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Clausewitz, still the Master of War?

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Review article

Clausewitz, war and strategy in the twenty-first century

R. Gerald Hughes

Christopher Daase and James W. Davis (eds), Introduction by James W. Davis, *Clausewitz on Small War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. viii+252. Hbk. £58. ISBN: 9780198737131.

Christopher Coker, *Rebooting Clausewitz: On War in the 21st Century* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), pp. xiv+188. Pbk. £15.99. ISBN: 9781849047142.

‘The day after tomorrow...there will be a great battle, for which the entire army is longing. I myself look forward to this day as I would to my own wedding day.’ Clausewitz, 12 October 1806.¹

‘Today it is aid that the Russian army has begun to move on Warsaw. Then the ultimate great decision will soon take place, which I look forward to with alarm. If I should die, dearest Marie, that is part of my profession.’ Clausewitz, 29 July 1831.²

The figure of the Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz dominates Western military thought today.³ This is in spite of the fact that this philosopher of war was born in 1780 and, after a life as a career soldier, died in 1831 - *one hundred and eighty-seven years ago*.⁴ His fame is such that he even appeared in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.⁵ His (unfinished) magnum opus, *Vom Kriege*, was published posthumously after being collated and organised by his widow Maria (her enormous influence is clear from newly discovered correspondence between the couple).⁶ Some five years earlier Clausewitz had envisaged publishing his treatise in ten volumes but, despite his premature death from cholera, *Vom Kriege* remains the most important book on war ever written. Much of modern strategic thinking is derived from the concepts Clausewitz advanced in *On War*, although these have often been misinterpreted and/or misrepresented by any number of soldiers and statesmen (including Moltke the Elder, Schlieffen, Lenin, Hitler, Eisenhower and Mao).⁷ Bernard Brodie asserted that *On War* ‘is not simply the greatest but

¹ Clausewitz to his wife, Marie, 12 October 1806 (two days before the Battles of Jena-Auerstedt). Roger Parkinson, *Clausewitz: A Biography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 58.

² Clausewitz to his wife, Marie, 29 July 1831. Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State: The Man, His Theories, and His Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007 edn.), 423.

³ Emily Simpson, ‘Clausewitz’s theory of war and victory in contemporary conflict’, *Army War College Review*, 18/4 (2017/8), 7.

⁴ For a recent biography, see Donald Stoker, *Clausewitz: His Life and Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (London: Penguin, 1982 [1869]), 920.

⁶ On this, see Vanya Eftimova Bellinger, *Marie von Clausewitz: The Woman behind the Making of On War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁷ On Mao and Clausewitz, see Yuanlin Zhang, ‘Mao Zedong’s bezugnahme auf Clausewitz’, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 81/2 (1999), 443-71.

the only true great book on war’⁸ whilst US Army Colonel Harry Summers, Jr. opined that ‘*On War* is still the seminal work [in military science]’.⁹ Clausewitz criticised earlier thinkers for their adherence to dogmatic and prescriptive theories that predicted success if only they were pursued in an inflexible fashion to victory. (The obvious drawback here being the question of what is one to do if one’s opponent is guided by the very same principles). Its insights mean that *On War* has never been out of print, although debates as to its continued contemporary relevance rage as strongly as ever. This article will consider two recent offerings amongst the recent wave of what we might term ‘Clausewitz Studies’. One is a newly-translated edited collection of his writings, *Clausewitz on Small War*; the other a reconsideration of Clausewitz for the twenty-first century, *Rebooting Clausewitz: On War in the 21st Century*.

The continued utility of Clausewitz’s thinking on small wars makes the publication of the first English language edition of Clausewitz’s *Lectures on Small War* and other writings on small unit warfare, particularly timely.¹⁰ In *Clausewitz on Small War* Christopher Daase (who has already written extensively on this subject)¹¹ and James W. Davis have translated and edited the most important texts devoted to the analysis of asymmetric, unconventional, guerrilla, and small unit warfare. It is clear from reading *Clausewitz on Small Wars* that, while Clausewitz’s reputation as a theorist of classic inter-state conflict is well-deserved, he was also a highly original thinker in the realms of small wars and all forms of asymmetric warfare (including guerrilla warfare and terrorism).¹² *Clausewitz on Small Wars* is an important collection and, after an excellent introductory piece by one of the editors, comprises the following: ‘Lectures on Small War, held at the War College [*Allgemeine Kriegsschule*] in 1810 and 1811’ (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 19-168);¹³ the ‘Testimonial (*Bekennnisdenschrift*)’ (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 169-216) of 1812 (which called for a national war of liberation against Napoleonic France); ‘On the political advantages and disadvantages of the Prussian institution of the *Landwehr*’ (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 217-20) from 1819 (an assessment of the effectiveness of the *Landwehr*, a citizen militia that operated with the Prussian army after having been established on 17 March 1813); and, finally, ‘The arming of the people (*Volksbewaffnung*)’ from 1832 (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 221-6).¹⁴ The ‘Testimonial (*Bekennnisdenschrift*)’ comprises a text that was sent by Clausewitz to Major-General August von Gneisenau (1760-1831) in February 1812, and circulated amongst other military reformers in Prussia. Clausewitz began it by declaring: ‘This short text is designed to justify before the eyes of the world, the political opinion of those who had to give way to conventional opinion and were denounced as quixotic fools, or dangerous revolutionaries, or frivolous cacklers, or self-serving schemers’ (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 169). This quote typifies the manner in which the pieces that comprise *Clausewitz on Small Wars* illuminate Clausewitz’s worldview. This also goes for the ‘Lectures on Small War’ (which comprise the bulk of this collection)

⁸ Bernard Brodie, ‘The Continuing Relevance of *On War*’ in 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), 58.

⁹ Harry Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2002), 4.

¹⁰ Most of these have been available in German for many years. See, for example, Werner Hahlweg (ed.), *Carl von Clausewitz: Schriften, Aufsätze, Studien, Briefe*, 2 volumes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966).

¹¹ See, for instance, Christopher Daase, ‘Clausewitz and Small Wars’ in Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, (eds.), *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 182-95.

¹² On this, see Christopher Daase and Sebastian Schindler, ‘Clausewitz, Guerillakrieg und Terrorismus: Zur Aktualität einer missverstandenen Kriegstheorie’, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 50/4 (2009), 701-31.

¹³ Originally published as Carl von Clausewitz, ‘Meine Vorlesungen über den Kleinen Krieg, gehalten auf der Kriegs-Schule 1810 und 1811’ in Carl von Clausewitz: *Schriften, Aufsätze, Studien, Briefe*, ed. Werner Hahlweg (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), pp. 205-588.

¹⁴ This is a new translation of Clausewitz’s chapter in *On War* entitled ‘The People in Arms’.

which demonstrate a great deal of the genesis of the book *Vom kriege* as, in the wake of defeat and the Peace of Tilsit (July 1807), Clausewitz the career soldier turned his attention to recent history and its impact upon military theory.¹⁵ At this time Clausewitz was attached to the Military Reorganisation Commission headed by Gerhard von Scharnhorst (1755-1813) at the new War Department in Berlin.¹⁶ At this time Prussia was a defeated state and an ally of Napoleon, albeit a reluctant one. In such circumstances, the Prussian War Academy naturally turned to self-reflection and practical military matters (as did the *Reichswehr* and Colonel General Hans von Seeckt following Imperial Germany's defeat in 1918).¹⁷ *Clausewitz on Small Wars* shows Clausewitz at his pragmatic and prescriptive best – seeking to instruct future generations of soldiers as to how best to prepare themselves for the fog and friction of war, prior to their being actually engaged in war themselves.

Christopher Coker's *Rebooting Clausewitz: On War in the 21st Century* weighs into the debates on Clausewitz on all fronts, asking, for instance, 'What went wrong in Iraq and Afghanistan' (*Rebooting Clausewitz*, 94). Coker's book focusses on the misunderstood notion of the role of politics in Clausewitz's worldview, stressing how often it is forgotten that Clausewitz was unequivocal on the point that it is through political means that wars can be controlled and limited. But Clausewitz's opinions on the role of politics in preventing conflict escalation (and placing putting limits on military) have not really been taken seriously enough. Despite the wealth of scholarship on this subject, a number of myths and misunderstandings surround Clausewitz and his work (Beatrice Heuser has termed these 'misinterpretations of enormous consequence').¹⁸ Most notoriously, Hitler was supposedly a keen devotee of Clausewitz and his work although, in reality, the Führer got the Prussian philosopher of war all wrong. In *War, Clausewitz and the Trinity* (2013), Thomas Waldman examined recent debates over Clausewitz's continued relevance in the face of onslaughts from the 'new war' theorists, proponents of 'non-Trinitarian' warfare', and the technological determinism of the extreme proponents of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA).¹⁹ As the framework upon which Clausewitzian ideas are brought together and rendered workable,²⁰ the Trinity is a particular target of criticism. In his lengthy study, Waldman argued that anti-Clausewitzians tended to base their case against Clausewitz on popular secondary readings, which are often inaccurate in their interpretations. That said, it is also true that enthusiasts for Clausewitzian thinking have often downplayed the extent of change in warfare since Clausewitz's time, often because of the anachronistic parts of Clausewitz's writings (on cavalry, for example). Waldman asserts that the admirers of Clausewitz need not fret: indeed, the entire theoretical framework of Clausewitz can be readily adapted to rapid and radical change.²¹

¹⁵ Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle: The Political Theory of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 32.

¹⁶ Parkinson, *Clausewitz*, 97.

¹⁷ Winston Churchill later noted that - 'not unjustly' - Field Marshal August von Mackensen had compared Seeckt to Scharnhorst. In 1925, Mackensen had supposedly remarked of Seeckt's successes: 'The old fire burns still, and the Allied Control has not destroyed any of the lasting elements of German strength.' Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, volume 1, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 8th edn. 1966), 42.

¹⁸ Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz* (London: Pimlico, 2002), x.

¹⁹ On RMAs see Colin S. Gray, *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

²⁰ Christopher Bassford, 'The Primacy of Policy and the Trinity in Clausewitz's Mature Thought' in Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 75.

²¹ Thomas Waldman, *War, Clausewitz and the Trinity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

There are, of course, certain constants in the study of war but, as Clausewitz noted, ‘every age had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions.’²² And Clausewitz’s historicisation of military science is now emulated by many modern students of national security (and the ‘sub-discipline’ of Security Studies).²³ This flexibility has not rendered Clausewitz invulnerable to the charge of his advancing obsolete ideas (and, as Azar Gat noted, the ‘obscurity’ of Clausewitz’s text only encouraged unhistorical interpretations).²⁴ The changes which have supposedly rendered Clausewitzian thought obsolete has led to what Mary Kaldor termed ‘new wars’. This label was deemed to be a response to the transformation wrought in ‘organized violence’ in the last decades of the twentieth century.²⁵ (Mary Kaldor does, at least, recognise the continued value of certain portions of Clausewitz’s thinking. And she acknowledges that Clausewitz’s influence is such, that ‘new wars’ 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*.’)²⁶ Kaldor’s critique of Clausewitz rests on her assertion that his theories are not timeless, as is often asserted (this, of course, is a serious charge against any philosopher).

[T]he notion of absolute war, the inner tendency of war to lead to extremes, which I regard as the core of Clausewitzian theory, is no longer applicable. For Clausewitz, war was fundamentally about the ‘urge to decision’, which was achieved through fighting, that is to say combat between two warring parties, and this implied the need for speed and concentration; the suspension of belligerent action and the dispersal of forces did, of course, take place but were explained in terms of departures from the inner nature of war. Today’s wars, by contrast to the European wars of the 19th and 20th centuries, are inconclusive, long lasting and have a tendency to spread.²⁷

Refuting such thinking, in his introduction to *Clausewitz on Small War* James W. Davis asserts that critics of Clausewitz see his work as being limited by virtue of its ‘time-bound framework’ for analyses. (Martin van Creveld, for instance, declared the work of Clausewitz, and all ‘classical strategy’, to be the ‘product of specific periods and circumstances.’)²⁸ Clausewitz’s approach, it is argued, fails to ‘anticipate forms of warfare beyond the rather symmetric pitched battlefield exchanges of large regular armies – the “old wars” that are said to have characterized his own times.’ (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 10). Davis argues that much of the criticism is misplaced as commentators often mistakenly attack versions of Clausewitzian thought produced by individuals other than Clausewitz himself. Furthermore, many critics of Clausewitz have been limited to reading those of his works available in the English language and relied too heavily on the ‘unfinished work *On War*’ (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 10).

²² Clausewitz, *On War*, 593.

²³ Christopher Daase, ‘Die Historisierung der Sicherheit: Anmerkungen zur historischen Sicherheitsforschung aus politikwissenschaftlicher Sicht’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 38/3, ‘Sicherheit und Epochengrenzen’ (2012), 387-405.

²⁴ Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 202.

²⁵ Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 1-2.

²⁶ Mary Kaldor, ‘Inconclusive Wars: Is Clausewitz Still Relevant in these Global Times?’, *Global Policy*, 1/3 (2010), 271.

²⁷ Kaldor, ‘Inconclusive Wars’, 272.

²⁸ Martin van Creveld, *On Future War* (London: Brassey’s, 1991), 206.

Elsewhere, indeed, Christopher Haase has made the point that Clausewitz's critics would have been more measured in their attacks had his writings on small wars been translated earlier.²⁹

Coker's book seeks to utilise the material assembled against Clausewitz by his critics by demonstrating his enduring relevance in the face of technological change. This involves the application of Clausewitzian ideas to the contemporary world by means of the integration of such concepts as 'big data'³⁰ into the Prussian thinker's worldview. In order to do this three fictional scenarios are constructed. First, Clausewitz is placed in a seminar at the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point; second, he debates the course of the post-2001 'War on Terror' at an imaginary think-tank in Washington DC; and, third, participates in a lively seminar on the Hegelian-type debate on the utility of reading history. In this seminar, Clausewitz considers fighting contemporary wars by means of a discussion of the most productive way to read military history. This seminar, situated at a meeting of the Military History Circle in London, is particularly appropriate given the fact that it was Clausewitz who introduced Hegelian dialectical thought to the study of war (one of Clausewitz's great ontological achievements).³¹ All of these essays locate Clausewitz across the centuries, deconstruct and analyse his philosophy of war. Coker argues that the advances in evolutionary psychology and neuroscience made since Clausewitz's death in 1831 vindicate and even expand Clausewitz's view of war. What is clear is that, even though he was unaware of them, Clausewitz's theories have proved remarkably resilient in the face of the major technological developments that have occurred since his death.

Clausewitz had two great preoccupations. First, how to win wars. And, second, the relationship between war and logic. In order to address these and other questions, he acknowledged the utility of unifying theories. Contrary to the opinions of many of his detractors, Clausewitz was not a militarist, even though, on occasion, his prose might lead you to conclude he was in love with war (or at least happy to live with war – see the epigrams at the head of this article). He saw war as something that resided, however unfortunately, in the human condition. The business of the strategist was to ameliorate the impact of the imperfections of politics, 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. Determined to avoid wasteful distractions, in his West Point seminar Clausewitz repeats his maxim that war remains, fundamentally, 'an act of violence to compel an enemy to do our will' (*Rebooting Clausewitz*, 29). This simple formulation belies the fact that there exists a variety of victories, and different modes of will and assorted clashes of combatant will. Clausewitz's trinity casts the nature of war as the interplay of three fundamental elements: reason, passion, and chance.³² The expanding complexity of the world today is a stimulus to good Clausewitzian analysis 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 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.

²⁹ Christopher Daase, 'Kleine Kriege und die Aktualität von Clausewitz' in Joerg Calliess (ed.), *Vom Gebrauch des traurigen „Notmittels Krieg“: Welche militärischen Operationen können welche politischen Zwecke fördern?* (Loccum: Evangelische Akademie Verlag, 2001), 26.

³⁰ On this, see Damien Van Puyvelde, Stephen Coulthart and M. Shahriar Hossain, 'Beyond the buzzword: big data and national security decision-making', *International Affairs*, 93/6 (2017), 1397-1416.

³¹ Peter Paret, 'Clausewitz' in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 194.

³² Despite its notoriety, Clausewitz dealt with the notion of the 'Trinity' on just one page of *Vom Kriege* (Clausewitz, *On War*, 89).

(For some, this would be more attractive than the approach of, say, Sir Michael Howard, whose deconstruction of strategic epochs focused rather more on careful historical analysis).³³ Such an approach might address one of the central criticisms of the US Intelligence Community (IC): i.e. that it doesn't 'do' theory.³⁴ (Such debates as to the utility of a unifying theory have raged in Intelligence Studies for years now).³⁵ 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'.³⁶

The idea that innovations like 'big data', the RMA and 'full-dimensional protection', have rendered Clausewitzian thought obsolete is hard to sustain. The misunderstandings arising out of the impact of these developments upon fundamentals such as the *nature* of war, and the *character* of conflict, are obviously a cause of some irritation to advocates of Clausewitz and Coker is but the latest of a long line of scholars to lament the repeated misinterpretations of Clausewitz. How to win efficiently is, Coker asserts, something the US military has largely forgotten how to do. Its military culture is, in terms of the grasp of basics in classical strategy, simply inadequate. He thus lambasts the 'a-strategic' nature of US military culture and demonstrates Clausewitz's point with a Darwinian breakdown of the social complexity of the post-2003 conflict in Iraq, and the development of the resistance forces there. This analysis culminates in a damning indictment of US policy which, however unwittingly, 'created [the] conditions in which the seeds of Islamic State [ISIS] were sown' (*Rebooting Clausewitz*, 103-4).

In war, it is axiomatic to declare that good intelligence is a prerequisite of victory. Contrary to popular misconceptions, Clausewitz was intensely aware of the value of intelligence at all levels, but he was famously also highly suspicious of the potential for accuracy derived from a large proportion of military intelligence. That this was so was generally derived from phenomena that Clausewitz termed the 'fog of war' and 'friction'. It is in response to these two negatives that Clausewitz developed his concept of 'military genius'.³⁷ This, naturally, is of great advantage in the realm of how leaders use intelligence.³⁸ 'Military genius' was not just a matter of intellect but, rather, an admixture of intellect with personality, courage, experience, and temperament. If sufficient of these qualities are present in sufficient quantity, then one might be able to nullify the effects of the 'fog of war' and 'friction'.³⁹ Clausewitz argued forcefully that 'friction' will always create significant difficulties for the implementation of any war plan, whilst the 'fog of war' will always hinder commanders in their attempts to get a

³³ Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 198-200.

³⁴ Robert Jervis, 'The Politics and Psychology of Intelligence and Intelligence Reform', *The Forum*, 4/1 (2006), 7-8.

³⁵ On this, see Christopher Andrew, 'Intelligence, International Relations and 'Under-theorisation'', *Intelligence and National Security*, 19/2 (2004), 170-184; and Claudia Hillebrand and R. Gerald Hughes, 'The Quest for a Theory of Intelligence' in Robert Dover, Michael Goodman and Huw Dylan (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Security, Risk and Intelligence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1-24.

³⁶ Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 181.

³⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 100-12.

³⁸ On this, see Michael I. Handel, 'Leaders and intelligence', *Intelligence and National Security*, 3/3 (2008), 3-39.

³⁹ Major Frederick L. Shepherd III, *The Fog of War: Effects of Uncertainty on Airpower Employment* (New York: PN Books, 1997), 9-10.

picture of what is happening.⁴⁰ Clausewitz's scepticism about intelligence was largely directed at the tactical and operational levels. At the strategic and political levels, by contrast, he repeatedly reiterated the absolute necessity of (high-level) political and strategic intelligence. Naturally, Clausewitz's writings were based on his own experiences as a soldier. One should therefore recall that his Prussian army was inferior to the contemporary French army in military intelligence,⁴¹ as in virtually every respect, due not least to the 'systemic' approach of Napoleonic warfare. Thus, while Clausewitz is sometimes accused of disregarding intelligence, this is simply not true. (He did, however, note its limitations in his day – many of which have been overcome since, not least by advances in technology).⁴²

Clausewitzians have no patience with approaches that seek reduce the conduct of war to simple perceptions about power, approached 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. Peter Paret recently provided a highly useful volume in this regard in his *Clausewitz in seiner Zeit*, which deployed a series of his essays in order to that wed intellectual history and biography thus taking the contextualisation of Clausewitz to new heights.⁴³ 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. Clausewitz himself would never have been so arrogant. Indeed, the Prussian believed that, as well as seeking to understand the phenomenon of war, there was a very good reason for specifically addressing 'small wars'

The topic of my lectures is Small War and the operations of the General Staff. The reason for separating these from the other lectures on war is the intention to differentiate the mechanical from the scholarly. The General Staff's operations are mechanical, or, if you would prefer, technical skills, which relate to general war: reconnoitring, marching orders, etc. Small War, however, is not something mechanical or merely technical, though it depends even more on a certain virtuosity, that is, on the development and training of natural abilities, whereas in general wars more scholarly and articulate views predominate (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 19).

A truth all too often lost on the Pentagon and other strategists in the US is that other nations (and cultures) still fight differently from the Western (or the American) way of war. (The dreaded phenomenon of 'mirror-imaging', as ever, remains a potentially deadly pitfall).⁴⁴ 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 of war itself.

⁴⁰ On Clausewitz, military command and intelligence, see John Ferris and Michael I. Handel, 'Clausewitz, Intelligence, Uncertainty and the Art of Command in Military Operations', *Intelligence and National Security*, 10/1 (1995), 1-58.

⁴¹ For an insight into Napoleon's use of intelligence in war, see Jay Luvaas, 'Napoleon's use of intelligence: The Jena campaign of 1805', *Intelligence and National Security*, 3/3 (2008), 40-54.

⁴² 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), 52-4.

⁴³ Peter Paret, trans. Reinhold Janke, *Clausewitz in seiner Zeit: Zur Kriegs- und Kulturgeschichte der Jahre von 1780 bis 1831* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2017).

⁴⁴ On this phenomenon, see Lauren Witlin, 'Of Note: Mirror-Imaging and Its Dangers', *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 28/1 (2008), 89-90.

Once you start demarcating forms of ‘knowledge’, dismissing groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS) as a throwback to the Medieval era becomes all too easy (as the United States and the Soviet Union learned to their cost in Vietnam and Afghanistan, respectively).⁴⁵ In today’s turbulent and increasingly fractured world, digesting military history teaches us not to underestimate one’s enemies. US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper was candid about his nation’s recent failings in 2014.

What we didn’t do was predict the will [of the Islamic State] to fight. That’s always a problem. We didn’t do it in Vietnam. We underestimated the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese and overestimated the will of the South Vietnamese. In this case, we underestimated ISIL [the Islamic State] and overestimated the fighting capability of the Iraqi army . . . I didn’t see the collapse of the Iraqi security force in the north coming. I didn’t see that. It boils down to predicting the will to fight, which is an imponderable.⁴⁶

Clausewitz knew only too well of such potential pitfalls in war, and his insights here typify the soundness of the philosophical tenets with which he sought to understand war. In his ‘Testimonial’, Clausewitz identified ‘[f]ighting for the fatherland’ as the soldier’s greatest motivation. And, as an analysis of the nature of asymmetric war it is hard to dissent from Clausewitz’s view that ‘[t]he history of our times demonstrates to us that the most forceful war can be waged with little money; but only with a great deal of courage and good will.’⁴⁷ The frequency of such insights contributes towards making *Clausewitz on Small War* an illuminating and important book. And scholars and militaries should be grateful to Daase and Davis for their sterling efforts. In a recent review of *Clausewitz on Small War* Timothy D. Hoyt perceptively identified the edited volume as a ‘metaphor for Clausewitz’s remarkable trinity.’ Because the four pieces depict ‘Clausewitz the officer, Clausewitz the patriot’, Hoyt sees this as ‘a personal manifestation of the forces of chance, accident and probability (nested largely in the military), primordial violence, hatred and enmity (found largely in the people), and rationality (found in the political leadership).’ This allowed the trinity to act as ‘the foundations for [Clausewitz’s] discussions of how and why the character of war can and has (in his time) changed.’⁴⁸ Such a contribution to long-standing debates constitutes the real appeal of *Clausewitz on Small War* to today’s military historians and strategists. In the contemporary world, Clausewitz’s belief in the utility of force (or at least an acceptance that it is the way things are), and of the necessity of keeping political and military goals in close alignment continues to shape international politics.⁴⁹ And make no mistake about it – even for the United States the idea of exactly how to use its overwhelming military power is problematic. The widest possible audience for texts arguing for the enduring relevance of Clausewitz is important not least because it is with good reason that Clausewitz remains required reading in military academies and universities worldwide.⁵⁰

[Clausewitz’s] discernment of the power of a people in arms, mobilized by patriotism or ideology and willing to make great sacrifices to achieve victory,

⁴⁵ Bruce Riedel, ‘Comparing the U.S. and Soviet Experiences in Afghanistan’, *CTC Sentinel*, 2/5 (2009), 1-4.

⁴⁶ David Griffiths, ‘James Clapper: We underestimated the Islamic State’s “will to fight”’, *Washington Post*, 18 September 2014.

⁴⁷ ‘Testimonial (*Bekennnisdenkschrift*)’ in Daase and Davis (eds), *Clausewitz on Small War*, 169-216.

⁴⁸ Timothy D. Hoyt, ‘Clausewitz and Small Wars: The Conceptual Origins of the “Remarkable Trinity”’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40/3 (2017), 441.

⁴⁹ Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought*, 215.

⁵⁰ R. Gerald Hughes, ‘War as Political Violence’ in Marie Breen-Smyth (ed.) *The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Violence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 358.

should be fundamental for those considering wars that will require occupation. Clausewitz's critics, as always, will argue that because he does not provide simple answers to specific complex contemporary problems, he has nothing to offer. The fact that the United States has, in this century, pursued two wars of unlimited aims (with the explicit objective of overthrowing an existing regime), and then faced the quandary of counterinsurgency and state building, should suggest that Clausewitz is as relevant to strategic calculations today as ever.⁵¹

In his introduction to *Clausewitz on Small War*, James W. Davis makes a strong case for Clausewitz's writings as being underpinned by a single philosophical approach, applying to 'small' and 'big' wars alike. For Davis, '[a]ugmenting our understanding of Clausewitz with his early writings on Small War leads us to the conclusion that asymmetric warfare is not a development that can be termed pre- or post-Clausewitzian as many contemporary scholars of war and military strategy argue' (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 17-8). In fact, the theory developed by Clausewitz in *On War*, and the earlier ideas on Small War, represent a real continuity in thinking. Criticism that Clausewitz failed to appreciate the emergence of today's asymmetric and hybrid wars, signally fails to appreciate that 'Clausewitz's framework [allow us to direct] our focus to changes in the relationship between the identity of warriors, the means of violence employed, and the purposes to which it is put'.

Ultimately, [for Clausewitz] war is an act of violence (Gewalt) intended to compel the enemy to submit to a foreign will. A close reading of Clausewitz's writings on Small War leads to the conclusion that he did not have a fixed conception of the political organizations that might adopt means or of the form the ensuing clash of wills would take. Rather, it is that which unifies warfare despite the diversity of its empirical forms that interested him (*Clausewitz on Small War*, 18).

Sir Michael Howard once observed that Clausewitz was possessed of a 'magisterial fairness of judgment' derived from 'experience rather than abstraction', placing him 'in a class by himself' as a strategist.⁵² That this is the case is derived from the fact that the Clausewitzian paradigm has endured because war evolves in tandem with humanity. And the elevation of the human factor to prominence was something recognised in the Sixteenth Century by Niccolò Machiavelli who wrote that '[e]verything that happens in the world at any time has genuine resemblance to what happened in ancient times. This is due to the fact that the agents who bring such things about are men, and that men have, and always have had, the same passions, whence it necessarily comes about that the same effects are produced.'⁵³ Clausewitz himself acknowledged in *On War* that, in the wake of the French Revolution, 'peoples themselves were in the scale on either side.'⁵⁴ The belief that any discussion of war must always keep humanity at the heart of matters was something Clausewitz never deviated from. It is at the core of why he remains relevant today.

⁵¹ Hoyt, 'Clausewitz and Small Wars', 441.

⁵² Sir Michael Howard, 'Foreword' to Carl von Clausewitz, *The Campaign of 1812 in Russia* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), xiv.

⁵³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, trans. Leslie J. Walker, revisions by Brian Richardson (London: Penguin, 2003 [1531]), 517.

⁵⁴ Peter Paret, *Clausewitz in his time: Essays in the cultural and intellectual history of thinking about war* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), 85.

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