

**CLAUSEWITZ'S CATEGORIES OF WAR**

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Not long after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003—but long enough for almost everyone except the Bush White House and the Department of Defense to recognize that the occupation of Iraq was not going as promised—I had an opportunity to receive an authoritative briefing on the progress of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. Three US Army colonels on the faculty of the National War College had offered to provide the College's faculty with their assessment. The first line of the briefing was “As you know, our objectives in Iraq have been quite limited.”

It is difficult to recount this occurrence without lapsing into incredulous sarcasm. Yes, we will invade and occupy this alien state; thoroughly destroy its military forces (those not killed will be disarmed and thrown into the street with no jobs, pensions, or futures); exterminate the ruling dynasty; hunt down its other political leaders; remove the entire ruling political party from influence; displace the entire traditional ruling ethnic group; and radically alter the state's political, legal, and economic systems. In the process, we will utterly alter the geo-political balance of power in the region. And then we will see an explosion of democracy throughout the Middle East.

In what universe, one might well ask, could such intentions constitute “limited objectives”?

Let me pause to note that these briefers were not dunderheads. The military faculty of the U.S. National War College is of high quality and is rigorously selected. Most of the three briefers had Ph.D.s. All had extensive experience both in Joint military operations and on high-level staffs (including White House and Congressional staffs). Two had actually taught the College's "Theory and Nature of War" course, including classes on the theories of Carl von Clausewitz and on "Limited War" (a case-study of the Korean War, 1950-53). Clearly, the briefers were attempting to apply Clausewitz's concept concerning the variable relationship between political objectives and military objectives. And yet they were quite unable to make any sense with it. Unfortunately, such confusion is widespread.

To a considerable extent, the explanation lies with Clausewitz himself. He was an eclectic, experimental thinker who ruthlessly tested his own evolving theories about war. If they failed his tests, he revised them. As a result, his concepts and the terminology he used to describe them changed over time. His most famous book, *Vom Kriege (On War)*,<sup>1</sup> was compiled posthumously from a set of sporadically revised manuscripts of varying and uncertain dates written between 1816 and 1830.<sup>2</sup> While Book 1 was carefully revised quite late in his life and is considered to reflect his most advanced thinking,<sup>3</sup> he never had a chance to completely revise the rest of the book to match. Therefore the existing book preserves,

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1 Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, vols. I-III of *Hinterlassene Werke des Generals Carl von Clausewitz über Krieg und Kriegführung* (Berlin: Dummlers Verlag, 1832-37). *On War*, ed/trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton University Press, 1976/84).

2 Clausewitz's prefatory notes might have helped sort this out, but the notes themselves, and the debate over their correct dates, are a source of much uncertainty. See Azar Gat, "Clausewitz's Final Notes," *Militargeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, v.1 (1989), 45-50, which has sparked much debate ever since.

3 While Book 1, Chapter 1, "What is War?" is widely discussed, less attention is paid to Chapter 2, "Purpose and Means in War," which has equal relevance to our subject here.

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in a somewhat disorderly way, various states of its author's evolutionary process.

While Clausewitz is often described as a 'strategic theorist,' the body of theory he developed extended well beyond the confines of 'strategy.' For many important subjects—for instance, his arguments concerning the nature and proper use of military theory, his concepts about history and their implications for military education, his ideas concerning the relationship between the strategic defense and offense, the relationship between political and military activity, the character of 'military genius'—the fact that he died unexpectedly before finishing the book does not seem to pose much of a problem. His treatment of many related issues is convincing throughout *On War* because he is an acute observer of people and events, achieving coherence despite the fact that his observations are made through an ever-evolving conceptual and terminological lens. The confusion concerning many issues can safely be blamed on the inattention of readers.

In the area of strategic analysis, however, the preservation of Clausewitz's evolutionary trail in *On War* has proven to be extremely problematic. If "the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive is to establish ... the *kind of war* on which [we] are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature,"<sup>4</sup> we need to understand what "kinds of war" Clausewitz expected us to choose among. Unfortunately, he left us with several different ways of categorizing war, to which confused or creative readers have added more. Given the power, importance, and influence of Clausewitz's ideas, modern thinkers attempting to apply Clausewitzian theory to real-world problems (past, present, or future) should seek to understand his earlier terminology, but they should also reject it and use his most mature analytical structure.

In this article, I therefore propose to examine a number of categories of war that Clausewitz developed for various

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4 *On War* (Book 1), pp.88-89.

purposes (and one that he didn't) and to consider how and why his terminology changed over time. These categories include (in alphabetical order):

Absolute War

Ideal War

Real War

Total War

War of Limited Objectives

War to Render Our Opponent Militarily or Politically Helpless

Broadly, my argument is this: *On War*, in the state Clausewitz left it in 1830, is an incomplete record preserving various states in the evolution of his thinking over a rather long period. The book nevertheless has tremendous coherence: the overall structure is sound and many aspects can be considered fully developed. That is not the case with regard to his quest to derive a conceptual structure for strategic analysis that would survive historical change, both past and future. He was initially biased by what appeared to be the success of the warfare ushered in by the French Revolution. His own formative experience was shaped by the conservative powers' struggle to cope with, match, and eventually exceed the energy and competence of warfare as it was waged by Napoleon Bonaparte. Only gradually was he forced by the study of history, reflection on his own experience, and contemplation of the future to recognize the infinite variation manifested by war in the real world and to respect the choices made by competent governments and commanders who chose to wage war in different modes. Clausewitz therefore sought to identify key factors inherent in politics and war that underlay and drove that variation. He found those factors in the political context and objectives of the powers at war, the differing military objectives that supported those political objectives, and the asymmetrical relationship between offense and defense. The most confusing of the terms with which he experimented is the notion of 'absolute war,' which is very

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widely referred to in the general literature about war. The problem, however, is that 'absolute war' represents an intermediate stage, not the final development, in Clausewitz's evolution. It appears almost entirely in Book 8, "War Plans," but his discussion of it there is experimental—probing and inconsistent. Ultimately, he dropped the term altogether and modified its underlying elements so fundamentally that we must consider the notion rejected. It is very often presented as Clausewitz's prescription for correct war-making, the opposite to 'limited war,' the equivalent of 'total war,' or a synonym for 'real,' 'true,' or 'ideal' war.<sup>5</sup> These depictions are incorrect, but the nature of the error depends on which of the shifting versions of absolute war is being addressed. Clausewitz's most mature treatment of the problem, in Book 1, more successfully confronts the same factors not resolved in Book 8.

In this short article, I cannot describe in detail either Clausewitz's evolution or the wildly varying uses made of his shifting categorizations of war in the wider military literature, nor show how those shifting terms relate to Clausewitz's other propositions. I do not believe that the former can be done with any precision—the necessary evidence simply does not exist. The latter would require a complete rehashing of *On War*. This is simply a discussion of the categories of war used by or attributed to Clausewitz, based on my own perception of his evolving logic.

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Clausewitz seems to have started out with the assumption that 'war' is a single, unified phenomenon. Over time, he came to recognize the great variation in the wars of history and of his own extensive experience. At first, this variation appeared to be driven simply by fluctuations in the energy and competence with which warfare was pursued.

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5 Certainly 'total war,' 'ideal war,' and 'absolute war' do sound rather alike. Equating them makes perfect sense to people who have not actually read the book. Unfortunately, that group includes many people who write about it.

By the time Book 8 reached its present form, however, Clausewitz was well aware that this linear view is inadequate. He saw that warfare naturally bifurcates into two fundamentally different ‘types’ or ‘forms’ in what is often referred to as the ‘dualism of war.’ In Book 8 he struggled to justify that duality, usually presenting one side of it merely as a superior replacement for the other. Looking for a label for the high end of the spectrum, he came up with the term ‘absolute war.’

The word ‘absolute’ appears very frequently in *On War* (114 times in the original German).<sup>6</sup> It is generally used in the philosophical sense of extreme perfection in some quality or condition (e.g., truth, superiority, uselessness, panic, security, resistance, flatness of the ground, etc.).<sup>7</sup> The formal term ‘absolute war,’ however, appears only six times in *On War*, only once<sup>8</sup> outside of Book 8. Its conspicuous total absence in Book 1 implies that Clausewitz found important reasons to drop it.

We must be careful what we mean by ‘types’ of war. Clausewitz constantly emphasizes the interactive nature of warfare. Logically therefore, to describe a ‘type’ of war should require a description that characterizes the interaction of all the contending powers, but he often uses the word ‘war’ in a confusing, purely unilateral sense. The phrase “war of limited aim” is confusing because war is interactive while aims are unilateral, and the phrase may describe only one side’s approach. A similar confusion occurs

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6 Counting the number of times a phrase appears in *On War* may not, however, offer much guidance as to either its importance in Clausewitz’s thinking or its influence on his readers. Clausewitz’s famous ‘trinity,’ for example, is mentioned only once (p.89), and one struggles to find clear references to it elsewhere. It nonetheless seems to powerfully capture Clausewitz’s overall approach.

7 It appears in other senses, of course, e.g., absolute numbers versus the actual relative power of two forces.

8 Near the end of Book 6, “Defense” (p.488-9), where ‘absolute war’ and an alternative that Clausewitz was considering, “true war,” appear together. The latter term, with which the Clausewitzaphobic John Keegan was obsessed [see John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York, Knopf, 1993)], appears only twice in this sense.

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when Clausewitz says that war is “an instrument of *Politik*.”<sup>9</sup> He fails to distinguish clearly between military force, which each side employs as a tool of its own unilateral policy, and war, which is an “instrument of [interactive] politics” in the sense in which a basketball court is an instrument of sports. ‘War to disarm our opponent’ is not so confusing: it clearly refers to only one side’s interests. Sometimes Clausewitz’s description of absolute war does describe a bilateral, high-energy, powerfully motivated conflict that, in principle, culminates in a distinct resolution of the issues between the opponents.<sup>10</sup> But this definition is problematic, for the same reason that any definition of absolute war is problematic: Clausewitz was changing his mind even as he wrote about it. In other places, absolute war is practiced unilaterally by Napoleon in his victories over the backward conservative powers, who are practicing the other form. Its relationship to reality varies: Clausewitz says in one place that “with our own eyes we have seen warfare achieve this state of absolute perfection.”<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, Napoleon only approximates a Platonic ideal, “as absolute war has never in fact been achieved.”<sup>12</sup> There, it is an unachievable abstraction similar to Book 1’s “logical fantasy” of ‘ideal war.’ Ideal war, however, is not only unachievable; it must be rejected as a model for real-world emulation. In the probing, experimental

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9 The confusion is amplified, in this case, by our own dilemma over whether to translate *Politik* as the English language’s interactive ‘politics’ or its unilateral ‘policy.’

10 Clausewitz’s last and most sophisticated historical campaign study, *Der Feldzug von 1815 in Frankreich* (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmlers, 1835), written c.1827-30, described a war to which the absolute-as-bilateral-real-war approach might reasonably have been applied. It is also extremely easy to interpret Clausewitz’s treatment through the language of Book 1. In fact, however, the study is written in very pragmatic prose without overtly presenting any grand theoretical framework. The word ‘absolute’ does not appear.

11 *On War* (Book 8), p.580. Emphasis added.

12 *On War* (Book 8), p.582.

writing of Book 8, absolute war remains the form the warfighter must strive for “when he can or when he must.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus in most of Book 8 there still exists a linear spectrum of warfare, a low-energy/low competence form at one end and a high-energy/high-competence form at the other. Clausewitz characterized the low end as ‘wars of observation,’ applying that lifeless imagery to all warfare of the pre-revolutionary era, thus casting doubt on its legitimacy.<sup>14</sup> It was “something incoherent and incomplete.”<sup>15</sup> At the opposite extreme were savage spasms of violence in which armies were smashed and states reduced to begging for peace. He recognized, however, that the extreme form was rare among civilized peoples, and understood early in his evolution that politics was both the driving and the moderating force.<sup>16</sup> The French Revolution had clearly injected a great deal of energy into this system, and Napoleon Bonaparte had injected a great deal of competence; both were gradually absorbed and finally mastered by his opponents.

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13 *On War* (Book 8), p.581.

14 In Clausewitz’s view, the conservative powers continued to wage such war until c.1809 or later.

15 *On War* (Book 8), p.580. Lumping pre-1789 wars together under the label “War of Observation” is odd and is clearly an unsatisfactory way to characterize many of the hard-fought struggles of that era. It ignores vast contextual differences as well as the accomplishments of Marlborough and Frederick. For instance, the 1704 Battle of Blenheim—a coalition battle on both sides—resulted in an annihilative victory by Marlborough and Eugene that is strongly redolent of Jena or Waterloo.

16 Modern commentators tend to focus on the evidently novel notion that war is an expression of politics (which has always seemed particularly astounding to Americans). That aspect of Clausewitz’s thinking received little attention in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, evidently because it was common knowledge. See, for example, Wellington’s reluctant praise for Clausewitz’s grasp of the relationship between policy and strategy in his reply to *Der Feldzug von 1815* in Wellington’s “Memorandum on the Battle of Waterloo,” 24 September 1842, in *Supplementary Despatches, Correspondence, and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington*, edited by his son, the Duke of Wellington (London: John Murray, 1863), 10:530.

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The key aspects of absolute war are not merely its energy, violence, and competence, but also its 'decisiveness': it "is completely governed and saturated by the urge for a decision."<sup>17</sup> Clausewitz is looking for an event that actually decides something of great political importance, the "decision to make peace." A decisive battle leads directly to peace because it convinces the loser that his own objectives are unachievable. The best alternative is to accept his opponent's minimum demands. That implies that the loser's decision matters. In the clearer formulation of Book 1, the objective of the more energetic form of war is to render the political opponent's decisions irrelevant. Having been 'disarmed,' he no longer possesses the military means to prevent the victor from simply imposing his own conditions.

Note, however, that Clausewitz seldom envisions "regime change," the actual elimination of the political opponent. His wars end in peace treaties, and the victorious and vanquished powers move on from there. For all the 'absoluteness' of Napoleon's victories, his political objectives—vis a vis the other Great Powers, at least—were quite restrained by later standards. Even Prussia, reduced in scale and power after the disasters of 1806-7, occupied and drafted into a French-dominated coalition, did not see its dynasty deposed.<sup>18</sup>

Nor do either absolute war or Book 1's 'ideal war' in any way equate to 'total war' as that term was used in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and by critics of Clausewitz like B.H. Liddell Hart, who called

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17 *On War* (Book 6), p.488-49. This is the single reference to absolute war ("if we may call it that") outside of Book 8.

18 One might argue that Spain was an exception to this, though whether Spain qualifies as a 'Great Power' by this time is dubious. In any case, the internal politics of Spain were in such a state of dissolution that regime change no doubt appeared easier than any other practical alternative. It nonetheless failed. The other great exception was the Allies' determination to overthrow Napoleon personally in 1814 and 1815, but France itself emerged not merely intact but as a full member of the 'Concert of Europe,' with many aspects and even personnel of the Napoleonic regime still in place.

him “the Apostle of Total War.”<sup>19</sup> ‘Total war’ is a prescription for the actual waging of war typified by the ideas of General Erich von Ludendorff, who actually assumed control of the German war effort during World War One. It requires the total subordination of politics to the war effort—an idea that was anathema to Clausewitz. It makes the assumption that total military victory or defeat are the only options, even when one’s political objectives are limited (as was the case for most of the Great Powers, most of the time, during the ‘total war’ of 1914-18). The concept of total war involves no suspension of the effects of time and space, as did Clausewitz’s pure abstraction of ‘ideal war.’ Ludendorff was fully aware that his arguments were inimical to Clausewitz, saying “All theories of Clausewitz have to be thrown overboard!”<sup>20</sup>

Nor does Clausewitz’s frequent emphasis on the “destruction” of the opposing force have anything to do with wars of extermination: “that is, they must be *put in such a condition that they can no longer carry on the fight*. Whenever we use the phrase ‘destruction of the enemy’s forces’ this alone is what we mean.”<sup>21</sup>

Understanding that historical processes are not linear,<sup>22</sup> Clausewitz saw that the lesser form might well alternate with the form manifested in the revolutionary wars:

Not every future war ... is likely to be of this type; on the contrary, one may predict that most wars will tend to revert to wars of

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19 Other than an accidental reference to a theater of war as “the total war area” (p.280), and a hypothetical reference (on p.605, “even if war were total war,” with the clear implication that it is not), the phrase ‘total war’ does not appear in *On War*.

20 Erich Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen* (Berlin, 1919), p.10, cited in Hans Speier, “Ludendorff: The German Concept of Total War,” in Edward Mead Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy*, pp.306-321.

21 *On War* (Book 1), p.90.

22 An understanding that evidently eludes the authors of such categories as ‘fourth-generation’ and ‘fifth-generation war,’ as well as the ‘New Wars’ scholars, who view the wars of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as a type rather than an accident of timing.

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observation. A theory, to be of any practical use, must allow for that likelihood.<sup>23</sup>

But it is no more likely that war will always be so monumental in character than that the ample scope it has come to enjoy will again be severely restricted.<sup>24</sup>

Clausewitz thus detected problems in his effort to paint absolute war as the linear perfection of a singular phenomenon of war. Such warfare remained historically rare, and even Napoleon's example of its achievable near-perfection did not appear likely to cause it to universally replace the other form. Seeking to define absolute war more clearly, Clausewitz began to recognize that each of these two forms could be appropriate, depending on circumstances. "Since both these concepts lead to results, theory cannot dispense with either."<sup>25</sup>

A theory, then, that dealt exclusively with absolute war would either have to ignore any case in which the nature of war had been deformed by outside influence, or else it would have to dismiss them all as misconstrued. That cannot be what theory is for. Its purpose is to demonstrate what war is in practice, not what its ideal nature ought to be.<sup>26</sup>

Thus the idea of the singular 'perfection' of the most violent form lost its legitimacy, and with it the value of the word 'absolute.' It might be possible to approach perfection in either form.

Absolute war was a conceptual failure for many reasons. The notion of the absolute as the "right" form caused its author to redefine "real war" in a manner quite different from the discussions of "war in the real world" that appear outside of Book

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23 *On War* (Book 6), pp.488-9.

24 *On War* (Book 8), p.593.

25 *On War* (Book 8), p.583.

26 *On War* (Book 8), p.593.

8.<sup>27</sup> It described a linear learning process that could not account for the likely recurrence of non-absolute war. It did not reflect much of the dynamic relationship between the strategic aggressor and the strategic defender explored in Books 6 and 7, nor could it account for wars in which neither side sought a ‘decision.’ It hovered awkwardly between the more intense spectrum of real-world war and a purely philosophical notion of perfection. The legitimization of non-absolute war, i.e., ‘war of limited objectives,’ gains ground in Book 8 and the limited aim appears as a formal goal in its concluding chapters.

The contradictions and failures of Book 8 demonstrate Clausewitz’s recognition that the variety of war as we experience it in the real world does not merely reflect a simple linear spectrum from weak and befuddled to energetic and competent. It sparked his final acceptance that war actually has two foci or attractors, two *legitimate* tendencies which coexist and must be respected, which we call (for convenience, but not quite accurately) ‘limited’ and ‘unlimited war.’ This realization had been brewing for a long time. He was not fully forced to confront the inadequacies of his earlier concepts and terms until he turned from historical analysis to future planning. Required to do this by his own research design, he had to produce an analytical structure applicable to a truly realistic variety of strategic futures. The confusing mix of terms in its nine chapters reflects the misfiring of his initial concept for the discussion and his efforts to repair it on the fly.

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Book 1 represents the lessons learned in that struggle, though his language never achieved complete consistency. Clausewitz by no means radically changed his direction in Book 1; he simply pushed further down the same path, making incremental but

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<sup>27</sup> In most of *On War*, the term “real war” simply means war as it appears in the real world. In Book 8, p.604, it refers only to the high-energy ‘absolute’ form: “the half-hearted war does not become a real war after all.”

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nonetheless profoundly significant changes to several components of his argument and to the terminology with which it was described. These can be summarized as follows:

The term 'absolute war' is not replaced in Book 1 by another singular phrase, but by a set of concepts or dialectical pairs that, taken together, are far more able to account for the variety of war as we experience it in the real world.

Many people (including myself) have assumed that ideal war is a synonym for absolute war. In Book 1, however, Clausewitz eliminated the ambiguity of 'absolute war' and set up a clear distinction between the pure abstraction of 'ideal war' on the one hand, driven to unachievable extremes outside the boundaries of time, space, and man's political nature, and war in practical reality on the other. It serves important purposes. First of all, ideal war serves the function of an immovable benchmark. Unlike Napoleon's style of war-making, it is not going to be rendered obsolete by future developments. Secondly, ideal war is an exercise in pure logic, serving to demonstrate the dangers of rigid logic in the human social universe and forcing the discussion to return to the practical domain of politics:

Even assuming this extreme effort to be an absolute quantity that could easily be calculated, one must admit that the human mind is unlikely to consent to being ruled by such a logical fantasy... since subtleties of logic do not motivate the human will... war is dependent on the interplay of possibilities and probabilities, of good and bad luck, conditions in which strictly logical reasoning often plays no part at all and is always apt to be a most unsuitable and awkward intellectual tool.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, Book 1's dense abstraction seems to have stopped many—probably most—readers in their tracks, either because it seems so difficult to grasp, because it is so repellent in its violence,

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<sup>28</sup> The first half of this block quote is from Book 1 (p.78); the second from Book 8 (p.580).

or, conversely, because some readers take it as the book's singular thesis and practical prescription, which, once grasped, obviates any need to plow through the rest.<sup>29</sup>

The dialectical opposite of 'ideal war' is 'real war,' which now returns to its literal meaning encompassing war as it actually occurs, in all of its variety. Within real war, there now appears a new dialectical pair of equally respectable options: two distinctive but legitimate types of objective. The first is the limited aim, which can be defensive (pure defense aims only at self-preservation; it has no 'positive aim' of increasing the defender's power) or offensive (the attacker seeks only a modest goal—e.g., to grab a piece of territory, to gain a bargaining chip, or to make the defender give up some political objective of his own). The limited aim implies no need to render the opponent helpless; the purpose of military operations is merely to wear down his will to continue an unprofitable struggle, as the American revolutionaries wore down Great Britain's will to retain the 13 colonies, or as North Vietnam wore down the Americans' will to maintain an independent Republic of Vietnam. Its dialectical opposite is the aim of 'disarming' the opponent, which may be the goal of an aggressor or the optional riposte of a defender who has played his cards right. The goal of military operations in that case is the destruction of the opponent's capacity for self-defense, rendering him unable to continue the struggle regardless of his will to do so. Both of these military objectives may serve either limited or extreme political objectives, depending on circumstances and costs. They can be mixed and matched in multiple ways to suit the changing circumstances of either side. Though Clausewitz envisioned the political ends of warfare in rather civilized dimensions, this structure is adaptable to far more savage political ends like those of Nazi Germany or ISIS. One

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29 Strangely, the philosopher W.B. Gallie failed to detect the unreal character of 'ideal war,' probably because he assumed that it was part of the 'absolute war' concept. See W.B. Gallie, "Clausewitz Today," *European Journal of Sociology*, v.XIX (1978), 143-167.

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cannot exterminate helpless populations until one has stripped away their military shield.

It is important to note that the character of a war in the terms of Book 1 is not determined by its scale, the resources committed, or the number of casualties. World War One was, despite its enormous scale and sacrifices, a war of limited political objectives coupled with the pursuit of military annihilation (achieved, in practice, via tactical attrition). On the other hand, though rather modest in scale the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama sought unlimited political objectives (the complete overthrow of the Panamanian government) and accomplished the complete destruction (by Clausewitz's definition) of Panamanian forces. Militarily, despite its low casualties, it was a war of annihilation. The Cold War, in which the West certainly sought and achieved massive political change in the Soviet Union, was militarily a war of limited aim—indeed, almost 'pure defense.' North Vietnam waged a war of attrition against the United States, with the limited political goal of exhausting the Americans' will to preserve their South Vietnamese ally; in the same space and time, it pursued an unlimited war of annihilation aimed at disarming the south, with the unlimited political goal of eradicating the southern state and fully absorbing its people and territory. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq employed a strategy of military annihilation to disarm Saddam's state, permitting the imposition of political objectives as extreme as any in history. All of these variations can be richly described using Clausewitz's mature analytical structure.

This new dialectical construct thus better connected the character of warfare to its dynamically changeable political motives, better reflected the dynamics of offense and defense, and better accounted for the variety of strategic configurations found in real-world warfare. It is adaptable to even greater changes in warfare than Clausewitz had seen in the history he had surveyed or experienced personally.

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It cannot be said that Clausewitz finished the job. It is reasonable to suspect that, had he lived to pursue the matter further, the concept of the dual nature of war would have continued to evolve. I say that with some trepidation, for it is also easy to suspect that many modern theorists would take that observation as a license to impose their own fantasies upon Clausewitz's still-rough analytical structure and treat the result as "the inevitable trend of Clausewitz's mature thinking." It is nonetheless legitimate to seek to clarify the limitations of Clausewitz's latest presentation and to expand upon it.

Clausewitz continued to emphasize, disproportionately I think, the necessity of keeping the higher-intensity form in mind at all times.

The fact that slaughter is a horrifying spectacle must make us take war more seriously, but not provide an excuse for gradually blunting our swords in the name of humanity. Sooner or later someone will come along with a sharp sword and hack off our arms.<sup>30</sup>

This attitude is understandable in the light of Europe's experience of the French Revolution and Napoleon, and it is edifying to see that Clausewitz retained the intellectual honesty to eventually accept the legitimacy of the limited approach. The danger he noted remains very real and deserves our constant awareness. But the converse is also true, and the temptation to view the strategy of military annihilation as the default, all-purpose solution is equally likely to seduce us away from a careful consideration of the possibilities in any actual future contingency.

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30 *On War*, p.260.