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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY  
NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE



TITO'S VICTORY: THEORY INTO REALITY  
CORE COURSE 2



FRANK GORENC/CLASS OF 95  
FOUNDATIONS OF MILITARY THOUGHT AND STRATEGY  
SEMINAR I  
COL PETER HERRLY  
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Operation Punishment, the invasion of Yugoslavia, started on April 6, 1941, when the German air force executed a savage air assault consisting of 234 German bombers on the capital city of Belgrade (Kaplan 73) This invasion, completed in ten days, constituted yet another aggression by Adolph Hitler in his evolving quest to expand the German empire However, in the eyes of Josip Broz Tito, the tragedy of the invasion signaled a golden opportunity In his view, the war would give him the opportunity to continue his prewar political work for revolution and overthrow of the royalist government. Demonstrating decisive and inspired leadership, Tito successfully used the war to achieve an independent communist Yugoslavia. His leadership and vision earned the Partisan movement the respect of both enemies and allies In 1944, Winston Churchill commended Tito and his Partisan movement: "The communist element has the honour of being the beginners, but as the movement increased in strength and numbers a modifying and unifying process has taken place, and national conceptions have supervened. In Marshal Tito, the Partisans have found an outstanding leader, glorious in the fight for freedom " (Padev 123) The German leader Himmler simply stated, "Unfortunately, he is our opponent." (Dedijer 219)

Expertly working in the military and political realms, Tito validated many Clausewitzian theories There is no evidence Tito ever studied the writings of Carl von Clausewitz; however, Tito did study Friedrich Engels who was an early advocate of revolution and socialism Engels had read and was "impressed" by the writings of Clausewitz (Paret 265) Therefore, Clausewitz may have affected Tito indirectly through the teachings of Friedrich Engels because some Clausewitzian theories, such as decisive action even in the strategic defensive did find their way into Engels' revolutionary principles. (Paret 266) To achieve victory, Tito prosecuted the war with the practical revolutionary principles of Engels and provided history with a clear validation of Clausewitz' theory on the purpose, nature, and conduct of war

### Background

Ever vigilant to potential threats to his political vision of an independent communist Yugoslavia, Tito wisely observed in 1937 that, "An expanding Germany is neither friend nor good neighbor, but an avowed enemy of the freedom and independence of the peoples of Yugoslavia "

(Dedijer 121) After the 1938 German takeover of Czechoslovakia, the Yugoslavian Central Committee stated that, "The basic task of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia is to mobilize and organize all the peoples of Yugoslavia in the struggle to defend the inviolability of their country and their independence against the German and Italian Fascist aggressors " (Dedijer 123) This call for support to communist struggles in Europe while preparing Yugoslavia against Fascist aggression increased the popularity of the Communist Party (Dedijer 127) As the only independent communist country in the world, the Soviet Union dictated the foreign policy for all national parties dedicated to achieving world communism. When the fighting broke out between France, Britain and Germany, the Soviet leadership smugly announced that this was purely a war between imperialists, the Second Imperialist War, and portrayed themselves as a country of peace (Auty 143) The Soviet Union also denounced the Nazi and Fascist aggression while simultaneously criticizing the imperialist British and French. (Auty 143) After the August 1939 Nazi-Soviet Non Aggression Pact, the Soviets reversed the ideological line against Nazism and Fascism that the communist party movements all over the world had preached (Auty 145) Shocked, Tito accepted the Pact obediently believing, "It necessary for the security of the Soviet Union," but continued to believe that Yugoslavia would become subject to Fascist aggression (Auty 145) (Maclean 95) The resolution of the Fifth Yugoslavian Communist National Conference, held in October 1940, boldly warned that the, "Danger of war directly threatens Yugoslavia " (Dedijer 132) When the Germans invaded Yugoslavia, Tito could only call for resistance but not a general uprising because of the alliance between Russia and the Germans, yet, he prepared for war against the Fascists and the opportunity to begin a communist revolution (Auty 168) June 22, 1941, marked the beginning of the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the Yugoslavian Partisan resistance (Auty 171)

#### Purpose of War Politics By Another Means

Clausewitz saw war as a "true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means." (Handout 1) Tito's actions before and after the war validates the significance of Clausewitz' purpose of war Tito's knowledge of Engels alerted him to the requirement for

revolution "A new revolution is possible only as a consequence of a new crisis " (Paret 268) Since 1920, there were only two or three opportunities, civic disorders or economic stresses, that even remotely represented an adequate crisis for Tito. (Maclean 95) However, as early as 1939, Tito felt war would come to Yugoslavia and intended to use that crisis as the "springboard" for revolution (Auty 149) Edvard Kardelj, a member of the Yugoslavian Central Committee, later explained that, "The victory of the national liberation uprising would usher in a socialist revolution " (Accomplishment 89) Therefore, prior to 1941, Tito continued his political work feverishly strengthening political organization, stressing unity through federalism among ethnically diverse communists, and warning of the "fateful days" ahead. (Auty 153) Ironically, during the invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941, it was Hitler, a Fascist, who started Tito on the road to revolution by eliminating the established Yugoslavian government. Through the invasion of Russia, it was Hitler again that presented Tito with the crisis Engels required for revolution. Tito's own words for action were, "This was our party's war cry, its call to arms and to revolt." (Maclean 92) Tito reminded the communists that, "The time had come for the party to prepare to seize power and to seize it in such a way that the bourgeoisie would never regain it " (Maclean 85)

Tito did not waste any time in making sure that his movement remained in power after the war and denying royalist attempts to gain power. (Padev 88) One technique designed to continue progress toward an independent communist state involved establishing "liberation territories " (Auty 177) Militarily, liberation areas constituted staging areas for Partisan operations against the Nazis. Politically, liberation areas served as areas used by Tito to continue to spread the word about socialism and communism. (Auty 177) After the military liberation of an area, Tito immediately ruled it as a small state and began to put communist political theories into practice (Auty 177) Tito set up Peoples' Liberation Committees to build close relations because, "The correct functioning of even the smallest organs of government is the very basis for success in the war of liberation." (Auty 201) The Partisans provided the population basic reading and writing education along with political education to gain the support of the people for Tito's long term

objectives (Auty 202) Liberation areas consolidated military successes and broadened Partisan influence. (Auty 202) A German dispatch to Berlin provides the best and most vivid testimony to the effectiveness of political liberation areas in earning the people's political support The dispatch read, "Nobody is interested in the old political parties They do not believe in anyone any more and they follow the Communist bandits blindly They are tougher than anything you can imagine What is more their organization is excellent It might serve as the classical example of a perfect secret organization " (Maclean 102)

#### Purpose of War: Establish the Kind of War

Another Clausewitzian concept validated by Tito was the theory that, "The most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking." (Handout 1) Close study of the situation facing Tito in 1941 reveals a particularly skilled judgment by Tito as to the type of war the communists were actually embarking on. In essence, Tito correctly determined that simultaneous distinct kinds of war existed: (1) the liberation war, (2) the revolutionary war, and (3) the civil war. Establishing the kinds of war allowed Tito to determine exactly who is the enemy. The list of enemies proved to be long and formidable. The list included the Nazis, the Italians, Nazi sponsored Croatian Ustasa, Italian backed Montenegrins, royalist Cetnik resistance movement and indigenous German collaborators or anti communists. Understanding the situation enabled Tito, the statesman and commander, to prioritize and strike a balance between competing "wars" while optimizing the political consequences of each military action.

An example of Tito's brilliance at balancing the objectives and understanding the potential political effects of a military decision occurred after the royalist Cetniks conducted a surprise attack on the Partisans at their headquarters early in the war The unprovoked attack came as a surprise because Tito considered the Cetniks allies against the Fascists After the surprise attack, despite having surrounded the Cetnik leader Mihalovich and his entire staff, Tito allowed them to go free even though eliminating the Cetniks would do away with a major obstacle in the civil war Since the Cetniks were fighting the Fascist occupiers, eliminating them at this point would only

hurt the war of liberation effort against the common enemy. Confident that the Cetniks could never win the support of the people, Tito pointed out that, "I do not want to take it upon myself to perform the will of the people. who will dissociate themselves from Mihailovich and from all that he stands for," and any influence claimed by the Cetniks after the war would collapse (Padev 89). Tito believed that popular support of the people for communism would follow the successful liberation of Yugoslavia from German occupation and the Communists would win any post war elections against the Cetniks. (Padev 88) Another motivation for Tito not to destroy the Cetniks was that since they represented the recognized Yugoslav government in exile, their extermination would subject the so far unrecognized communist movement to political propaganda in the West (Padev 89). Believing that this action would only hinder the achievement of his ultimate political aim, he spared the Cetnik resistance movement choosing to fight them only, "When it can not be avoided " (Auty 240)

#### Nature of War Compelling the Enemy and Effort

Tito proved particularly adept at understanding the Clausewitzian nature of the war as it applied to the struggle in World War II. Clausewitz stated that, "War is an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will," and that, "The political aim will determine both the military objectives to be reached and the amount of effort it requires," because war will never be absolute (Handout 1) Since the political aim of an independent communist Yugoslavia remained the constant across all three simultaneous war efforts, Tito had to expertly analyze each "enemy" and adjust the amount of military effort required to compel the enemy.

Two examples clearly demonstrate this aspect of Tito's understanding of Clausewitz' nature of war. The first example involves the war of liberation military objective against the Fascists which in Tito's words was, "To free our homeland from the hated occupation and its servants " (Padev 95) Compelling the Germans and Italians to cease the occupation of Yugoslavia would contribute significantly to the political aim of a communist Yugoslavia and as such required the most significant effort. Given the strength of the occupation forces and the fact that the Fascists were the main enemy, Tito displayed patience knowing that quick defeat was improbable

Additionally, so desperate was the situation during the lean years of the resistance in 1941 and 1941 that Tito even accepted the aid of the "imperialist" British to continue his against the Germans.

In the civil war, the decision to allow the Cetnik leadership to escape indicates that despite the fact that they were the enemy, their inability to thwart the achievement of the political aim led Tito to almost disregard the Cetniks completely and not exert any force. In fact, even after the Cetnik surprise attack on the Partisans, Tito continued to make overtures to Mihailovich in the hope for joint operations. After the Cetniks openly collaborated with the Fascists, however, Tito again considered them an enemy. Explaining his views on the Cetniks to Churchill in 1944, Tito said he considered, "The Germans to be our main enemy," and, "We had much rather see our bullets used to kill Germans." (Auty 240)

#### Nature of War: Trinity

Another aspect of Clausewitz' nature of war understood and validated by Tito was the balance required of among the three aspects of the "trinity" of war (1) primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force, (2) the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam, and (3) of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy." (Clausewitz 89) In the first aspect of the trinity, Clausewitz noted that, "The passions that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people " (Clausewitz 89) Tito once assured a Spanish comrade who complemented him on the quality of the Balkan volunteers in the Spanish International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War that, "Those who have remained behind are no different from these and that is our strength. One dies and there are a hundred to take his place." (Padev 22) Often times, local Partisan leaders had trouble controlling the primordial violence and hatred of the people as demonstrated in Montenegro where over zealous party members killed both Italians and any of their own people who were slow to support the revolt (Auty 173)

On the second aspect of the trinity, Clausewitz noted that, "The scope which play of courage and talent will enjoy in the realm of probability and chance depends on the particular character of

the commander and the army " (Clausewitz 89) Brimming with courage and talent the Partisans enhanced the probability of success and limited the effects of chance on their military operations by maintaining professionalism throughout the war Himmler provides praising testimony to Tito's superior character and the strength of his army when lamenting that, "I wish we had a dozen Titos in Germany, men who were leaders and had such great resolution and good nerves that though they were forever encircled they would never give in he is an uncompromising and steadfast soldier, a steadfast commander." (Dedijer 219) Noted for their Spartan behavior and strict code of discipline, the Partisans earned the respect and admiration of all Allied officers working with Partisan units and brought tremendous advantages by earning the respect and support of the people. (Auty 200) Even in defeat, when the Partisans would lose liberation areas, inhabitants had the opportunity of seeing how their enemies behaved and comparing them with the Partisans. (Auty 200) Given the oppressive and brutal tactics of the Fascists and their puppet governments, the Partisans were sure to win that popularity contest.

In the third aspect of the trinity, Clausewitz states that, "The political aims are the business of the government alone." (Clausewitz 89) Tito fully understood the relationship between war and politics; that war was an instrument of policy subordinate to political aim Uniquely poised as both the military commander and the top statesman, Tito could direct all actions of his effort. Constantly analyzing the implications of his decisions, one close associate noted that, "Tito was never only a soldier without being a politician at the same time; and he was never a politician without also being a soldier" (Accomplishment 87)

#### Conduct of War Defense with Offense

Tito elected to conduct a guerrilla war and offered simple instructions to his soldiers "Attack them when they aren't expecting it! When they attack you, withdraw!" (Padev 69) (Maclean 177) Tito clearly adopts the views of Friedrich Engels for an insurrection directing action, "With the greatest determination and on the offensive The defensive is the death of every armed rising Surprise your antagonist " (Paret 267) However, Tito's plan for action validates Clausewitz' view on defense during the conduct of war Clausewitz advised that, "Defense is the

stronger form of war," yet, it "Need not be passive," and, "Can be a shield of well-directed blows." (Handout 2) Adopting the strategic defensive with tactical offensive military operations played havoc with the Axis' strategic offensive but tactically defensive military operations. Interestingly, the Axis powers failed to heed the Clausewitz' advise to abandon the defense when strong enough to pursue a "positive object " (Handout 2)

### Conclusion: Military Genius

Tito's Partisan resistance against the Fascists in World War II validates the universality of the theories on war of Carl von Clausewitz. To Clausewitz military genius is, "A highly developed mental aptitude for war" consisting of the following elements: courage, strength of body and soul, *coup de oeil*, determination, presence of mind, energy, staunchness, strength of mind or character, firmness, and the faculty to grasp topography (Handout 1) The senior British liaison officer to the Partisans, Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean seemingly runs down Clausewitz' military genius elements when he said, "Tito brought to the war against the Germans. leadership, courage, realism, ruthless determination and singleness of purpose, resourcefulness, adaptability and plain common sense. Where there were important decisions to be made, whether political or military, he took them...calmly and collectedly, however precarious the situation." (Auty p 223) Additionally, Tito's tremendous abilities to focus and lead the ethnically and religiously diverse and fragmented population of Yugoslavia through World War II remains a significant achievement. After defeating the Germans, Tito resumed his political activities and finally completed his revolution in 1945. The ability to achieve political aims through war remains the hallmark of great commanders and superior statesman. For the victory against the Fascists through leadership in the face of a seemingly overwhelming enemy, Josip Broz Tito certainly earns the praise of great military commander and superior statesman.

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