reduced at all by its incompleteness. Despite the complexity of the text with its variety, interconnectedness, attention to details and the conclusions drawn from them, Clausewitz's "War" is like Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, and his making assumptions due to his failure to revise his own work, according to Echevarria's findings, is very similar to talking about Beethoven's hypothetical tenth symphony, but factual It is that the 10th could not replace the existing 9 symphonies.

This work seems destined to fluctuate between periods of obscurity and resurgence. Following the author's demise, his unfinished manuscript emerged into the light between 1832 and 1834, under the guardianship of Clausewitz's wife. A decade later, it found its way into French translation, and by 1837, it was available in English. However, recognition of the work within military circles was gradual. Predominantly, it was embraced by the German military school, with figures like Moltke and Schlieffen profoundly influenced by Clausewitz's philosophy.

The exigencies of the 20th-century world wars periodically necessitated a revisit of Clausewitz's text. Despite these intermittent resurgences, his philosophy languished without the attention it truly deserved for an extended period.

Paradoxically, across continents, Clausewitz's work was often dismissed as "obsolete," yet time consistently proved such judgments wrong. Today, Clausewitz holds equal sway in military strategic thinking and business realms. His treatise, "On War," stands as one of the most widespread texts on strategy in the modern world.

If Clausewitz's "On War" encapsulates immortal concepts of strategy and warfare, then Peter Paret and Michael Howard act as Moses and Aaron, popularizing the new English translation published in 1976. Their efforts ensured that the Prussian philosophy of war found resonance in successful military and strategic institutions worldwide.

The illusion of the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, briefly dampened interest in warfare and Clausewitz. However, after September 11, 2001, both researchers and the military rediscovered the enduring relevance and depth of Clausewitz's treatise. It remains not only modern but also fundamental in its insights into the nature of conflict