



**THE REALITY OF WAR**

THE REALITY OF WAR

A COMPANION TO CLAUSEWITZ

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**EDITOR'S PREFACE**

Great books, the masterpieces of the special branch of knowledge with which they deal, are often very big books; and busy men, who have not unlimited time for reading, find it helpful to have some one who will give them a general summary of a famous writer's teaching, and point out the most important passages in which the author himself embodies the very essence of his argument.

This is what Major Murray has done for the most important work on war that was ever written. He does not give a mere dry summary of its contents. He sets forth, in language so plain that even the civilian reader or the youngest

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soldier can read it with interest, the essence of the teaching of Clausewitz, and he embodies in his book the most striking passages of the original work. He adds to each section of his subject some useful criticisms, and at the end of the book he sums up the effect of recent changes on the practice of war.

The book is a popular manual of the realities of war, which should be read not only by soldiers, but by every one who takes an intelligent interest in the great events of our time.

As to the practical value of the writings of Clausewitz, it may be well to quote here the words of Mr. Spenser Wilkinson, the Professor of Military History at Oxford, from his introduction to the original edition of Major Murray's work:

"Clausewitz was a Prussian officer who first saw fighting as a boy in 1793,

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and whose experience of war lasted until 1815, when the great war ended. He was then thirty-five and spent the next fifteen years in trying to clear his mind on the subject of war, which he did by writing a number of military histories and a systematic treatise 'On War.' At the age of fifty he tied his manuscripts into a parcel, hoping to work at them again on the conclusion of the duties for which he was ordered from home. A little more than a year later he died at Breslau of cholera, and the papers, to which he had never put the finishing touch, were afterwards published by his widow.

"Part of the value of his work is due to the exceptional opportunities which he enjoyed. When the war of 1806 began he had long been the personal adjutant of one of the Prussian princes, and an intimate friend of Scharnhorst, who was

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probably the greatest of Napoleon's contemporaries. In the period of reorganization which followed the Peace of Tilsit he made the acquaintance of Gneisenau, and of almost all the officers who made their mark in the subsequent wars of liberation. During the years of preparation he was Scharnhorst's assistant, first in the Ministry of War and then on the General Staff. During the campaign of 1812 he served with the Russian army as a staff officer. Thus his experience during the four years of the Wars of Liberation was that of one who was continually behind the scenes, always in touch with the Governments and Generals, and therefore better able than any one not so favourably placed to see everything in its proper perspective, and to follow

and appreciate the considerations which directed the decisions both of statesmen and of the commanders of armies. His

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personal character was of the finest mould, and his writings have the sincerity, the absence of which makes it so difficult to rely upon those of Napoleon.

"The ultimate test of the value of books is time. When Clausewitz died, the two books on war which were thought the best were those of the Archduke Charles of Austria and General Jomini. To-day the book of Clausewitz, 'On War,' easily holds the first place. It is the least technical of all the great books on war; from beginning to end it is nothing but common sense applied to the subject, but for that reason it is the hardest to digest, because common sense or a man's natural instinctive judgment on any subject is exceedingly hard to analyse and put into words. An exceptionally gifted man can go through this process, but few can follow it for any length of time without a distinct effort.

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"Almost every good institution has arisen out of the effort to provide a remedy for some evil, but in the imperfection of human nature nearly every institution brings with it fresh evils, which in their turn have to be counteracted. The modern spirit, with its hatred of nepotism and its belief in knowledge, has grafted the examination system upon every form of education from the lowest to the highest. The British army shares in the benefits and in the disadvantages of the system, of which, in the case of an officer, the danger to be guarded against is that it tends to accustom a man to rely rather on his memory than his intelligence, and to lean more on other people's thinking than on his own. Clausewitz aimed at producing the very opposite result. He does not offer specific solutions of the various problems of war lest officers, in moments when their business

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is to decide and to act, should be trying to recall his precepts instead of using their eyes and their wits. His purpose rather is to enable them to understand what war is. He believed that if a man had accustomed himself to think of war as it really is, had got to know the different elements which go to make it up, and to distinguish those that are important from those that are comparative trifles, he would be more likely to know of himself what to do in a given situation, and would be much less likely to confuse himself by trying to remember what some general, long since dead, did on some occasion in which after all the position was by no means the same as that in which he finds himself."

What is said here of the soldier actually engaged in war, is true also even of the onlooker who takes a patriotic interest

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in the progress of a war in which his country is involved. Unless he has a clear idea of the real character of modern war, and the principles on which success or failure depend, he will be utterly unable to grasp the significance of the events of which he reads each day. And it is of real importance that in time of war every citizen should judge soundly the course of events, for opinion influences action, and public opinion is made up of the ideas of the units who compose the public. In this connection it is well to bear in mind a point that is often overlooked, a point on which Clausewitz

insists in a singularly convincing passage — namely, the fact that one of the main objects of a nation waging war is to force the enemy's population into a state of mind favourable to submission. This fact is sufficient proof of the importance of public opinion

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being well informed not only as to the course of events, but also as to the principles that give to these events their real significance.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **THE LIFE OF CLAUSEWITZ**

In an endeavour, such as the present, to interest the British public in even the greatest military writer, the first necessity is to show that he was not a mere theorist or bookworm. The wide and varied experience which the British officer gradually gains in so many different parts of the world shows up the weak points of most theories, and produces a certain distrust of them. Also a distrust of theory is

undoubtedly one of our national characteristics. Hence, in order to appeal to the British officer or civilian, a writer must be a practical soldier.

Such was General Clausewitz: a practical soldier of very great experience in

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the long series of wars 1793 to 1815, and one present throughout that most awful of all campaigns, Napoleon's Russian campaign in 1812.

"General Karl von Clausewitz was born near Magdeburg in 1780, and entered the Prussian army as Fahnenjunker in 1792. He served in the campaigns of 1793-1794 on the Rhine. In 1801 he entered the military school at Berlin as an officer, and remained there till 1803. He here attracted the notice of Scharnhorst. In the campaign of 1806 he served as aide-de-camp to Prince Augustus of Prussia, was present at the battle of Jena, and saw that awful retreat which ended a fortnight later in the surrender at Prentzlau. Being wounded and captured, he was sent into France as a prisoner till the end of the war." "On his return (in November, 1807) he was placed on General Scharnhorst's staff,

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and employed on the work then going on for the reorganization of the Prussian army. In 1812 Clausewitz entered the Russian service, was employed on the general staff, and was thus able to gain much experience in the most gigantic of all the struggles of his time." "In the spring campaign of 1813 (battles of Lutzen, Bautzen, etc.), he, as a Russian officer, was attached to Blucher's staff; during the winter campaign he found employment as chief-of-the-staff to Count Walmoden, who fought against Davoust on the Lower Elbe, and the splendid action of the Goerde was entirely the result of his able dispositions. In 1815 he again entered the Prussian service, and was chief-of-the-staff to the III. Army Corps (Thielman), which at Ligny formed the left of the line of battle, and at Wavre covered the rear of Blucher's army." "In addition to this, we may

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say, considerable practical training (note, enormous and varied indeed compared to any obtainable in the present day), he also possessed a comprehensive and thorough knowledge of military history, and also an uncommonly clear perception of general history" (Von Caemmerer). After the Peace he was employed in a command on the Rhine. In 1818 he became major-general, and was made Director of the Military School at Berlin. Here he remained for some years. This was the chief period of his writings. As General von Caemmerer, in his "Development of Strategical Science," puts it: "This practical and experienced, and at the same time highly cultured soldier, feels now, in peaceful repose, as he himself confesses, the urgent need to develop and systematize the whole world of thought which occupies him, yet also resolves to keep secret till his death the

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fruit of his researches, in order that his soul, which is thirsting for *Truth*, may be safely and finally spared all temptations from subordinate considerations."

In 1830 he was appointed Director of Artillery at Breslau, and, having no more time for writing, sealed up and put away his papers, unfinished as they were. In the same year he was appointed chief-of-the-staff to Field-Marshal Gneisenau's army. In the winter of that year war with France was considered imminent, and Clausewitz had

prospects of acting as chief of the general staff of the Commander-in-Chief Gneisenau. He then drew up two plans for war with France, which bear the stamp of that practical knowledge of war and adaptation of means to ends which distinguish his writings.

In the same year the war scare passed away, the army of Gneisenau was disbanded,  
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and Clausewitz returned to Breslau, where after a few days he was seized with cholera, and died in November, 1831, aged only 51.

His works were published after his death by his widow.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE INFLUENCE OF CLAUSEWITZ ON MODERN POLICY AND WAR

From the day of their publication until now the influence of the writings of Clausewitz has been steadily growing, till to-day it is impossible to over-estimate the extent of that influence upon modern military and political thought, especially in Germany. As General von Caemmerer, in his "Development of Strategical Science," says: "Karl von Clausewitz, the pupil and friend of Scharnhorst and the confidant of Gneisenau, is in Germany generally recognized as the most prominent theorist on war, as the real philosopher on war, to whom our famous

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victors on the more modern battlefields owe their spiritual training."

Field-Marshal Moltke was "his most distinguished pupil," and adapted the teaching of Clausewitz to the conditions of to-day.

General von der Goltz, in the introduction to his great work, "The Nation in Arms," thus describes the veneration which he inspires: "A military writer who, after Clausewitz, writes upon the subject of war, runs the risk of being likened to a poet who, after Goethe, attempts a *Faust*, or, after Shakespeare, a *Hamlet*. Everything important that can be told about the nature of war can be found stereotyped in the works which that great military genius has left behind him. Although Clausewitz has himself described his book as being something as yet incomplete, this remark of his must be taken to mean that he, too, was

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subject to the fate of all aspiring spirits, and was forced to feel that all he attained lay far beneath his ideal. For us, who knew not what that ideal was, his labours are a complete work. I have, accordingly, not attempted to write anything new, or of universal applicability about the science of warfare, but have limited myself to turning my attention to the military operations of our own day." One can hardly imagine a stronger tribute of admiration.

And, as Moltke was Clausewitz's most distinguished pupil, so also are all those trained in the school of Moltke pupils of Clausewitz, including the most eminent of modern German military writers, such as General von Blume, in his "Strategy"; Von der Goltz, in his "Nation in Arms" and "The Conduct of War," who trained the Turkish General Staff for the campaign of 1897 against Greece and the battle of Pharsalia, etc.; General von

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Boguslawski; General von Verdy du Vernois, the father of the study of Applied Tactics; General von Schlichting, in his "Tactical and Strategical Principles of the Present"; General Meckel, who trained the Japanese Staff, etc., etc.

We all remember the telegram sent to General Meckel by Marshal Oyama after the battle of Liao-yang: "We hope you are proud of your pupils."

Some time ago, when asked to give a lecture at Aldershot to the officers of the 2nd Division on Clausewitz, it struck me that it would be very interesting, anxious as we all were then to know the causes of the wonderful Japanese efficiency and success, if I could obtain a pronouncement from General Meckel how far he had been influenced in his teaching by Clausewitz. My friend Herr von Donat did me the favour to write to General von Caemmerer and ask him if he could procure

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me such a pronouncement which I might publish. General Meckel, whose death both Japan and Germany have since had to mourn, most kindly consented, and I esteem it a great honour to be allowed to quote part of his letter. He said: "I, like every other German officer, have, consciously or unconsciously, instructed in the spirit of Clausewitz. Clausewitz is the *founder* of that theory of war which resulted from the Napoleonic. I maintain that *every one* who nowadays either makes or teaches war in a modern sense, bases himself upon Clausewitz, even if he is not conscious of it." This opinion of General Meckel, to whose training of the Japanese General Staff the success of the Japanese armies must be largely attributed, is most interesting. It is not possible to give a stronger or more up-to-date example of the magnitude of the influence of Clausewitz.

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In this connection I should like to make a short quotation from "The War in the Far East," by the *Times* military correspondent. In his short but suggestive chapter on "Clausewitz in Manchuria" he says: "But as all save one of the great battles in Manchuria have been waged by the Japanese in close accordance with the spirit and almost the letter of Clausewitz's doctrine, and as the same battles have been fought by the Russians in absolute disregard of them (though his works had been translated into Russian by General Dragomiroff long before the war), it is certainly worth showing how reading and reflection may profit one army, and how the neglect of this respectable practice may ruin another." "Clausewitz in Manchuria"! That brings us up to date. It is a far cry for his influence to have reached, and triumphed.

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### **Reflections**

Clausewitz wrote his book expressly for statesmen as well as soldiers. We may be sure, therefore, that the influence of Clausewitz on the Continent has penetrated the realm of policy little less widely than the realm of war. From this thought arise many reflections. It will be sufficient here to suggest one. I would suggest that we should regard every foreign statesman, especially in Germany, as, consciously or unconsciously, a disciple of Clausewitz. That is to say, we should regard him as a man who, underneath everything else, underneath the most pacific assurances for the present, considers war an unalterable part of policy. He will regard war as part

of the ordinary intercourse of nations, and occasional warlike struggles as inevitable as commercial struggles. He will consider

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war also as an instrument of policy, which he himself may have to use, and to be studied accordingly. He will consider it not as a thing merely for speeches, but for practical use in furthering or defending the interests of his State. He will regard war as the means by which some day his nation shall impose its will upon another nation. He will be prepared to wait and wait, to make "every imaginable preparation," and finally to let loose war in its most absolute and ruthless character, war carried out with the utmost means, the utmost energy, and the utmost effort of a whole nation-in-arms, determined to achieve its political object and compel submission to its will by force.

To talk to such a man of "the evils of war," or of "the burden of armaments"; or to propose to him "disarmament" or "reduction of armed forces," and so

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forth can only appear to him as the result of "imperfect knowledge." He will not say so, but he will think so, and act accordingly. To the partially instructed opponent of such a man one can only say, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

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### **CHAPTER III**

#### **THE WRITINGS OF CLAUSEWITZ**

The writings of Clausewitz are contained in nine volumes, published after his death in 1831, but his fame rests chiefly on his three volumes "On War," which have been translated by Colonel J. J. Graham (the last edition edited by Colonel F. N. Maude, and published by Messrs. Kegan Paul, London). Clausewitz calls them "a collection of materials," "a mass of conceptions not brought into form," and states that he intended to revise, and throw the whole into more complete shape.

We must lament that he did not live to complete his revision. But, on the

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other hand, it is perhaps possible that this unfinished state is really an advantage, for it leaves us free to apply his great maxims and principles and mode of thought to the ever-varying conditions of the present and future, unhampered by too complete a crystallization of his ideas written before more modern conditions of railways, telegraphs, and rapid long-ranging arms of precision, etc., arose. It is perhaps this unfinished state which renders Clausewitz so essentially in touch with, and a part of, the onward movement and evolution of military thought. For his great aim was "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," without preconception or favour, as far as he could go — essentially "a realist" of war — and what better aim can we set before ourselves?

As Sir Arthur Helps has so well put it in his "Friends in Council," every man

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needs a sort of central stem for his reading and culture. I wish here to say why I think that Clausewitz is admirably adapted to form such a main stem in the military culture of British officers.



In the first place there is a lofty sort of tone about his writings which one gradually realizes as one reads them, and which I will not attempt to describe further than by saying that they stamp themselves as the writings of a gentleman of fine character. In the second place it is a book which "any fellow" can read, for there is nothing to "put one off," nothing abstruse or mathematical or formal, no formulæ or lines and angles and technical terms, such as in other writers, Jomini, Hamley, etc. Clausewitz is free from all such pedantries, which for my part, and I dare say for the part of many others, often "put one off" a book, and made

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one instinctively feel that there was something wrong, something unpractical about it, which rendered it hardly worth the sacrifice of time involved in its study. There is in Clausewitz nothing of that kind at all. All those lines and angles and formulæ he dismisses in a few pages as of little practical importance.

In the third place Clausewitz only goes in for experience and the practical facts of war. As he somewhat poetically puts it, "The flowers of Speculation require to be cut down low near the ground of Experience, their proper soil."<sup>1</sup> He is the great apostle of human nature and character as being everything in war. "All war supposes human weakness, and against that it is directed."<sup>2</sup> I believe that the British officer will find himself in sympathy with the great thinker on war, who asserts that

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*"Of all military virtues Energy in the conduct of Operations has always conduced most to glory and success of arms."*<sup>3</sup>

In the fourth place, to the practical mind will appeal his denunciation of all elaborate plans, because *Time* is required for all elaborate combinations, and Time is just the one thing that an active enemy will not give us, — and his consequent deduction that all plans must be of the simplest possible form. His famous sentence, "*In war all things are simple, but the simple are difficult*,"<sup>4</sup> gives the key to his writings, for to overcome those simple yet great difficulties he regards as the art of war, which can only be done by the military virtues of perseverance, energy, and boldness.

In the fifth place he does not want men to be bookworms, for he says:

*"Theory is nothing but rational reflection*

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*upon all the situations in which we can be placed in war."*<sup>5</sup> And we can all reflect, without reading too many books. Also he says: "Much reading of history is not required for the above object. The knowledge of a few separate battles, *in their details*, is more useful than a general knowledge of several campaigns. On this account it is more useful to read detailed narratives and journals than regular works of history."<sup>6</sup> He wants history in detail, not a general smattering and a loose application thereof, which fault he strongly denounces. And he expressly states that the history of the very latest war is the most useful. All of which is very practical, and in accord with what we feel to be true.

As he pictures war, "*the struggle between the spiritual and moral forces on*

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*both sides is the centre of all*,"<sup>7</sup> and to this aspect of the subject he gives much more attention than Jomini and most of Jomini's disciples. He has freed us once for all from all formalism. The formation of character, careful, practical, detailed study, and

thorough preparation in peace, the simplest plans carried out with the utmost perseverance, resolution, energy, and boldness in war — these are the practical fruits of his teaching.

Therefore, I say again, that I do not think that the British officer could possibly find a more interesting or a better guide for the main stem of his reading than Clausewitz, nor any one that will appeal to his practical instincts of what is *True* half so well. I do not believe that he could possibly do better than with Clausewitz as main stem, and a detailed study of the latest campaigns

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and modern technicalities as the up-to-date addition required to transform knowledge into action. I trust that every reader of Clausewitz will agree with me in this.

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#### **CHAPTER IV THE THEORY AND THE PRACTICE OF WAR**

"Moltke, the most gifted pupil of Clausewitz," "Moltke, who knew Clausewitz's book well, and often liked to describe him as the theoretical instructor." As Chaucer would say, "What needeth wordes more?"

Clausewitz has treated practically every chief branch of strategy and tactics (except, of course, the present-day developments of railways, telegraphs, quick-firing guns, smokeless powder, universal service armies, etc.). The whole of his bulky work "On War" is full of interesting and sometimes eloquent and almost poetical passages, of concentrated, pregnant, and far-reaching thoughts on every

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subject. Through all these it is, of course, impossible to follow him in any introduction. One can really do no more than urge all to read Clausewitz for themselves, to go to the fountain-head, to the master-work itself. In the short space to which I have restricted myself, I propose, therefore, to concentrate on a few of his leading ideas, reluctantly leaving out many others which are really almost just as good.

#### **Theory and Practice**

One of the things for which we are most deeply indebted to Clausewitz is that he has shown us clearly the proper place of theory in relation to practice. "It should educate the mind of the future leader in war, or, rather, guide him in his *self-instruction*, but *not* accompany him on to the battlefield; just as a sensible tutor forms and enlightens the

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opening mind of a youth without therefore keeping him in leading-strings all his life."8 Again, "In real action most men are guided by the tact of judgment, which hits the object more or less accurately, according as they possess more or less genius. This is the way in which all great generals have acted, and therein partly lay their greatness and their genius, in that they always hit upon what was right by this tact. Thus also it will always be in *action*, and so far this tact is amply sufficient. But when it is a question not of acting one's self, but of convincing others *in consultation*, then all depends upon clear conceptions and demonstrations and the inherent relations;

and so little progress has been made in this respect that most deliberations are merely a contention of words, resting on no firm basis, and ending

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either in every one retaining his own opinion, or in a compromise from mutual considerations of respect, a middle course really without any value. Clear ideas on these matters are not, therefore, wholly useless."9

How true this is any one will admit who reflects for a moment upon the great diversity of opinions on almost every subject held in our army, just because of this want of a central theory common to all. In the domain of tactics it is evident that this holds good even as in strategy, for a common central theory of war will produce a more or less common way of looking at things, from which results more or less common action towards the attainment of the common object.

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### **Rejection of Set and Geometrical Theories**

"It should educate the mind of the future leader in war" is what Clausewitz demands from a useful theory; but he most expressly and unreservedly rejects every attempt at a method "by which definite plans for wars or campaigns are to be given out all ready made as if from a machine."10 He mocks at Bülow's including at first in the one term "base" all sorts of things, like the supply of the army, its reinforcements and equipments, the security of its communications with the home country, and lastly the security of its line of retreat, and then fixing the extent of the base, and finally fixing an angle for the extent of that base: "And all this was done merely to obtain a pure geometrical result utterly useless" (Von Caemmerer).

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For the same reason Jomini's principle of the Inner Line does not satisfy him, owing to its mere geometrical nature, although he right willingly acknowledges "that it rests on a sound foundation, on the truth that the combat is the only effectual means in war" (Von Caemmerer). All such attempts at theory seem to him therefore perfectly useless, "because they strive to work with fixed quantities, while in war everything is *uncertain*, and all considerations must reckon with all kinds of variable quantities; because they only consider *material* objects, while every action in war is saturated with *moral* forces and effects; lastly, because they deal only with the action of *one* party, while war is a constant reciprocal effect of *both* parties" (Von Caemmerer).

"Pity the warrior," says Clausewitz, "who is contented to crawl about in this

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beggardom of rules." "Pity the theory which sets itself in opposition to the mind"11 (note, the moral forces).

### **A Theory to be Practically Useful**

Clausewitz insists that a useful theory cannot be more than a thorough knowledge of military history and "reflection upon all the situations in which we can be placed in war." "What genius does must be just the best of all rules, and theory cannot do better than to show just how and why it is so." "It is an analytical investigation of the subject which leads to exact knowledge: and if brought to bear on the results of experience, which in our case would be military history, to a *thorough* familiarity with it. If theory investigates the subjects which constitute war; if it separates

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more distinctly that which at first sight seems amalgamated; if it explains fully the properties of the means; if it shows their probable effects; if it makes evident the nature of objects; *if it brings to bear all over the field of war the light of essentially critical investigation*, — then it has fulfilled the chief duties of its province. It becomes then a guide to him who wishes to make himself acquainted with war from books; it lights up the whole road for him, facilitates his progress, educates his judgment, and shields him from error."<sup>12</sup>

### **Knowledge must be Thorough**

This Clausewitz considers most important. He says that "Knowledge of the conduct of war ... *must pass completely into the mind*, and almost cease to be

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something objective." For in war "The moral reaction, the ever-changing form of things makes it necessary for the chief actor to carry *in himself* the whole mental apparatus of his knowledge, in order that anywhere and at every pulse-beat he may be capable of giving the requisite decision *from himself*. Knowledge must, by this complete assimilation with his own mind and life, be converted into real power."

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So much for Clausewitz, therefore, as the greatest yet the simplest and least theoretical of theorists on war. Mark well his comforting dictum that "Theory is nothing but rational reflection upon all the situations in which we can be placed in war." That is a task which we have all more or less attempted. Therefore we are all more or less theorists. The only question is that of comparative

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"thoroughness" in our reflections. And it is essentially this "thoroughness" in investigation and reflection towards which Clausewitz helps us. Like every other habit, the *habit* of military reflection gradually grows with use; till, fortified and strengthened by detailed knowledge, it gradually becomes Power.

### **Reflections**

The theory of war is simple, and there is no reason why any man who chooses to take the trouble to read and reflect carefully on one or two of the acknowledged best books thereon, should not attain to a fair knowledge thereof. He may with reasonable trouble attain to such knowledge of the theory of war as will enable him to follow with intelligent appreciation the discussions of experienced soldier or soldiers. Such knowledge as

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will prevent his misunderstanding the experienced soldier's argument from pure ignorance, and such knowledge as will enable him to understand the military reasons put forward and the military object proposed. To the opinion of such a man all respect will be due. Thus, and thus only.

It is indeed the plain duty of all who aspire to rule either thus to qualify themselves to understand, or else to abstain from interference with, the military interests of the State.

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## **CHAPTER V**

## **THE MAGNITUDE OF THE EFFORT REQUIRED IN A MODERN NATIONAL WAR**

This point is here illustrated with more detail from Clausewitz than may seem necessary to some, because it is precisely the point regarding modern war which is least understood in this country.

"The complete overthrow of the enemy is the natural end of the art of war." "As this idea must apply to both the belligerent parties, it must follow, that there can be no suspension in the military act, and peace cannot take place until one or other of the parties concerned is completely overthrown." This is what Clausewitz means by Absolute War, that

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is war carried to its absolute and logical conclusion with the utmost force, the utmost effort and the utmost energy. He then proceeds to show that war, owing "to all the natural inertia and friction of its parts, the whole of the inconsistency, the vagueness and hesitation (or timidity) of the human mind," usually takes a weaker or less absolute form according to circumstances. "All this, theory must admit, but it is its duty to give the foremost place to the absolute form of war, and to use that form as a general point of direction." He then proceeds to show that war finally took its absolute form under Napoleon. To-day we may say that war takes its absolute form in the modern great national war, which is waged by each belligerent with the whole concentrated physical and mental power of the nation-in-arms.

This requires to be gone into a little

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more in detail, for it is a most important point.

Clausewitz in Book VIII. approaches this part of his subject by an historical survey of war from the time of the Roman Empire to that of Napoleon. He shows how as the feudal system gradually merged into the later monarchical States of Europe, armies gradually became less and less national, more and more mercenary. Omitting this, we arrive at the seventeenth century. He says: "The end of the seventeenth century, the time of Louis XIV., is to be regarded as the point in history at which the standing military power, such as it existed in the eighteenth century, reached its zenith. That military force was based on enlistment and money. States had organized themselves into complete unities; and the governments, by commuting the personal services of their subjects into money

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payments, had concentrated their whole power in their treasuries. Through the rapid strides in social improvements, and a more enlightened system of government, this power had become very great in comparison with what it had been. France appeared in the field with a standing army of a couple of hundred thousand men, and the other Powers in proportion."

Armies were supported out of the Treasury, which the sovereign regarded partly as his privy purse, at least as a resource belonging to the Government, and not to the people. Relations with other States, except with respect to a few commercial subjects, mostly concerned only the interests of the Treasury or of the Government, not those of the people; at least ideas tended everywhere in that way. The Cabinets therefore looked upon themselves as the owners and administrators of large estates, which they were

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continually seeking to increase, without the tenants on those estates being particularly interested in this improvement.

The people, therefore, who in the Tartar invasions were everything in war, who in the old republics and in the Middle Ages were of great consequence, were in the eighteenth century absolutely nothing directly.

In this manner, in proportion as the Government separated itself more from the people, and regarded itself as the State, war became more and more exclusively a business of the Government, which it carried on by means of the money in its coffers and the idle vagabonds it could pick up in its own and neighbouring countries. The army was a State property, very expensive, and not to be lightly risked in battle. "In its signification war was only diplomacy somewhat intensified, a more vigorous

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way of negotiating, in which battles and sieges were substituted for diplomatic notes."

"Plundering and devastating the enemy's country were no longer in accordance with the spirit of the age." "They were justly looked upon as unnecessary barbarity."

"War, therefore, confined itself more and more, both as regards means and ends, to the army itself. The army, with its fortresses and some prepared positions, constituted a State in a State, within which the element of war slowly consumed itself. All Europe rejoiced at its taking this direction, and held it to be the necessary consequence of the spirit of progress."

So think many in this country to-day. They are only a hundred years behind the times.

"The plan of a war on the part of the State assuming the offensive in those

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times consisted generally in the conquest of one or other of the enemy's provinces; the plan of the defender was to prevent this. The plan of campaign was to take one or other of the enemy's fortresses, or to prevent one of our own being taken; it was only when a battle became unavoidable for this purpose that it was sought for and fought. Whoever fought a battle without this unavoidable necessity, from mere innate desire of gaining a victory, was reckoned a general with too much daring."

For armies were too precious to be lightly risked. "Winter quarters, in which the mutual relations of the two parties almost entirely ceased, formed a distinct limit to the activity which was considered to belong to one campaign." "As long as war was universally conducted in this manner, all was considered to be in the most regular order." "Thus there was eminence and perfection of

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every kind, and even Field-Marshal Daun, to whom it was chiefly owing that Frederick the Great completely attained his object, and Maria Theresa completely failed in hers, notwithstanding that could still pass for a great general."

Beyond this stage of military thought, many in this country have not yet advanced.

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"Thus matters stood when the French Revolution broke out; Austria and Prussia tried their diplomatic art of war; this very soon proved insufficient. Whilst, according to the usual way of seeing things, all hopes were placed on a very limited

military force in 1793, such a force as no one had any conception of made its appearance. War had suddenly become again an affair of the people, and that of a people numbering thirty millions, every one of whom regarded

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himself as a citizen of the State." *"By this participation of the people in the war, instead of a cabinet and an army, a whole nation with its natural weight came into the scale. Henceforth the means available — the efforts which might be called forth — had no longer any definite limits; the energy with which the war itself might be conducted had no longer any counterpoise, and consequently the danger to the adversary had risen to the extreme."*

If only our politicians could learn this old lesson of the French Revolution! For many, too many, of them appear to derive their ideas of war to-day from some dim reminiscent recollections of school histories of the wars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

To continue: "After all this was perfected by the hand of Bonaparte, this military power based on the strength of

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the whole nation, marched over Europe, smashing everything in pieces so surely and certainly, that where it only encountered the old-fashioned armies the result was not doubtful for a moment.

"A reaction, however, awoke in due time. In Spain the war became of itself an affair of the people." In Austria. In Russia. "In Germany Prussia rose up the first, made the war a national cause, and without either money or credit, and with a population reduced one-half, took the field with an army twice as strong as in 1806. The rest of Germany followed the example of Prussia sooner or later." "Thus it was that Germany and Russia, in the years 1813 and 1814, appeared against France with about a million of men."

"Under these circumstances the energy thrown into the conduct of war was quite different." "In eight months the

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theatre of war was removed from the Oder to the Seine. Proud Paris had to bow its head for the first time; and the redoubtable Bonaparte lay fettered on the ground."

"Therefore, since the time of Bonaparte, war, through being, first on one side, then again on the other, an affair of the whole nation, has assumed quite a new nature, or rather it has approached much nearer to its real nature, to its absolute perfection.

The means then called forth had no visible limit, the limit losing itself in the energy and enthusiasm of the Government and its subjects. By the extent of the means, and the wide field of possible results, as well as by the powerful excitement of feeling which prevailed, energy in the conduct of war was immensely increased; the object of its action was the downfall of the foe; and not until the enemy lay powerless

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on the ground was it supposed to be possible to stop, or to come to any understanding with regard to the mutual objects of the contest.

"Thus, therefore the element of war, freed from all conventional restrictions, broke loose with all its natural force. The cause was the participation of the people in this great affair of State, and this participation arose partly from the effects of the French

Revolution on the internal affairs of other countries, partly from the threatening attitude of the French towards all nations.

"Now, whether this will be the case always in future, whether all wars hereafter in Europe will be carried on with the whole power of the States, and, consequently, *will only take place on account of great interests closely affecting the people*, would be a difficult point to settle. But every one will agree with us

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that, at least, *Whenever great interests are in dispute*, mutual hostility will discharge itself in the same manner as it has done in our times."

### **Reflections**

This is so true, that every war since the days of Clausewitz has made its truth more apparent. Since he wrote, the participation of the people in war has become, not a revolutionary fact, but an organized fact, an ordinary fact in the everyday life of nations. To-day every State except Great Britain, securely based on the system of the universal training of its sons to arms, stands ready to defend its interests with the whole concentrated power, physical, intellectual, and material, of its whole manhood. Consequently, European war, as Clausewitz foresaw, "will only take place on

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account of great interests closely affecting the people." The character of such war will be absolute, the object of its action will be the downfall of the foe, and not till the foe (be it Great Britain or not) lies powerless on the ground will it be supposed possible to stop. In the prosecution of such a national war the means available, the energy and the effort called forth, will be without limits. Such must be the conflicts of nations-in-arms.

Yet, even now, so many years after Clausewitz wrote, in the hope, as he himself stated, "to iron out many creases in the heads of strategists and statesmen," the great transformation in the character of modern war, due to the participation of the people therein, has not yet been adequately realized by many men in this country *who ought to know*. It is earnestly to be hoped that they will endeavour to adjust their minds, as regards war, to

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the fact that we are living, not in the eighteenth century, but in the twentieth, and that they will consider that war has once for all become an affair of the people, that our opponents will be a people-in-arms, using the uttermost means of their whole manhood to crush us, and that disaster can only be prevented by a like utmost effort on our part, by an effort regardless of everything except self-preservation.

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## **CHAPTER VI**

### **PUBLIC OPINION IN WAR**

"War belongs, not to the province of arts and sciences, but to the province of social life. It is a conflict of great interests which is settled by bloodshed, and only in that respect is it different from others. It would be better, instead of comparing it with any art, to liken it to trade, which is also a conflict of human interests and activities; and it is still more like state policy, which again, on its part, may be looked upon as a



kind of trade on a great scale. Besides, state policy is the womb in which war is developed, in which its outlines lie hidden

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in a rudimentary state, like the qualities of living creatures in their germs."13 These conflicts of interest can bring about gradually such a state of feeling that "even the most civilized nations may burn with passionate hatred of each other." It is an unpleasant fact for the philosopher, for the social reformer, to contemplate, but history repeats and repeats the lesson. Still more, "It is quite possible for such a state of feeling to exist between two States that a very trifling political motive for war may produce an effect quite disproportionate — in fact, a perfect explosion." "War is a wonderful trinity, composed of the original violence of its elements — hatred and animosity — which may be looked upon as blind instinct; of the play of probabilities and chance, which make it a free activity of the soul; and

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of the subordinate nature of a political instrument, by which it belongs purely to the reason.

"The first of these three phases concerns more the people; the second, more the general and his army; the third more the Government. *The passions which break forth in war must already have a latent existence in the peoples.*

"These three tendencies are deeply rooted in the nature of the subject. A theory which would leave any one of them out of account would immediately become involved in such a contradiction with the reality, that it might be regarded as destroyed at once by that alone."14

Clausewitz is the great thinker, the great realist, the great philosopher of war. His aim was, free from all bias, to get at *the truth of things*. His view of war as a social act, as part of the

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intercourse of nations, so that occasional warlike struggles can no more be avoided than occasional commercial struggles, is a view which requires to be most carefully pondered over by every statesman. It is based upon the essential fundamental characteristics of human nature, which do not alter. It is not to be lightly set aside by declamation about the blessings of peace, the evils of war, the burden of armaments, and such-like sophistries. To submit without a struggle to injustice or to the destruction of one's vital interests is not in passionate human nature. Nor will it ever be in the nature of a virile people. It is indeed to be most sincerely hoped that *arbitration* will be resorted to more and more as a means of peacefully settling all non-vital causes of dispute. But arbitration has its limits. For *no great nation will ever submit to arbitration any interest that it regards as*

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*absolutely vital*. The view of war, therefore, as a social act, as part of the intercourse of nations, with all that it implies, appears to be the only one which a statesman, however much he may regret the fact, can take. It has, therefore, been brought forward here at once, as it underlies the whole subject and is essential to all clear thought thereon.

So much for the influence of Public Opinion in producing war. Now for its influence in and during war.

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