



CLAUSEWITZ'S  
*On War* –  
A Foundation for  
Strategic Thinking

Antulio J. Echevarria II  
October 2015

Note: Views expressed in this presentation are not representative of USG.

# Outline

- Brief Background:
  - Who was Clausewitz?
  - What is *On War*?
- War's Nature vs Strategy
  - Trinity vs Ends, Ways, Means
- Discussion

Who was Clausewitz?

# Soldier, Military Critic, Theorist

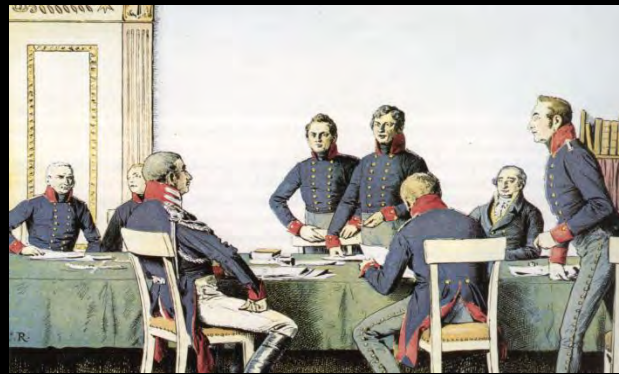
- Campaign in France: 1792-93
- Berlin General War School (War Academy)
- Jena Campaign: 1806; Captured by French
- Prussian Reform Movement: 1808-11
- Russian & German Campaigns: 1812-13
- Waterloo Campaign: 1815 (Wavre)
- Comdt, Berlin War Academy: 1816-1830
- Polish Insurrection: 1830-31



Victory 1815

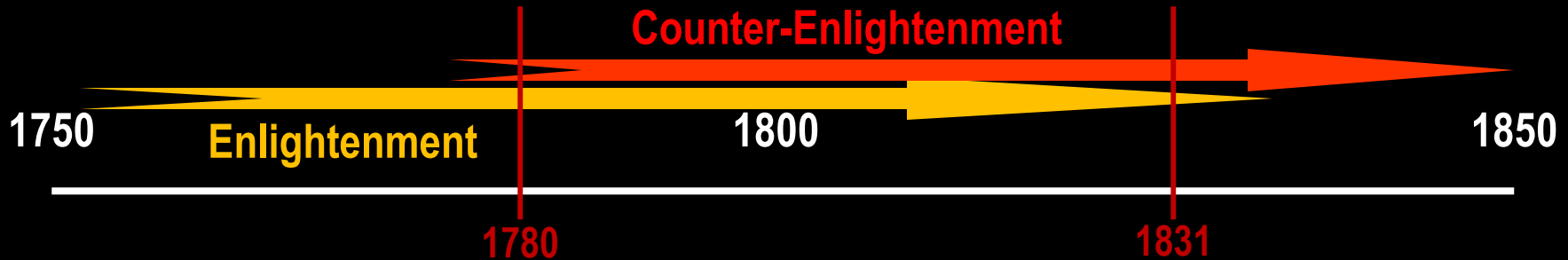


Defeat 1806-07



Reform 1808-11

# Intellectual Movements in Clausewitz's Time

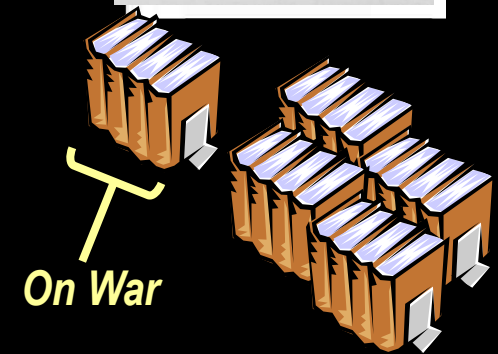
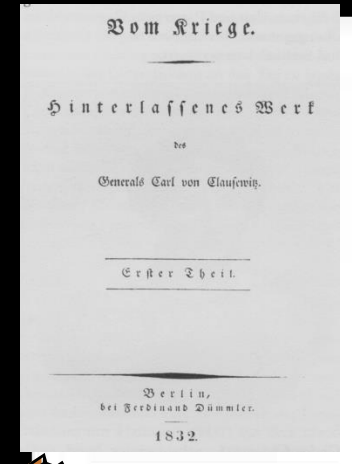


## The 18<sup>th</sup> Century's Search for Universal Laws:

- Adam Smith (1723-1790) *Wealth of Nations*
  - Law of 'Supply & Demand'
- David Ricardo (1772-1823) *Principles of Political Economy*
  - Iron Law of 'Labor & Wages'
- Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) *Principle of Population*
  - Law of 'Poverty' = Population vs Resources

# What is *On War*?

- *On War*: a search for “objective” (universal) knowledge of war.
- An organized corpus of knowledge; not a how-to book.
- A foundation for “subjective” (individual) knowledge of war.
- A “battle-centric” revolution in military theory: **hostility/violence** is core of war.



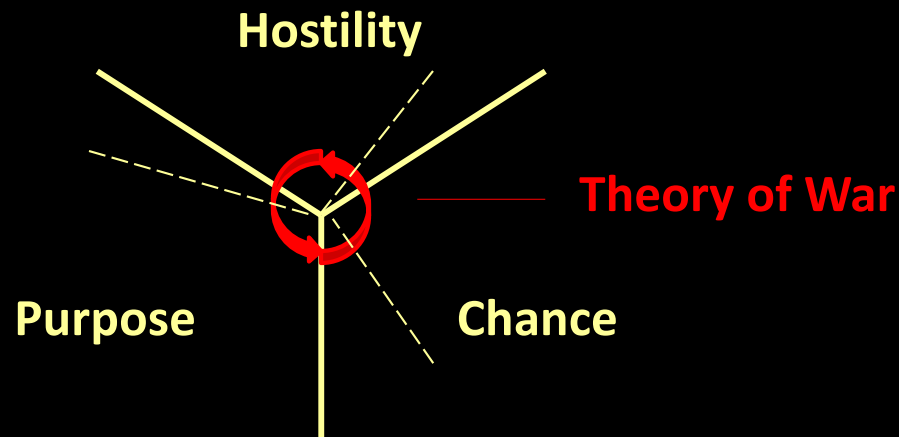
*On War* = 30% of Clausewitz's published works; 10% of his works overall.

# The (Wondrous) Trinity

What is “wondrous” in  
the Clausewitzian Trinity?

# The Clausewitzian Trinity

Objective Forces

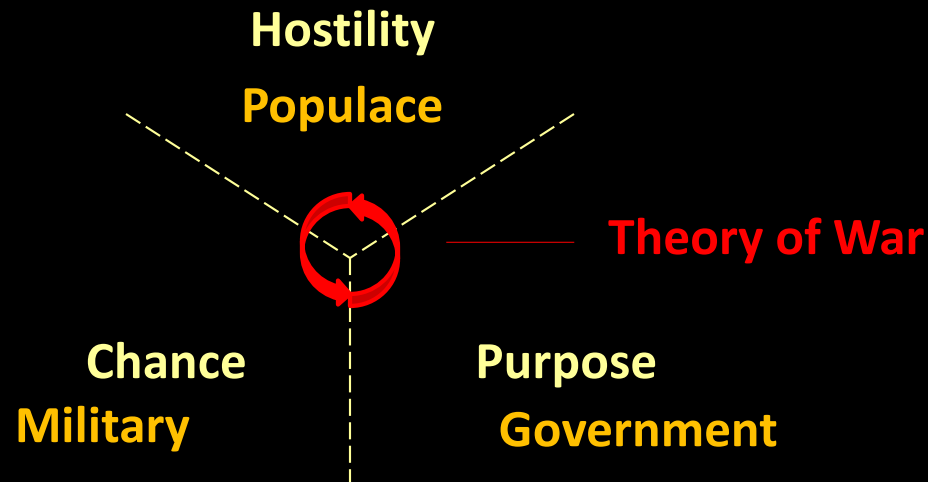


What does this construct mean?



# The Clausewitzian Trinity

Subjective Forces/Institutions

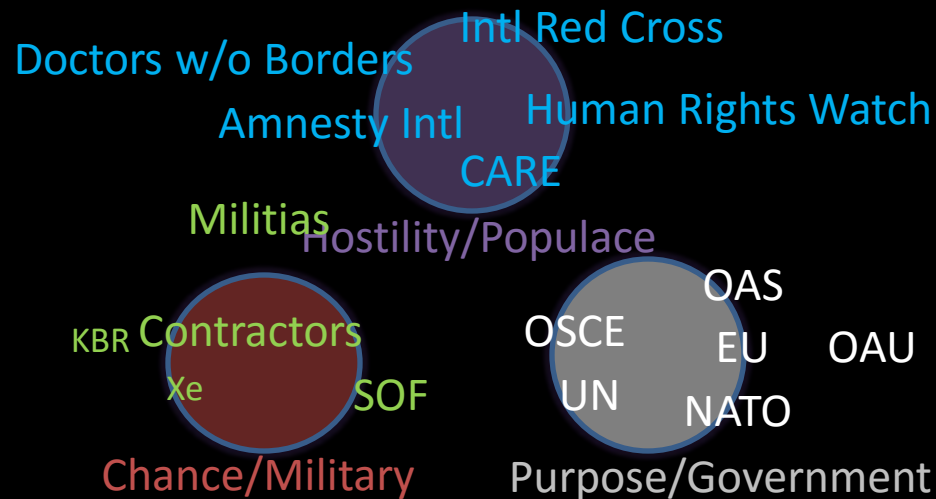


War's nature is dynamic and a composite of three forces.

# The Clausewitzian Trinity

- What does Clausewitz's Trinity represent?
- What is its purpose?
- What are its implications for a theory of war?
- Main forces at work in war; institutions that shape war's nature.
- Analytical framework explaining why "engineering" theories do not work.
- Theory must account for all war's forces.

# What is Different Today?



- More institutions (IGOs, NGOs, para-mil) have emerged within populace, military, & government; these influence today's wars.
- Speed of information flow has increased requiring better "stratcom."

# Trinity vs Strategy

- What are the Trinity's implications for our Ends, Ways, Means (+Risk) construct?



- What does “balance” mean and can it be achieved given war's dynamic nature?



- Is our model Clausewitzian or Jominian?
- Why does this model persist; would another one serve us better?

# Q & A

# War as an Instrument of Policy

What does this mean?

# War and Policy: Layered Meanings

*War is “use of violence to compel an opponent to do our will.”*

Is Policy Roosevelt or the Monroe Doctrine?



*Politik* = Policy and Politics

Policy = formal: “custodian of collective interests of the state” AND informal: ideology, culture, alliances, agreements, conventions, customs, spirit of the age.

Politics = struggle for power; or “the use of nonviolent means to compel an opponent to do our will.”

# Absolute vs Real War

Why is the difference  
important?



# Absolute vs Real War

- Absolute War: war “absolved” of moderating forces of physical reality... [policy, friction, chance].
  - Absolute War obeys the “logic of extremes” in violence, aim, and effort; no Real War does this.
- Real War: might approximate absolute war; but always remains inseparable from politics, and its unique logic.
  - No war escalates on its own; its escalation is a function of politics, which in turn is a function of “probability.” Why?
- Total War: War of maximum means (WWII).
- Limited War: War of minimal means (Indian Wars).

# Real War: A Closer Look

- Real War is defined in terms of three elements:
  1. “...an act of violence to compel our enemy to do our will.”
  2. “...a gamble...a matter of assessing probabilities.”
  3. “...a genuine political instrument, a continuation of political conflict, by other means.”
- Hence, the Clausewitzian Trinity.