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CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ:
HOPE AND FEAR

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College, the Department of the Navy, or the Department of the Air Force.

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Abstract of
CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ:
HOPE AND FEAR

How well does the United States (US) understand Clausewitz's ideas? To sample US understanding of Clausewitz, this paper analyzes how US doctrine uses three concepts from On War: the dual nature of war, the center of gravity, and the culminating point of victory. The analysis shows how these concepts are superficial in US doctrine compared to their rich depth in On War. Furthermore, doctrine uses these concepts individually--their application is fragmented, simplistic, and mechanical. The centerpiece of the analysis ties these three Clausewitzian concepts together using the idea that limited and unlimited war have "points of irreconcilability," which are: the political aim, the form of war, the objective, and the culminating threshold. If these points are violated, the operational commander risks turning a limited or unlimited war into something alien to its nature. The paper concludes that US military doctrine provides a misleading version of Clausewitz's intent. The potential exists for operational commanders to apply poor judgement when using these concepts--and this potential is growing worse. Therefore, recommendations are made to change basic US military doctrine to improve the operational commander's understanding of Clausewitz's ideas.

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CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ: HOPE AND FEAR

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In his notes to On War, Clausewitz challenged readers to blend his ideas with history to distill a complete theory of war. With this hope came a concern--that his efforts would be "liable to endless misinterpretation." [1] This combination of hope and fear inspired the driving question behind this paper:

How well does the United States (US) understand Clausewitz's ideas?

THESIS: The US has realized Clausewitz's fear. Instead of a complete theory, US application of On War is fragmented, simplistic, and mechanical. At best, the US treats Clausewitz superficially; at worst, US military doctrine may set the operational commander up to misunderstand Clausewitz--and the nature of war.

Understanding Clausewitz is a practical issue. During Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell ensured copies of On War were in the hands of operational commanders in-theater. [2]

This paper focuses on broadening US understanding of On War's ideas. The goal is not to advocate Clausewitz as the foundation of US doctrine, but rather to help operational commanders exercise informed judgement when they develop and apply military doctrine.

THE 'PROBLEM' WITH "ON WAR": Clausewitz is widely interpreted. He was praised by Hitler and Lenin; scorned by Ludendorff and Stalin; and used as support "by guerrilla leaders from Giap to Che Guevara." [3] Clausewitz is often viewed in extremes: As a Prussian militarist or a detached philosopher; the apostle of total war or the architect of limited war; as the forerunner for national socialism or the German resistance to Hitler. [4]

Even On War's most fundamental ideas are subject to disagreement or distortion. An example is the Clausewitzian concept of war as a continuation of policy. Though exposed to On War, Moltke believed policy and strategy were coequal and independent. Ludendorff advocated the dominance of military considerations. The horror of World War I brought Kellogg-Briand, who rejected war as an instrument of policy. Then Hitler (a self-proclaimed Clausewitz devotee) completed this circle with a tyranny of policy. How is it that On War is taken to such varying degrees of acceptance and application?

The emotional answer lies in the book itself. Contemporary readers often find On War disjointed; its style difficult. The manuscript contains a wealth of technical, dated material. Its lessons are not easy nor readily apparent.

The more clinical answer is that On War is incomplete--a "shapeless mass" of ideas that was never finished. So, "much of Clausewitz's reputation as a profound thinker...resulted from the confusion among his interpreters...Clausewitz could never have been wrong...because no one could be quite sure that he understood the true meaning of Clausewitz's ideas." [5]

Both of these answers are cop-outs. People who blame the source take the easy way out--they normally haven't read the entire book or given On War careful study and reflection. It is commonplace for practitioners, like Hitler or Che Guevara, to turn On War into slogans without meaning or context.

Scholars who say On War is incomplete assume an intellectual carte blanche. Volumes are written about Clausewitz's life, the age he lived in, what philosophers inspired him, etc. They all miss the point, which is to define a universal theory of war. Too little is written that helps us understand war while too much time is spent trying to carve out Clausewitz's place among the great philosophers. [6]

Enter Clausewitz's hope and fear: scholars have not focused on distilling a complete theory of war and practitioners, by only scratching the surface, ensure endless misinterpretation. This is the environment the US finds itself in today.

PLAN OF ATTACK: To sample US understanding of Clausewitz, this paper analyzes how US doctrine uses three concepts from On War:

- Chapter II: The dual nature of war,
- Chapter III: the center of gravity (COG) and,
- Chapter IV: the culminating point of victory (CPV).

Each concept is viewed from three angles: US doctrine's application, On War's description, and historical demonstration. Chapter V ties these concepts together by showing how each fits into a coherent whole. Chapter VI summarizes the analysis and looks at future trends. The final chapter presents conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

THE DUAL NATURE OF WAR

In his note of July 1827, Clausewitz outlined two kinds of war. This concept is often referred to as "the dual nature of war" with the two types labeled as unlimited (called general war by the US) and limited war. The following discusses each type separately.

A. UNLIMITED WAR

GENERAL WAR IN US DOCTRINE: The US does not go into great detail to describe general war--US doctrine simply uses three characteristics to define the nature of general war. First, the belligerents must be major powers. Second, they must employ total resources. And third, the outcome of the war must jeopardize the national survival of a belligerent. [1]

UNLIMITED WAR IN "ON WAR": The aim of unlimited war "is to overthrow the enemy--to render him politically helpless or militarily impotent, thus forcing him to sign whatever peace we please." [2] In unlimited war, one constantly seeks out the center of the enemy's power--"daring all to win all." [3]

Clausewitz prescribes offensive war as the way to totally defeat the enemy. This is clearly seen in the military acts he considers most important to achieving this unlimited aim: destroy the army, seize the capital, and deal an effective blow against a principal ally.

Clausewitz briefly covers the possibility of using the defensive specifically to achieve an unlimited aim--it is a half-hearted attempt. While this is the strongest form of war, the only way to achieve an active goal (like overthrowing an enemy) is in a war whose main thrust is offensive--either initially or in attacks following any defensive phase. [4]

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES: Referring to their descriptions, both Clausewitz and US doctrine would agree that Germany and Russia fought an unlimited war in World War II. However, according to Clausewitz and contrary to the US definition, Iraq's war against Kuwait or the United Nation's drive to the Yalu in the Korean War are also examples of unlimited wars.

The Normandy invasion shows an example of Clausewitz's idea of risk all-take all in an unlimited war. Finally, there is no recognized example of a nation fighting an unlimited war using a defensive strategy throughout. [5]

B. LIMITED WAR

LIMITED WAR IN US DOCTRINE: According to US doctrine, limited war is anything short of general war. It follows that limited war is armed conflict that does not involve major powers, does not employ total means, or does not jeopardize national survival. [6]

LIMITED WAR IN "ON WAR": The aim of limited war is "merely to occupy some of [the enemy's] frontier districts so that we can annex them or use them for bargaining at the peace negotiations." [7] Unlike unlimited war, Clausewitz clearly states there are two methods for fighting a limited war:

offensive (with a limited political aim) and defensive--and each method is given its own chapter in On War. [8] Also, in comparison to unlimited war, "effort [in limited war] is increasingly dispersed, friction everywhere increases, and greater scope is left for chance." [9]

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES: Again, referring to their descriptions, both Clausewitz and US doctrine would agree that Argentina and Britain fought a limited war in the Falklands. What about Japan during World War II? US doctrine would classify this as a general war--two major powers using total resources with Japan's national survival at stake. Clausewitz would call this a limited war from Japan's perspective--Japan wanted a negotiated settlement and never intended to overthrow the US.

Finally, the US perspective in Vietnam, or the British view in the Falklands, shows Clausewitz's idea of how other national interests and commitments can disperse military effort and increase the scope of chance in limited wars.

US DOCTRINE AND "ON WAR" CONTRASTED: From this discussion of the dual nature of war, the main conflict between On War and US doctrine centers on definitions. Clausewitz uses only the political aim to determine whether a war is limited or unlimited. US doctrine adds the status of the belligerents and the resources employed to its definitions. Clausewitz's concepts are more helpful, especially when discussing limited war.

Poor definitions can often lead to poor judgement. For example, a recent military essay rejected limited war as a viable US option. How is this possible when, by any definition, most US wars are both limited and successful?

Like US doctrine, the essay equated limited war with limited means.[10] It doesn't take much to carry this conclusion further to limiting time, exempting weapon types, rejecting targets, slowing tempo, etc--all automatically and almost unconsciously.

From a doctrinal perspective, how would the US view an unlimited war between two Third World countries--or between the US and a minor power? Could the US, for example, evaluate the enemy's unlimited aim (which US definitions wouldn't recognize) and its impact on enemy strategy or risk tolerance? Using these same US definitions, the US could fight a limited war with a major power only if it did not use total resources.

Means employed can not be a basis for determining whether a war is limited or unlimited--too much goes into the resource decision.[11] Likewise, the belligerent's status as a major or minor power is irrelevant to understanding the dual nature of war. The political aim remains the best way to identify war--and will keep US doctrine consistent with the history of US warfare. [12]

CHAPTER III

THE CENTER OF GRAVITY

THE COG IN US DOCTRINE: The COG concept plays a critical role in US military doctrine. In the US, the COG is seen as:

"that characteristic, capability, or locality from which a military force, nation, or alliance derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight." [1]

This idea is applied in US doctrine in the development of national military strategy for war and military operations short of war. Here, if the COG "can be reduced to a singular capability, the control or disruption of that capability should be the primary military objective." [2] Army doctrine goes even further--the very essence of the operational art is "the identification of the enemy's center of gravity." [3]

THE COG IN "ON WAR": Clausewitz says that:

"one must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed." [4]

Clausewitz applies the concept of attacking an enemy's COG mainly to unlimited war. First, every description, application, or mention of the COG by Clausewitz occurs in the context of unlimited war and never in association with limited war. For example, in his final chapter outlining a war plan for the total defeat of the enemy, his first principle is to identify the COG and attack it with utmost concentration and speed.

Second, to attack and defeat the COG destroys an enemy's power and movement. This is exactly the desired condition for overthrowing the enemy--the aim of an unlimited war. Thus, destroying the COG in a limited war would most likely result in achieving an unlimited aim.

And third, the COG is a source of strength. Clausewitz describes needing blow after blow, concentration, and superiority to attack the COG. Unlimited war has that risk all-take all nature. But for a limited war, attacking the enemy's COG could exceed the sacrifice policy is willing to make in the war's magnitude and duration.

To find the COG, trace the sources of enemy strength, reducing them to one source.[5] In other words, strength lies in a range. The most critical source of strength is the COG; all other sources are, in effect, subordinate COGs. For this reason, the COG concept also has application to limited wars. For example, in an unlimited war, defeating the COG should achieve the aim and peace would follow. What about war termination when destroying the enemy is not the political aim; i.e., in a limited war?

In discussing the attack in a limited war, Clausewitz refers to achieving objectives by "threatening lines of communication, occupying strong positions uncomfortably located for the defender, occupying important areas, threatening weaker allies, etc. "[6] These physical objects are analogous to the COG; yet, are clearly not of that magnitude; i.e., they are subordinate COGs.

Therefore, a nation can achieve its limited policy aim, and terminate the conflict, by successfully attacking subordinate COGs and/or by threatening the critical COG. The enemy is then induced to believe continued fighting is too costly or that confidence in victory is low.

One problem with limited war is that even though an armed force may achieve its objective, the enemy may chose to fight on.[7] If the enemy fights on, the choice is simple: put up or shut up. This is why the critical COG is threatened--to induce the enemy to quit. Thus, to terminate a limited war, policy may be forced to either renounce its aim or escalate up the scale of enemy strengths--to include the critical COG.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES:

a. German Unification: In these successful limited wars, Bismarck allowed Moltke to attack subordinate COGs or threaten the critical COG: he took Duppel, but no more; he defeated an Austrian army, but kept the way to Vienna open. Later, Bismarck was forced to lay siege to Paris, the critical COG, because the French coup prevented war termination even though Prussia had already achieved its limited aims.

b. Korea: Once the political aim became unlimited; i.e., the total overthrow of North Korea, the US did not allow attacks on Korea's COG--China. [8] The US found it could not achieve its unlimited aim. When the war reverted back to a limited aim; i.e., a negotiated settlement. Eisenhower achieved termination by threatening China with nuclear attacks.

c. Vietnam: The critical COG was North Vietnam's Communist allies. They were what kept US strategy at bay and provided the support that kept North Vietnam fighting. The US achieved termination after attacking subordinate COGs (Hanoi, the army, etc) and threatening these allies. This threat did not come in the form of a military attack, but rather in the political maneuverings of detente that threatened to isolate North Vietnam. Without this threat to the critical COG, this limited US war could have easily dragged on longer.

d. Japan: Instead of intending to overthrow or destroy the US, Japan sought a negotiated settlement that recognized Japanese interests in the Pacific region. To achieve this limited aim, Japan chose to attack US willpower. In this case, Japan attacked too high on the range of US strengths by attacking the critical US COG. The result is well known--Japan got more than it bargained for and failed to achieve its limited goal.

US DOCTRINE AND "ON WAR" CONTRASTED: In contrast to On War, the US concept of the COG is superficial. In regard to the COG, US operational commanders essentially have only two functions: identify the enemy's COG and attack it. As the COG concept cascades down to tactical level doctrines, it becomes even more mechanical.

For example, "Corps must destroy or neutralize the enemy center of gravity." This quote is from a section describing Corps contingency operations that include demonstrations, non-combatant evacuation operations, etc.[9] In the doctrine for space control forces, USCINCSpace prescribes that "the offensive spirit must be aimed to defeat or disrupt the enemy's center of gravity." [10]

In US doctrine the idea of attacking the COG is almost boilerplate. The newest doctrine manual, Joint Pub 1, outlines the Chairman's philosophy for employing forces jointly. Of all the concepts mentioned, attacking the COG gets the greatest exposure. [11]

Clausewitz gives so much more depth of understanding in his use of the COG concept. A strategist must identify all the enemy's sources of strength. Once he determines the range up to the critical COG, he must determine a course of action. Instead of automatically attacking the COG, as US doctrine prescribes, Clausewitz suggests examining the political aim to determine if the COG should be attacked, threatened, or avoided.

Doctrine should warn the commander that he is approaching dangerous waters whenever he applies the COG concept in a limited war context. Knowing how far a commander can go in attacking (or threatening) up the COG scale is what makes war an art and explains why the commander needs coup d'oeil. Certainly, genius and political control will find the right solutions, but US doctrine should provide a more useful guide.

CHAPTER IV

THE CULMINATING POINT OF VICTORY

THE CPV IN US DOCTRINE: US military doctrine does not describe the CPV. A related concept, the culminating point of attack, is discussed in On War and is well represented in doctrine. [1]

THE CPV IN "ON WAR": Simply put, a culminating point occurs whenever further actions can erase gains or even lead to defeat. The CPV adds a "political" twist to the more logistically oriented culminating point of attack.

First, other nations, acting for their own political interests, may intervene against the attacker. And second, the attacker's victory may convince the defender that he is in real danger and must make a greater effort; e.g., escalate. [2] The key is in the political effect of victory--will it stun the loser or rouse him to greater efforts?

If victory rests on overthrowing the enemy, as it would in an unlimited war, a CPV is largely moot. Once this victory is achieved, the only concern is whether allies will come to the defeated enemy's aid.

However, Clausewitz says that the CPV "is bound to recur in every war in which the destruction of the enemy can not be the military aim;" i.e., in a limited war. [3] This is because an attack with a limited objective is "far more burdened than it would be if aimed at the heart of the enemy's power." [4] The burden comes from spreading scarce resources over a wider range of national interests and from the political calculations

that spawned the limited aim. There also remains the problem of not knowing whether the attack will politically arouse the enemy's rage or shatter his resolve. [5]

So what happens if an enterprising General overshoots the CPV? On War says this "would not merely be a useless effort which could not add to success...it would in fact be a damaging one, which would lead to a reaction; and experience goes to show that such reactions usually have completely disproportionate effects." [6]

Finally, when trying to determine the CPV, "thousands of wrong turns running in all directions tempt [the commander's] perception." [7] Therefore, mastering the CPV is crucial to the military art.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES:

a. DESERT STORM: The debate continues over whether the offensive was stopped too early. Clearly, the coalition had the ability to continue the attack. The decision to stop rests on the CPV.

In a war with limited aims, as the US had against Iraq, the CPV threshold is relatively low and politically motivated--especially in alliances. This suggests the following:

More attacks, driving to Baghdad, or individually targeting Hussein would have risked greater Iraqi resistance; e.g., escalation with weapons of mass destruction. Allied unity (a key political goal) could stretch thin, especially among Arab partners. This could impact US political viability in post-war influence and cooperation; e.g., hostage releases,

Arab-Israeli peace, the New World Order, etc. Another consideration was the possibility of negative domestic reaction to continued attacks when the US had largely achieved its stated goals and Iraq was perceived as defeated and retreating. It was these issues that Clausewitz would say "far more burdened" the US attack.

Different "artists" may argue over the exact CPV in DESERT STORM. But, when President Bush surveyed the thousands of factors Clausewitz says would impact his perception, the decision to stop was clearly made to avoid crossing victory's culminating point.

b. Cold War: The strategy of flexible response was designed to show, in advance, US and NATO political resolve. In Clausewitz's terms, flexible response presented the enemy with a clear CPV--the Allied response would have a damaging and disproportional effect. Thus, an enemy could expect to reach a CPV whenever he attacked with nuclear weapons or launched a massive non-nuclear advance.

c. Iran/Iraq: Initially, Iraq desired and achieved limited territorial aims against Iran. Iraq had the ability to continue its attack, but ceased offensive actions to demonstrate their limited intent and to negotiate a peace. This, however, was not the CPV. Though Iraq's aims/actions were limited, Iran viewed this (or any) attack in politically unlimited terms--to them the legitimacy and survival of the revolution was at stake. Therefore, Iraq reached a CPV the minute it crossed the Iranian border.

US DOCTRINE AND "ON WAR" CONTRASTED: US military leaders are comfortable in recognizing and anticipating culminating points of attack. US doctrine, however, lacks any description of Clausewitz's CPV. The commander's problem is that victory is a political animal. Without providing some understanding of the CPV in doctrine, operational commanders can, at best, find themselves in disagreement with their political masters--as occurred in DESERT STORM. At worst, the CPV is likely to sneak up on him when he is least ready and for reasons he will find hard to fathom.

CHAPTER V

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

The previous chapters discussed the dual nature of war, the COG, and the CPV as individual concepts. However, the crucial test of understanding is to recognize a whole--the context--in which these concepts operate together.

The "Principles of War" offer a useful guide. A commander can understand individual principles, but he is in deep trouble if he doesn't know or regard the relationships, risks, or trade-offs these principles represent. True judgement would come from knowing the interplay of the offensive vs security, mass vs economy of force, etc. Anything less could result in simplistic, mechanistic, and dangerous interpretations.

While US military doctrine has done a fair job of tying together the principles of war, it has failed to show the influence and role played by the dual nature of war, the COG, and the CPV in a coherent whole. On War provides the means to construct this context.

Clausewitz emphatically states that the two types of war (limited and unlimited) are quite different. In fact, they have what he called "points of irreconcilability." [1] These points occur where the nature of limited war conflicts with the nature of unlimited war. Some points, like the role of policy or genius, are compatible between the two types of war. The key, however, is to focus on how the two types of war are incompatible; i.e., irreconcilable.

The importance of finding these points of irreconcilability is apparent in one of the most familiar Clausewitzian quotes:

"The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and the commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive." (emphasis added) [2]

The first step is to establish the kind of war. Since Clausewitz only lists two kinds, the statesman determines if he will fight a limited or an unlimited war. Further, this determination is crucial to not mistaking the war for, or trying to turn the war into, something alien to its nature. The only way to do that is to cross a point of irreconcilability; e.g., in theory, unlimited war concepts should conflict with the nature of limited war.

If Clausewitz had written a chapter to specifically outline the points of irreconcilability in the dual nature of war, he would have included the following: [3]

1. The political aim: This is the key starting point. While aims can change, war for one side is always limited or unlimited--never both.

2. Form of war: The offensive and defensive forms are both appropriate for a limited war. A defensive form is alien to the unlimited aim.

3. Objective: Attacking the enemy's COG is the proper objective for an unlimited war. Therefore, failing to attack this COG is irreconcilable with an unlimited aim. To attack the critical COG in a limited war risks mistaking the war for something it is not.

4. Culminating threshold: A CPV is most likely to occur in a limited war, with a lower and earlier CPV than its unlimited cousin. Operations past this point will turn the war into something it is not; especially when the enemy reacts by escalation. Any misstep on the range from subordinate to the critical COG should lower the culminating point.

By knowing these points of irreconcilability, individual concepts like the dual nature of war, the COG, and the CPV take on a new gestalt. The operational commander now has a framework where judgement is applied with insight, perspective, and understanding. However, this framework should never be construed as a straightjacket or a checklist--genius can always rise above the rules.

Clausewitz would say that seeing the bigger picture is absolutely critical. Why? Because understanding the greater context is what separates potential artists, who create strategic masterpieces, from blind fools, who mechanically use dogma to wage war by the numbers.

CHAPTER VI

THE FUTURE

SUMMARY: Concepts from On War help the operational commander use doctrine to define basic military conditions/tasks:

- General/limited war = What kind of war am I fighting?
- Center of gravity = What should I attack?
- Culminating point = When should I stop?

It is the operational commander that links strategy and tactics, within an overall policy. While policy is the track that guides the operational art, doctrine is the engine.

General Curtis E. LeMay, USAF, said it best:

"At the very heart of war lies doctrine. It represents the central beliefs for waging war in order to achieve victory...It is the building material for strategy." [1]

Applying doctrine requires judgement. Judgement is enhanced by understanding--better understanding leads to sounder judgement. There is a danger when doctrine does not provide enough to let the operational commander apply informed judgment.

DOCTRINE BY SLOGAN: At the start of World War I, the French believed in one principle of war--the offensive. In the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Halsey relied on a tactical maxim--don't divide the fleet. Both illustrate the dangers of misunderstanding the nature of war.

The easy tendency is to "elegantize," but this is an often harmful shortcut to judgement. Today's shortcuts might be tomorrow's governing factors--their corrupting influence decisively felt when the operational commander evaluates an otherwise sound estimate of the situation.

Attack the enemy's critical COG? Using today's doctrine: Absolutely! Where will the CPV occur? Today's answer: Never heard of it. What is a limited war? Today: Limited means, limited time, etc. [2] The cure for this poison is better understanding.

Without better understanding, the operational commander risks improperly using his doctrinal tools. He has less rationale to press a differing view. He may misunderstand war and lock himself into poor assumptions or courses of action.

The counter-argument is that in today's high-tech environment, operational commanders have little impact or initiative. Political leaders will stay in touch and will make all the decisions about when to start, what to attack, and when to stop. This is a dangerous argument. Taken to extreme, the US could abandon all strategic and operational doctrine.

Policymakers are constrained by the realities inherent in war--the nature of war doesn't change no matter who is calling the shots. US policymakers rely heavily on military advice. The source of this advice should be founded in doctrine and tempered by experience. Also, the US public frowns on any perceived discord between its military and political leaders. A robust doctrine provides a sound basis for discussion, advice, and action.

WORRISOME TRENDS:

a. Strategy/doctrine: The trend today is on offense and firepower--if the US fights, it fights to win. Maneuverability, mobility, lethality, overwhelming force, rapid and decisive victories, etc. are becoming dominant concepts/slogans.

b. Technology: The trend is for smaller and smaller units to achieve greater and greater range, lethality, etc. Also, proliferation, especially weapons of mass destruction, will increase the combat potential of future adversaries.

c. Environment: Defense budgets are declining. Capability is being reduced. Limited wars are the likely wars of the future. Coalitions are virtually a necessity.

These trends show the potential for doctrinal misapplication to grow worse. Dangerous paradoxes are forming: concepts/capabilities that seem more at home in unlimited wars must operate within a US that pursues limited aims in war.

Consider the operational commander in a future limited war. He wants rapid/decisive victory. He uses overwhelming forces with great range and lethality. As such, tactical units over the entire Area of Operations can easily, inadvertently, cross to the strategic level. These units live to attack the enemy COG. Coalition partners vacillate long before his attack loses strength. The enemy has weapons of mass destruction. Fearing, or misinterpreting, US actions, the enemy escalates. The US passes a CPV--the war has become something it was not.

US military doctrine today does not adequately prepare the operational commander to handle these paradoxes.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

This paper started with a question: How well does the US understand Clausewitz's ideas? To make a judgement, three concepts from On War were examined: the dual nature of war, the COG, and the CPV.

In US doctrine, these three concepts receive superficial treatment compared to their rich exploration in On War. Furthermore, US doctrine uses these concepts individually--their application is fragmented, simplistic, and mechanical.

Therefore, US military doctrine provides a misleading version of Clausewitz's intent. The potential exists for operational commanders to apply poor judgement when using these concepts--and this potential is growing worse.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Clausewitz believed future readers of On War might discover a "revolution in the theory of war." The following changes to basic US military doctrine will revolutionize US understanding of Clausewitz:

1. Dual nature of war: Redefine general/limited war solely in terms of political aim. Outline "points of irreconcilability."
2. COG: To identify the COG remains the essence of operational art. However, emphasize the purpose of this identification: to plan for, or avoid, its attack; to threaten as part of war termination. Ensure cascading concepts emphasize "level purity;" e.g., tactical doctrine for tactical COGs.

3. CPV: Put the CPV into US doctrine. Warn the operational commander that this may occur well before the culminating point of attack.

Some may dismiss the value of taking these steps arguing that they are simply common sense. Perhaps true--history will be the judge. Consider, however, the tragedy of disregarding a solution only because it is too easy. By broadening US understanding of Clausewitz, operational commanders can exercise more informed judgement when developing strategy and applying doctrine to better meet the challenging world ahead.

EPILOGUE: In addition to the conclusions/recommendations, three additional thoughts are essential:

- Like the rerun of a good movie, each reading of On War reveals something not seen before. The full power of On War requires several readings.
- Each conclusion drawn from On War requires testing against personal experience and the history of war.
- Through better understanding, operational commanders can apply doctrine with heightened judgement.

Clausewitz wanted to write a book "that would not be forgotten after two or three years, and that...might be picked up more than once by those who are interested in the subject." [1] Indeed, only through the careful reading and reflection of On War will military professionals live up to Clausewitz's hope that his work would be understood.

NOTES

Chapter I

1. Carl von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 61-71.
2. Strategy and Policy Lecture Comment, Naval War College, Fall 1991.
3. Martin Kitchen, "The Political History of Clausewitz," The Journal of Strategic Studies, March 1989, p. 45.
4. Ibid, pp. 27-46.
Michael Howard, Foreword to Clausewitz A Biography by Roger Parkinson, (NY: Stein and Day, 1970), p. 11.
5. Azar Gat, The Origins of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 252-253.
6. In compelling fashion, Azar Gat (Ibid, pp. 255-263) advances the idea that On War is more complete than is generally accepted. In brief, he concludes that Clausewitz wrote Books VII and VIII along the lines of his new ideas and then revised Book I. All that was left was to "mop up" the rest of the text in short order.

Chapter II

1. Joint Pub 0-1, Basic National Defense Doctrine, 7 May 1991, p. GL-10.
2. Clausewitz, On War, p. 69.
3. Ibid, p. 596.
4. Ibid, Book VIII, Chapter 4.
5. Iraq's war against the allied coalition in DESERT STORM is not an exception. From Iraq's viewpoint they fought two wars. In the first war, Iraq had an unlimited aim to overthrow Kuwait. In the second war, Iraq fought defensively to retain their conquest--not with the unlimited aim of overthrowing or destroying any of the allied nations.
6. Joint Pub 0-1, p. GL-11.
7. Clausewitz, On War, p. 69.

8. Ibid, Book VIII, Chapters 7 and 8.

9. Ibid, p. 612.

10. LtCol Eddy Smith, USA, The Utility of a Limited War Strategy, US Naval War College Operations Research paper, 17 June 1988.

11. "To discover how much of our resources must be mobilized by war, we must examine our own political aim and that of the enemy. We must gauge the strength and situation of the opposing state. We must gauge the character and abilities of its government and people and do the same in regard to our own. Finally, we must evaluate the political sympathies of other states and the effect the war may have on them." Clausewitz, On War, pp. 585-586.

12. Without using solely the political aim, US definitions can not explain how the US fought limited wars in Vietnam and DESERT STORM, but used tremendous resources; e.g., massive mobilizations and the newest technologies. The same is true for Korea with the threat of using nuclear weapons. Furthermore, how could the US change from limited to unlimited aims--as in Korea--without needing to change means? Finally, by using the political aim, the US would have the doctrinal consistency to fight unlimited wars against minor nations or limited wars against major powers.

Chapter III

1. Joint Pub 0-1, p. GL-3.

2. Ibid, p. III-37.

3. FM 100-5, Operations, Department of the Army, May 1986, p. 180.

4. Clausewitz, On War, pp. 595-596.

5. This may be analogous to the strategic-operational-tactical spectrum in today's doctrine.

6. Clausewitz, On War, p. 549.

7. The enemy doesn't have this choice when he is overthrown in an unlimited war.

8. This is the center of gravity because without China, North Korea can not stay in the fight.

9. FM 100-15, Corps Operations, Department of the Army, Sep 1989, p. 8-4.

10. USSPACECOM Pamphlet 2-1, Doctrine for Space Control Forces, United States Space Command, 27 March 1990, p. 5.

11. Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the US Armed Forces, (National Defense University Press, Nov 1991). The COG is mentioned at least six times--usually in bold print.

Chapter IV

1. FM 100-5, pp. 181-182. First appeared in the 1980s.
2. Clausewitz, On War, Book VII, Chapter 22.
3. Ibid, p. 570.
4. Ibid, p. 612.
5. Ibid, p. 572.
6. Ibid, p. 570.
7. Ibid, p. 573.

Chapter V

1. Clausewitz, On War, p. 69, Note of 10 July 1827.
2. Ibid, pp. 88-89.
3. The closest Clausewitz comes is in Book VIII. In war plans, he ties together the CPV, the COG, and the use of the offensive and the defensive depending on the political aim.

Chapter VI

1. Joint Pub 1, p. 5.
2. Totalitarian leaders are another example of how doctrinal slogans can cause misunderstanding. This leader is the COG, especially in command and control. Doctrine says, "Attack the COG." Therefore, target the Head of State.
While I haven't read the final result, this is the thesis of a fellow student's operation's paper. I find this thinking dangerous. What if US aims are limited? What if the enemy has weapons of mass destruction? How will this attack be perceived by: the enemy, other nations, and the US populace? What is the impact on the CPV? None of this is systematically considered, yet these answers are essential to understanding the nature of a limited war--and, in this case, to the decision of whether or not to target another nation's Head of State.

Chapter VII

1. Clausewitz, On War, p. 63.

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