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The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation: The Theories of Clausewitz and Schlieffen and Their Impact on the German Conduct of Two World Wars

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Wallach, Jehuda L. *The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation: The Theories of Clausewitz and Schlieffen and Their Impact on the German Conduct of Two World Wars*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986. 334pp. \$45

Between 1832 and 1952, sixteen editions of Carl von Clausewitz' *On War* were published in Germany; fifteen of these, beginning with the second edition in 1853, were purposely falsified by inverting the author's recommendation—that the military commander be made a member of the Cabinet so that the latter could *directly influence military planning*—to read that the commander join the Cabinet in order to *shape national policies*. Even so, most German generals avoided the book like the plague: Wilhelm Groener “procured it only in later years”; Erich Ludendorff warned that officers could “get confused by studying it”; and Paul von Hindenburg, a onetime teacher at the War Academy, thought that *On War* warned against the encroachment of politicians upon the conduct of war! Even that most Clausewitzian of politicians, Otto von Bismarck, exclaimed “shame at never having read” the work.

Jehuda Wallach, colonel in the Israeli Defense Forces and professor of military history at Tel Aviv University, has admirably shown how well a closer reading of Clausewitz might have helped German military planners from Schlieffen to Hitler; especially Schlieffen, for he, having discovered the Battle of Cannae in Hans Delbrück's writings, quite forgot the timeless validity of

Clausewitz' teachings concerning friction, interaction, and the fog of war. The battle of encirclement became the shibboleth of victory. The mechanical schematism of the Schlieffen plan assumed without hesitation that the French were willing to play the part of Terentius Varro that Schlieffen had assigned them. To be sure, had Schlieffen read more of Delbrück, whom he decried as a “civilian strategist,” he would have discovered that Hannibal had not been able to exploit his great triumph at Cannae, that he never appreciated Roman seapower, and that he eventually lost the war.

Nor is this all. German planners, from Schlieffen on, never managed to bring national policies and military strategies into line. Few remembered that the Elder Moltke's brilliant victories in 1866 and 1870 had been brought about largely by Bismarck's superb statesmanship. And in neither world war did the Germans coordinate their strategies with their major allies. Nor did they excel at army-navy (and later, air force) coordination or at economic planning for wars of long duration. Strategy over time was reduced to Falkenhayn's “Meuse grinder” at Verdun in 1916 and to Ludendorff's tactical breakthrough approach in 1918. And while Wallach would not count the Younger Moltke among the great captains, he nevertheless makes a cogent plea for more objective treatment of the man charged with carrying out Schlieffen's rigid operational plan.

Unfortunately, Wallach has offered a direct translation of the

German version of his book, first published in 1967. As a result, the invaluable literature published on the topic over the past two decades has gone unnoticed. This is especially critical for the latter third of the book, which deals with Hitler and his military paladins. It simply is dated and flawed. The publishers would have done well to omit it, or at least to have had the author rework it. In addition, they would have done well to include some maps and to check the spelling of well-known German political and military planners. This notwithstanding, the first two-thirds of the work dealing with the military under Wilhelm II is superb and offers English-language readers a welcome addition to the growing body of literature dealing with civil-military relations.

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Coutau-Bégarie, Hervé. *La Puissance Maritime—Castex et la Stratégie Navale*. Paris, France: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1985. 311pp.

Coutau-Bégarie, Hervé. *Castex, Le Stratège Inconnu*. Paris, France: Economica, 1985. 261pp.

Two recent books give, at last, an opportunity to understand in its fullness the thought of the greatest French naval strategist, Admiral Raoul Castex (1878-1968). A thirty-year-old historian, Hervé Coutau-Bégarie has rightly reestablished

“the unknown strategist”—unknown in France where care has always been brought more towards continental strategy, but also in countries where the maritime strategy is traditionally honored (Castex’s work has never been translated into English).

An 1898 graduate of the French Naval Academy, Raoul Castex began to write as early as 1904. A student in the Naval War College in Paris at the outset of World War I, he spent his years in that conflict in the Mediterranean. Promoted to flag rank in 1928, he published five volumes entitled *Theories Stratégiques* between 1929 and 1935—theories directly originated from the lectures he gave at the French Naval War College. In 1937 Castex was considered for the position of Chief of Staff of the French Navy, but the appointment went to Admiral Darlan. Slowly eased aside by his successful competitor, he had to resign a few months before France’s collapse in June 1940. He retired to his country house and continued to write till his death in 1968. A sixth posthumous volume, *Mélanges Stratégiques* was printed in 1976.

In his analysis of Admiral Castex’s ideas, Hervé Coutau-Bégarie gives the greatest credit to the synthesis achieved between concepts strongly opposed up to then:

- The historical school, which seeks to isolate immutable constituents out of the military history, must be combined with the material school that emphasizes technical data, and from that union, extract strategic guidance.