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From Mars to Minerva: Clausewitz, Liddell Hart, and the Two Western Ways of War

by Tony Corn

A decade after 9/11, the new generation of U.S. officers continues to postpone - or altogether shun - assignments to the various war colleges in favor of a second, third, or fourth deployment in Iraq or Afghanistan. As Major-General Robert Scales, the former Commandant of the U.S. Army War College, put it in 2010,

Throughout the services officers are avoiding attendance in schools, and school lengths are being shortened. The Army's full-term staff college is now attended by fewer and fewer officers. The best and brightest are avoiding the war colleges in favor of service in Iraq and Afghanistan. The average age of war college students has increased from 41 to 45, making this institution a preparation for retirement rather than a launching platform for strategic leadership... Sadly, atrophy has gripped the school house, and what was once the shining light of progressivism has become an intellectual backwater, lagging far behind the corporate and civilian institutions of higher learning.¹

The intellectual stagnation of U.S. war colleges, and the resulting gap between insular education and imperial mission, has been a recurring cause for concern ever since the end of the Cold War.² Though General Scales himself argued as early as 2004 in favor of a shift from a techno-centric to a culture-centric approach to war, U.S. war colleges have yet to experience their “cultural turn.”³ Between the Pentagon’s defense civilians (OSD) and the uniformed military (JCS), there seems to be, if not a full-fledged “civil-military gap,” at least some sort of “cognitive dissonance” on the question of professional military education. In a nutshell:

- Since the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, the majority of the military challenges (security cooperation, counterterrorism, information operations, counterinsurgency, coercive diplomacy, cyber-warfare...) identified by Pentagon civilians falls squarely under the generic term of “Indirect Approach” associated with the name of British strategist Basil Liddell Hart.⁴ Yet, it is the “Direct Approach” of Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz which continues to reign supreme in war colleges.

1 General Robert H. Scales, “Too Busy to Learn,” Naval Proceedings, February 2010, www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2010-02/too-busy-learn, and “Too Busy to Learn,” Military.com, January 23, 2006, www.military.com/opinion/0,15202,86149,00.html.

2 Beginning with Martin Van Creveld’s controversial *The Training of Officers: From Military Professionalism to Irrelevance*, The Free Press, 1990.

3 General Robert H. Scales, “Culture-Centric Warfare,” Naval Proceedings, October 2004, www.military.com/Content/MoreContent1?file=NI_1004_Culture-P1

4 Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, 2006. See also Shawn Brimley and Vikram Singh, “Stumbling into the Future? The Indirect Approach and American Strategy,” *Orbis*, Spring 2008.

Unsurprisingly, field grade officers don't relish the prospect of sitting through interminable theological debates on the "true meaning" of the Clausewitzian Trinity, the subtle differences between "absolute war" and "total war," or whether the undated note in *On War* is anterior or posterior to 1827. And who could blame them? After all, in the age of "population-centric" counterinsurgency warfare, the relevance of an "enemy-centric" theory of war is not immediately apparent.

- Since the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review as well, the Pentagon's adoption of concepts like "hybrid wars" and "persistent conflicts" constitutes an endorsement in all but in name of the view, put forward by Samuel Huntington in the aftermath of 9/11, that ours is the Age of Muslim Wars.⁵ Yet, though the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East seems to have vindicated that view, U.S. war colleges appear less interested in examining the various "Muslim Ways of War" than in celebrating an allegedly timeless "Western Way of War" (one so selective as to exclude the study of past encounters between the West and Islam).

Unsurprisingly, today's midlevel officers do not relish the prospect of sitting through endless lectures on the fine theological distinction between Western "military revolutions" and Western "revolutions in military affairs," and prefer to turn to virtual campuses like *Small Wars Journal* to discuss trans-cultural warfare.

While attending a War College remains an invaluable experience for interagency civilians (if only to get a sense of the proverbial "military mind"), it is not clear that the same experience is as useful to military officers as it could be. As Thucydides warned in his own day, "the society that separates its scholars from its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools." The danger is that today's generation of officers will repeat the same mistake as the Westmoreland generation who, having risen through the ranks in the course of WWII, never saw afterward the need for a formal military education. The result, this time around, could be much worse than Vietnam.

Though U.S. officers have become quite good at mastering "the graduate level of war" (counterinsurgency) with little input from the war colleges, the truth is that the New Counterinsurgency Era is – or soon will be - over. As both Defense Secretary Gates and JCS Chairman Mullen have made it clear, America is unlikely to commit itself to another economically ruinous "armed nation-building" campaign in the foreseeable future.⁶

⁵ "Contemporary global politics is the age of Muslim wars. Muslims fight each other and they fight non-Muslims far more often than do people of other civilizations. Muslim wars have replaced the Cold War as the principal form of international conflict. These wars include wars of terrorism, guerrilla wars, civil wars and interstate conflicts. These instances of Muslim violence could congeal into one major clash of civilizations between Islam and the West or between Islam and the Rest. That, however, is not inevitable, and it is more likely that violence involving Muslims will remain dispersed, varied and frequent." Samuel P. Huntington, "The Age of Muslim Wars," Newsweek, December 17, 2001, www.hvk.org/articles/1003/48.html (emphasis added).

⁶ As even David H. Ucko, the author of *The New Counterinsurgency Era: Transforming the U.S. Military for Modern Wars* (Georgetown UP, 2009), recently conceded: "NATO forces will undoubtedly retain a presence in Afghanistan for years to come, as will US forces in Iraq, but there is no great enthusiasm anymore for the concept of counterinsurgency – among governments and their militaries – or hope that its associated theory may help either in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Perceived as necessary and innovative only a few years ago, the concept has fallen out of grace and is now in danger of being flushed out before even taking root" *Counterinsurgency and Its Discontents: Assessing the Value of a Divisive Concept*, SWP-Berlin, 2011, p.6 http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2011_RP06_uck_ks.pdf. See also Tony Corn, "COIN in Absurdistan: Saving the COIN Baby from the Afghan Bathwater and Vice-Versa," *Small Wars Journal*, July 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/479-corn.pdf>

Meanwhile, the new unconventional challenges captured under the generic term of Unrestricted Warfare⁷ represent a “postgraduate level of war” which can only be mastered in the classroom, preferably through a, well – *unconventional* education. In his recent book on *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order*, former Ambassador Charles Hill, one of the founders of the Grand Strategy seminar at Yale University, has shown the value of unconventional approaches to the study of statecraft and strategy. In the same spirit, the following *reveries* attempt to make the case for a shift in the center of gravity of professional military education from Mars to Minerva in general, and from Clausewitz to Liddell Hart in particular.

In Search of a Useable Past

“History,” Hegel once remarked, “teaches us that History teaches us nothing.” Needless to say, there are very few Hegelians in the military world: more than any other profession, the profession of arms continues to show an unflinching faith in the idea that History ought to provide “lessons.” Yet, no profession seems to draw the wrong “lessons” so consistently as the military profession.

The lack of distantiation on the part of traditional military historians is partly to blame. As Mark Grimsley candidly remarks: “We borrow most of our categories, concepts, definitions, and questions from the armed forces. We think the way they think, ask the questions they ask, overlook the questions they overlook.” The so-called “new military historians” are not without flaws either: too many practitioners of the genre seem content with cultivating the kind of policy irrelevance common to academe at large, or with viewing military history as the continuation of political activism by other means.

In turn, the military institution itself has its own blind spots when it comes to its multiple - and sometimes mutually exclusive - “uses of history.”⁸ To begin with, from an institutional standpoint, the temptation is simply too great to treat military *education* in general as the continuation of *indoctrination* by other means. Thus, in the wake of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, “Jointness” became something of a religion within the U.S. military. The idea that the best way to transcend service parochialism was to posit the existence of a “unified theory of war” was a major consideration in the promotion of Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War* (1832) as a cross between inter-service Holy Scripture and conceptual Swiss Army knife.

It was not long before U.S. military planners began to develop the same blind spots as their Clausewitzian teachers: they borrowed most of their categories, concepts, and definitions from them, and asked and overlooked the same questions as them. Clausewitz dismisses the importance of intelligence/information? The U.S. military – including the proponents of network-centric warfare - only cares about tactical intelligence. There is no chapter on Stabilization & Reconstruction in *On War*? There was no planning for Stabilization & Reconstruction in Iraq. Clausewitz’s treatise is as long on Combat as it is short on Strategy? The Tommy Franks generation of flag officers combines tactical virtuosity with strategic illiteracy.

7 Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, Beijing, 1999, <http://cryptome.org/cuw.htm>

8 On the multiple uses of history, see David A. Charters, ed., *Military History and the Military Profession*, Praeger, 1992.

Over time as well (and whether consciously or not), the idea crept in that the curriculum of war colleges should be designed in such a way as to show that the Clausewitzian Way of War, the American Way of War, and the Western Way of War, were fundamentally one and the same.⁹ One of the most noticeable results was that, in the Strategy & Policy seminar which, in one form or another, constitutes the center of gravity of U.S. war colleges, the military student was led *sans transition* from the Peloponnesian Wars (431-404 BC) to the American War of Independence and the French Revolutionary Wars. There was apparently no “lessons” to be learned from 2,000 out 2,500 years of the Western military history.

The first problem with the idea of a “Western Way of War” is of course that, while its proponents claim to trace its roots in Antiquity, the Greeks and Romans themselves were so little convinced of the existence of *one* Western Way of War that they had *two* gods/goddesses for War: Ares and Athena for the former, Mars and Minerva for the latter.

Beginning with Homer, the dual nature of war (combat and strategy) was already illustrated through the opposition between Achilles (from Mars) and Odysseus (from Minerva). Throughout the centuries, the Mars/Minerva duality will be variously interpreted as a distinction between force and cunning, between a direct approach (destruction) and a *variety* of indirect approaches (deception, distraction, disruption, dislocation, subversion, paralysis), but also as a hierarchical distinction: the foot-soldier is from Mars, the General (*strategos*) is from Minerva. By the time of Machiavelli, the Mars/Minerva duality finds its illustration at the political level as well in the form of “the Lion and the Fox.”

Beginning with Richelieu, the idea that war ought to be “the continuation of politics” becomes part of the conventional wisdom and, during the first 150 years or so of the Westphalian era, the trend in Europe is a gradual move away from Mars and toward Minerva. Once and for all: there is nothing specifically “Clausewitzian” in the so-called Clausewitzian Dictum per se (in fact, while Clausewitz himself sporadically talked the talk, he never really walked the walk, and only saw the light very late in the game). What is specific to Clausewitz is the *reification* of what, in retrospect, was only a temporary reversion from Minerva to Mars: the Napoleonic era (three-fourths of *On War* is about Combat, while only one fourth at best is about Strategy).

With the advent of both nationalism and the industrial revolution, Mars will make another temporary come-back during the so-called “Second Thirty Years War” (1914-1945). With the advent of the nuclear era, though, as Basil Liddell Hart was the first to point out in 1954, the pendulum will swing again from Mars back to Minerva. Bottom line: In the past 2,500 hundred years, in one form or another, the Western tradition has always recognized the dual nature of war. In that respect, the recent idea that there is one Western Way of War marks an intellectual regression.

“Trans-Cultural Wars” and “Non-Trinitarian Wars”

The concept of a Western Way of War, which surfaced only in 1989, appears to have been developed both as an attempt to rescue the concept of “Western Civilization” (under siege in the post-1968 academic world at large) and as a way to re-assert the alleged centrality of the

⁹ Within the limits of this essay, I cannot discuss the rise and fall of the “American Way of War,” a concept introduced by Russell Weigley in 1973 and deconstructed by Brian Lynn in 2002 in “The American Way of War Revisited,” *The Journal of Military History*, 66, 2, April 2002 <http://frank.mtsu.edu/~dffrisby/linnwayofwar.pdf>

Clausewitzian paradigm – a centrality increasingly contested in the post-Cold War era by authors as diverse as Martin Van Creveld, John Keegan, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, Mats Berdal, Mary Kaldor, David Keen, or Paul Collier.¹⁰

In its mainstream version, the Western Way of War is said to rest on five pillars: a systematic exploitation of technology to compensate for numerical inferiority, the importance of discipline and drill, a preference for pitched battles, continuous innovation due to the existence of a competitive state-system, and development of mechanisms for the state financing of war. While other civilizations shared some of these features, Geoffrey Parker argues, it is the synergy between these five pillars that explains Western military supremacy in history.¹¹ Upon closer examination, though, it is hard not to notice that the only time when these five elements were present simultaneously was during the three hundred years of the Euro-centric Westphalian era (1648-1945) or, at most, during the five hundred years of what strategist Paul Bracken has called the “Vasco de Gama era.”(1497-1997).

Ironically enough, the Western Way of War thesis emerged precisely at the end of the Vasco de Gama era, during the so-called Second Nuclear Age, i.e. at a time when nuclear proliferation in the non-Western world (Pakistan, India, North Korea, Iran) signaled the beginning of the end of the five-centuries long technological superiority of the West in military affairs.¹²

If the early 21st century is any indication, it would appear that the non-Western world is quickly mastering the five features constitutive of the alleged Western Way, while the Western world itself is gradually losing its edge on at least three of the five fronts: technological superiority, innovative strategic thinking, and especially financing mechanisms (as then-candidate Barack Obama summed it up in 2008: “I’m tired of seeing America borrow money from China to give to Saudi Arabia”). If there ever was one dominant Western Way of War (which in turn guaranteed the global dominance of the West), it is simply no longer the case.

Not only does the concept of Western Way of War have little heuristic value today, but its adoption is also the surest way to fall into the trap of “military orientalism,” i.e. the temptation to reify a timeless Eastern Way of War.¹³ Interestingly enough, at the very moment when military historian John Keegan was making the case that “evasion, delay, and indirectness” constitutes the essence of an Eastern Way of War, political scientist Alastair Johnston was making the case that China itself has in fact two ways of war: the “indirect approach” associated

¹⁰ Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, Free Press, 1991; John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, Vintage, 1994; John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *In Athena’s Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*, RAND, 1997; David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*, Routledge, 1998; Mary Kaldor, *New Wars and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Stanford University Press, 1999; Mats Berdal, *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, Lynne Rienner, 2000; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 2004.

¹¹ Geoffrey Parker, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

¹² Paul Bracken, *Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age*, HarperCollins, 1999.

¹³ For two complementary re-statements of the Clausewitz/Sun-Tzu opposition, see Francois Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*, University of Hawai Press, 2004, and David Lai, *Learning from the Stones: A Go Approach to Mastering Chin’s Strategic Concept*, Shi, Strategic Studies Institute, 2004, www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub378.pdf. For a critique of military orientalism, see Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War through Western Eyes*, Columbia University Press, 2009.

with Sun-Tzu, but also a direct “parabellum” approach not essentially different from the so-called Western Way.¹⁴

In reaction perhaps to the reductionism of the one Western-Way-of-War approach, the theme chosen by the Society for Military History for its 2011 annual meeting is a pluralistic “Ways of War.” But Western military historians still have the hardest time getting out of their intellectual comfort zone and writing on non-Western history. Out of the 64 sessions of the SMH, only three deal with non-Western topics, while the rest deals with topics ranging from the English and Spanish ways of war in early modern Europe to the American, British, German, and Italian ways of war in WWII. It is not clear – to this writer at least - that de-multiplying the “way of war” *problematique* from the civilizational to the national level is the right answer – or the most useful one.

For one thing, the very concept of Way of War needs to be more rigorously defined in relation to both that of Strategic Culture and that of Grand Strategy.¹⁵ For another, in this day and age, the most useful “lessons” are more likely to be found in “trans-cultural wars” rather than in any particular “national” way. In view of the challenges confronting Western militaries today – be it in the form of Islamist “hybrid wars” or Chinese “unrestricted warfare” -, a trans-cultural approach would appear to be in order. In addition, in view of the fact “coalition warfare” has now become the norm for the West, a special attention should be given to the importance of cultural “fog and friction” *within* Western-led, multi-cultural coalitions.¹⁶

At the very least, the curriculum of war colleges should systematically emphasize what could be called “the Eastern strand in the Western tradition.” That, in turn, would require a shift away from the narrowly “utilitarian” military history toward what could be called a “historical anthropology” (in the sense of the *Annales* school) of war.

In the past two hundred years, David Kilcullen recently remarked, so-called “irregular warfare” has been a more *regular* occurrence than conventional warfare. To which one could add: in the past twenty-five hundred years of Western military history, there were at least a thousand years during which war about many things - except “the continuation of politics by other means.”

As a *prescriptive* statement, obviously, the Clausewitzian Dictum remains a valuable warning, especially in an American context where policy-makers and public opinion alike are too readily inclined to think of war as the *suspension* of politics.

But as a *descriptive* statement, the Clausewitzian Dictum is as comically restrictive a pronouncement as “sex is the continuation of love by other means.” Not totally false, of course, but this definition leaves out just too many fundamental “facts of life,” be it the fact that prostitution is the oldest profession, or that the business of sex today is a multi-billion dollar industry. In both cases: what’s love got to do with it? Similarly: what’s politics got to do with war during the Middle Ages? Not that much indeed.

14 Alastair Ian Johnson, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Ming China*, Princeton University Press, 1995.

15 See for instance Lawrence Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War*, Routledge, 2006.

16 Hans-Henning Kortum, ed., *Transcultural Wars from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, Akademie Verlag, 2006. Gal Luft, Beer, Bacon, and Bullets: *Culture in Coalition Warfare from Gallipoli to Iraq*, BookSurge, 2009.

The distinctive feature of medieval warfare is not so much the political calculations of state actors as the religious and economic motivations of non-state actors, ranging from Crusaders to Condottieri.

For today's irregular challenges, medieval warfare may not provide "lessons," but it does offer "insights," in that the *modus operandi* of Somali pirates, Mexican narco-trafficants, or Saudi Jihadists, has a lot in common with that of medieval "Barbarians, Marauders, and Infidels." Similarly, the study of Early Modern Condottieri and other "military entrepreneurs" can shed some light on post-modern phenomena like the rise of Neo-Warlordism in the East – or the rise of the Corporate Warrior in the West.

Rather than leave the Medieval world out of the curriculum on account that it does not fit in the Strategy & Policy straight-jacket, it would make more sense to get rid of the straight-jacket itself, and take a closer look at those pre-modern wars which, as Martin Van Creveld pointed out twenty years ago, offer more similarities with post-modern "non-trinitarian wars" than any modern-era conflict. While the "Neo-medieval" paradigm in use in the field of International Relations today is far from perfect, it still provides greater intelligibility than the Clausewitzian paradigm.¹⁷

Should there even be a Strategy & Policy seminar to begin with? The Strategy & Policy construct seems to be both too much and too little. Too much, in the sense that, even within the Western tradition, warfare for at least a thousand years (the Middle Ages) was as much about God & Gold as about Strategy & Policy. Too little, because the translation of the Clausewitzian Dictum as "War as the continuation of Policy" (instead of the original *Politik*) gives the misleading impression that "Policy" is something immaculately conceived outside of any domestic political considerations. Where does that fallacy come from anyway?

What They Don't Teach You in War Colleges

There is still no equivalent for War Colleges of the popular guides on the topic "What They Don't Teach You in Business/Law Schools." Yet, a basic user's manual would appear to be in order if only because war colleges, unlike business and law schools, are government-run institutions, primarily intended for military officers (though increasingly attended by interagency civilians), and that certain topics are simply "off-limit."

The idea that military professionalism is synonymous with apoliticism is a central tenet of the theory of civil-military relations elaborated by Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* in 1957, and adopted by all Western militaries ever since. By the time the new American translation of Clausewitz appeared (1976), the idea that officers should stay out of "Politics" in every way, shape, or form, had become conventional wisdom. Hence the decision to translate the Clausewitzian Dictum as war as a continuation of "policy" instead of "*Politik*."

¹⁷Antonio Santosuosso, *Barbarians, Marauders, And Infidels: The Ways Of Medieval Warfare*, Basic Books, 2004; P.W. Singer, "The Ultimate Military Entrepreneur," *Military History Quarterly*, Spring 2003, www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/articles/2003/spring_defense_singer/singer20030301.pdf. Kimberly Zisk Marten, "Warlordism in Comparative Perspective," *International Security*, 31, 3, Winter 2006/7; P.W. Singer, *Corporate Warrior: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, Cornell University Press, 2003. On the "neo-medieval paradigm," see Philip G. Cerny, "Neomedievalism, civil war and the new security dilemma: Globalisation as durable disorder," *Civil Wars*, Volume 1, Issue 1, 1998, and "Terrorism and the New Security Dilemma," *Naval War College Review*, Winter 2005, <http://public.gettysburg.edu/~dborock/courses/Spring/p344/ps344read/cerny%20terrorism%20and%20security.pdf>

Future historians will no doubt point out that this decision coincided, ironically enough, with the emergence of a new phenomenon in American politics: the rise of the “Permanent Campaign.”¹⁸ In a nutshell: since roughly the 1976 election, “governing” has increasingly become the continuation of “campaigning” by other means, and *political* consultants have increasingly usurped the *policy* role formerly played by diplomatic and military professionals.

Today, at the George Washington University’s School of Political Management (“the West Point of Political Wars”), future “ballot-box warriors” study dispassionately the importance of the “rally-round-the-flag effect” in public opinion.¹⁹ At National Defense University only a few blocks away, by contrast, the one thing you’ll never hear mentioned is the “diversionary theory of war.” At NDU, the “wondrous trinity” of Clausewitz is the object of intense theological debates. At GWU, the focus is on a more mundane, if equally “wondrous,” trinity: the proverbial Iron Triangle between defense contractors, Congress and the Pentagon. Two different worlds, then.

And that’s how it should be – but to a point only. “Political neutrality” does not have to be synonymous with “political illiteracy.” While it would be unrealistic to expect war colleges to offer an elective on, say, “The Long War as the Continuation of the Permanent Campaign,” there ought to be room for a grown-up approach to *Politik* in the context of professional military education. After all, ours is the age of the Soldier-Diplomat, and officers serving in the regional Joint Interagency Task Forces (JITFs) created since 9/11 cannot be expected to accomplish their mission with only a boy-scout understanding of *Politik*. In that respect, political topics that are deemed too sensitive to be approached in the context of the National Security Decision-Making seminar could nonetheless be discussed through the “indirect approach” (i.e. historically) in the framework of the Strategy & Policy seminar.

Which leads us to – ancient Rome. As it now stands, the Strategy & Policy seminar spends an awful lot of time on ancient Greece, and no time at all on ancient Rome. There are two reasons for this unbalance. On the one hand, if there is only one timeless “great book” on the subject of Strategy and *Politik*, Thucydides-is-it. *The Peloponnesian War* is seen by many academics as the foundational text of the academic discipline of International Relations, and by the same token of the sub-discipline of strategic studies. On the other hand, in the context of a Cold War between the Free World and the Communist Bloc, the story of the struggle between democratic Athens and autocratic Sparta could not but resonate with Western audiences. Thucydides was that rare bird who managed to combine realist politics with inspirational history.

But the view of Thucydides as a timeless “realist” has been increasingly contested since the end of the Cold War; and in a post-Cold War environment, the Athens/Sparta narrative has lost much of its resonance anyway.²⁰ In a country like America that seems to have irreversibly crossed the Rubicon that separates Republic from Empire, the most policy-relevant “lessons of history” for today are more likely to be found in the Roman era.

¹⁸ Karlyn Bowman, ed. *The Permanent Campaign and its Future*, AEI Press, 2000.

¹⁹ Robert V. Friedenberg, *Communication Consultants in Political Campaigns: Ballot Box Warriors*, Praeger, 1997.

²⁰ See for instance Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, “The Use and Abuse of Thucydides in International Relations,” *International Organization*, 48,1, Winter 1994; Richard Ned Lebow, “Thucydides the Constructivist,” *The American Political Science Review*, 95, 3, September 2001. Robert Kaplan recently argued that Herodotus’ *History of the trans-cultural Greek-Persian wars* could conceivably be more useful today than Thucydides. Robert D. Kaplan, “A Historian for Our Time,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, January/February 2007, http://lablog.typepad.com/a_historian_for_our_time.pdf.

The end of the Cold War seems to have been the equivalent, for America, to the end of the Third Punic Wars for Rome, and the question “Are we Rome?” is today raised in the most unexpected quarters. When even the U.S. Comptroller General takes the unusual step of warning ruling elites of the risk of ignoring the “lessons from the Fall of Rome,” it might be time for war colleges to include Rome in the curriculum.²¹ Too politically sensitive? Not really. Even though the American Empire *is* in decline, and even though the Barbarians *are* at the gate, we are still somewhat closer to 31 BC than to 476 AD.

Byzantium is as conspicuously absent as Rome from the curriculum of war colleges. In the past twenty years, even as they were busy demolishing the “Western Civ” master narrative, academic historians have increasingly come to acknowledge the debt owed to the Eastern Roman empire by the West in just about every field, from culture to diplomacy. By contrast, military historians have continued to ignore Byzantium’s military legacy even as they were elaborating their “Western Way of War” construct.²²

Yet, if the two pillars of “the West” are the Judeo-Christian and the Greco-Roman legacies, there is no reason a priori *not* to consider Byzantium a full-member of the Western family, and the Byzantine Way of War as an integral part of the Western Way of War. While the Roman way was from Mars, the Byzantine way was from Minerva. And for about a thousand years, it is the Byzantine “indirect approach” (not an alleged Western “civic militarism”) that kept Muslim armies at bay and prevented Islam from over-running Western Europe.

In his recent study of the grand strategy of the Byzantine empire, military strategist Edward Luttwak argues, not without reason, that America today could learn a thing or two from an empire which, after all, managed to survive a thousand years longer than the Western Roman empire.²³ To which one may add that, given its record of military encounters with Mongols, Persians, Arabs and Turks, the added-value of studying Byzantium would be to learn the various Muslim Ways of War and, by the same token, to avoid the ever-present risk of Military Orientalism.

The Lost Meaning of Grand Strategy

In a seminal article on “the lost meaning of strategy” published in 2005, Oxford historian Hew Strachan attempted to retrace the metamorphosis of the classical concept of “strategy” (as it emerged in the age of Jomini and Clausewitz) into the modern concept of “grand strategy” (popularized after 1918 by Fuller and Liddell Hart). As Strachan pointed out, the main consequence of the emergence of a concept that both transcended the temporal wartime/peacetime distinction and extended spatially beyond the military sphere proper to include what we now call the DIME spectrum (diplomacy, information, economy, military) was that the military institution began to lose its monopoly on the strategic discourse.

²¹ See Cullen Murphy, *Are We Rome? The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America*, Houghton Mifflin, 2007. Jeremy Grant, “Learn from the Fall of Rome, US Warns,” *Financial Times*, August 17, 2007, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/80fa0a2c-49ef-11dc-9ffe-0000779fd2ac.html#axzz1LMYBlj6O>); Eliot A. Cohen, “History and the Hyperpower,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2004, http://www.aei.org/docLib/20040907_HistoryandtheHyperpower.pdf

²² As Hew Strachan pointed out in his critique of Victor Davis Hanson in “A general typology of transcultural wars,” in Hans-Henning Kortum, *Transcultural Wars from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, Akademie Verlag, 2006.

²³ Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2009. For a summary, see Edward Luttwak, “Take me back to Constantinople,” *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2009.

This “hijacking” of strategic authority by the civilian world accelerated in the nuclear era, with the rise of strategists like Brodie and Schelling, and lasted until the end of the Vietnam War. Afterwards, Strachan points out, the strategy adopted by the “Anglo-American military” in order to regain control of the strategic discourse was to deify Clausewitz and conflate the concept of “strategy” with the then-fashionable concept of “operational art.”²⁴ One of the most pernicious consequences was that, since Clausewitz cared mostly about operational strategy in the context of land warfare, both “grand strategy” and “seapower” became the object of benign neglect in war colleges.

As a result, Mahan is not presented as the godfather of the concept of Grand Strategy, but reduced to the status of High Priest of Navalism, and the Mahanian Trinity (trade, shipping, colonies) only get a fraction of the attention devoted to the nebulous Clausewitzian Trinity.²⁵ Fuller, for his part, is presented only as a theorist of tank warfare and no mention is made of his writings on “The Meaning of Grand Strategy” (1923). Corbett himself, the most obvious forerunner of Liddell Hart, is reduced to both an opponent to Mahan on naval affairs, and an epigone of Clausewitz whose only memorable pronouncement would be: “Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided – except in the rarest cases – either by what your army can do against your enemy’s territory and national life, or else by fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do.”²⁶

The not-too-subtle message? Maritime strategy has no autonomy, it is subordinate to land warfare, and therefore worthy of study only in the context of combined operations. The truth is, while *naval* strategy proper may be subordinate to land strategy, land strategy in turn is subordinate to Grand Strategy - and Grand Strategy historically has been indissociable from *maritime* strategy broadly understood.

A hundred years after the publication of *On War*, Liddell Hart took the best of Mahan, Fuller and Corbett, and came up with a novel way of articulating Seapower, Indirect Approach, and Grand Strategy: the “British Way of Warfare.” The fact that this British Way had become highly problematic as a policy prescription in the 1930s should not distract from its historical reality as a policy description. What International Relations theorists have since formalized under the name of “Offshore Balancing” is nothing more than the continuation of the “British Way” by other means.²⁷

In 1911, it made all the sense in the world for a Corbett to assert that “men live upon the land and not upon the sea.” In 2011, Corbett’s assertion is no longer that obvious, for the Rimland in the meantime has experienced a twofold “sea change.” On the one hand, the overwhelming majority of the world population now lives within 200 miles from the coast. On

²⁴ Hew Strachan, “The Lost Meaning of Strategy,” *Survival*, 47, 3, Autumn 2005. The view of the U.S. military institution is best represented in J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., ed., *The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, Vol. I: Theory of War and Strategy,

www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1004, and Vol. II: National Security Policy and Strategy, 4th edition, July 2010, www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/Pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1005

²⁵ Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

²⁶ Julian Corbett, *Principles of Maritime Strategy*, Dover Publications, 2004 [1911], p.14.

²⁷ Basil Liddell Hart, *The British Way in Warfare* [1932], revised edition, Penguin Books, 1942; David French, *The British Way in Warfare, 1688-2000*, Unwin Hyman, 1990; Christopher Layne, “Offshore Balancing Revisited,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2002. <http://www.twq.com/02spring/layne.pdf>.

the other hand, since the entry into force of the Law of the Seas in 1994, we are witnessing a phenomenon known as the “territorialization of the seas,” whereby an increasing number of countries are trying to extend their 200 mile wide Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) in the Mediterranean, the Arctic, the Atlantic, and the Pacific.

Why this scramble for the oceans? In no small part because, as the example of Brazil indicates, the discovery of offshore oil can turn a country into an energy superpower almost overnight. And so it is that even a country like France which, thanks to its South Pacific possessions, already possesses the second largest EEZ in the world, has filed claims at the UN for an additional area three times the size of Germany. While men may not quite “live upon the sea,” today they certainly live upon a 400 mile-wide amphibious Rimland.

The Era of Clausewitzology (1976-2006) was indissociably linked with the concept of AirLand Battle and the continental threat from Russia. Today, at the operational level, the main challenge is not to win decisive battles on land, but to defeat China’s anti access/area denial strategy at sea – an altogether different ballgame. At the level of grand strategy as well, the Chinese themselves have long traded Clausewitz for Mahan and Liddell Hart, and opted for an “indirect approach” in which sea power is one of the three pillars (along with space power and soft power).

To remain policy-relevant, war colleges must do a better job re-evaluating the importance of “grand strategy” and of raising “maritime domain awareness.”²⁸ One way of doing so, within the context of a Strategy & Policy seminar, would be to stress that, during the Westphalian era, the distinction between Mars and Minerva was best illustrated by the opposition between a Continental, and a Maritime, Way of War, and that – oh yes – the maritime approach of the Anglo-Saxons prevailed against the continental approach of both Napoleon and Hitler.

The “Clausewitz Puzzle” Revisited

Like Lloyd, Guibert and even Jomini before him, young Clausewitz, encouraged by his mentor Scharnhorst, initially dreamed of writing on the subject of War the kind of broad “philosophical anthropology” that Montesquieu had written on the subject of Law. *The Spirit of Laws* being essentially a treatise on the variety of “legal cultures” in space and time, *On War* should logically have been a treatise on the variety of “strategic cultures.”

Yet, in the ten volumes of Clausewitz’s complete works, the study of military history is limited to intra-European wars over two centuries (1618-1815). In *On War* itself, three-quarters of historical references concern an even more limited timeframe (1740-1815). In addition, the focus of *On War* is the intersection, not of Policy and Strategy, but of Strategy and Tactics – i.e. the operational level of war. Last but not least, unlike his contemporary Jomini, Clausewitz limits the Art of War (Kriegskunst) to the conduct of war (Kriegsführung) and relegates Logistics to the realm of peacetime administration.

Why did the older Clausewitz end up limiting his investigations to two centuries of intra-European warfare? Why did it take him a full decade to realize that, in the *longue duree* of military history, Napoleonic wars were not the norm but the exception? Why is it that his theory of war ends up being much narrower in scope than that of his contemporary Jomini? And why

²⁸ For more, see Tony Corn, “The Revolution in Transatlantic Affairs: Perils and Promises of a Global NATO,” Policy Review, August 2007, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/6032>

does a work that was initially meant to be an “anthropology” of war end up resembling a “theology” of war (Raymond Aron) instead?

In order to find the answers to all these questions, it is necessary to scratch Clausewitz the Icon and recover Clausewitz the Man.

In war colleges today, Clausewitz is presented as the quintessential model soldier who, had he had the good fortune to live in meritocratic 20th Century America rather than in aristocratic 19th Century Prussia, could have become the General Marshall of his time. Nothing could be further from the truth, and the pre-1976 specialists of Clausewitz (Rothfels, Hahlweg, Brodie) knew better.

As Bernard Brodie pointed out in a seminal article published in 1973, the theorist of ‘enemy-centric’ warfare was *his own worst enemy*. In addition to being temperamentally unsuited for command, Clausewitz had no social graces, no political savvy, and spent most of his life cultivating the fine art of shooting oneself in the foot.

Thus, in his famous 1812 manifesto, the thirty-two-year old *Major* von Clausewitz blasts King and Court alike, and undertakes to demonstrate his superior grasp of Prussia’s national interest. Coming from a midlevel active-duty officer who, on top of it, happens to be the tutor of the Crown Prince, the tone and content of the manifesto are simply appalling. The pamphlet will circulate informally, but widely, within government circles, but it is so over-the-top that it won’t be published until 1869 (to get a sense of the enormity of what Major von Clausewitz does, try to imagine then-Major Smedley Butler, some time in 1916, writing his *War is a Racket* pamphlet - while serving as a junior military aide at the White House).

Not only does Clausewitz show no political judgment in refusing to consider the political implications of arming the people, but he shows no strategic judgment in his condemnation of the King’s strategy – a strategy best characterized as Liddell Hartian, since it amounted to “helping” Napoleon get sucked into a Russian quagmire.²⁹ Clausewitz is not the only Prussian officer who will temporarily “defect” to the Russian side, but here again, he takes leaves in such an appalling way that he is the only one whom the Prussian King will never really forgive.

As earlier commentators knew full well, Clausewitz is a tragic figure for whom one cannot help but have compassion. His story is that of a man who lives at a time when there are both a revolution in philosophical affairs and a revolution in military affairs; who has a first-rate philosophical mind, but a third-rate philosophical education; and who yearns so much for military glory that he cannot reconcile himself (even at age fifty!) with the fact that he has no natural talent for command. During the decade between Austerlitz and Waterloo, Clausewitz has

²⁹ As Brodie puts it: “In this instance... the King was...doing something... which turned out to be far the better course for Prussia. He was not really giving much help to Napoleon, who knew the Prussian troops assigned to him could not be seriously relied upon and left most of them behind under General Yorck’s command when he entered Russia. Yorck was indeed operating under Marshal Macdonald’s orders - so long as things seemed to be going well for the French.” Bernard Brodie, “On Clausewitz: A Passion for War,” *World Politics*, XXV, January 1973. Interestingly, in 1804, Clausewitz himself had been the first one to argue: “If Bonaparte should someday reach Poland, he would be easier to defeat than in Italy, and in Russia I would consider his destruction as certain.” Brodie’s article is a review of Roger Parkinson’s eye-opening Clausewitz (Wayland, 1973), a biography that contains a few factual inaccuracies but presents overall a more realistic portrait than Peter Paret’s subsequent Clausewitz and the State (Princeton University Press, 1976).

no time to study. After Waterloo, when he finally has the *time* to acquire a first-rate education, he no longer has the *will* to do so.³⁰

In 1815, Clausewitz writes to Gneisenau: "...if I were not too old, and [if my education was] not too neglected, I would throw myself wholly into the arms of scholarship." By the time he is appointed head of the War College in Berlin in 1818, he realizes how radically the philosophical scene has changed since his war college days, and how much it has become an affair of professionals (Kant, Fichte, Hegel) in which there is no longer room for talented dilettantes. In 1820 again, Clausewitz will tell Gneisenau: "It is too late to drink from the fountain of science and develop all of its riches within me."³¹ The man at the time is forty – younger than most students in U.S. war colleges today!

In the 1820s, everybody in Europe who is intellectually somebody lives in Berlin. But Clausewitz lacks both the self-confidence to participate in the "battle of ideas" and the will to learn (unlike *le tout-Berlin*, he does not even attend the seminars of Hegel or Ranke) and, as a result, his ruminations will go in circle until the crisis of 1827.

If Clausewitz ended up spending the last decade of his life ruminating about Napoleonic battles, it is mostly because History was a nightmare from which he was trying to awake. In the aftermath of Russia, he confides to his wife Marie: "What ghastly scenes have I witnessed here. If my feelings had not been hardened it would have sent me mad. Even so, it will take many years before I can remember what I have seen without feeling a shuddering horror." As Bernard Brodie hinted in 1973, Clausewitz's letters to his wife show all the symptoms of what we would call today post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and there is some truth in his widow's claims that Clausewitz in 1830 died of depression as much as of cholera.³²

When *On War* was published posthumously in 1832, the treatise was not even close to completion (seven books out of eight are between 45-75 pages long, while one book is 160 pages long). As Clausewitz himself had anticipated, "if an early death should terminate my work, what I have written so far would of course only deserve to be called a shapeless mass of ideas, being liable to endless misinterpretations."

In fact, far from being totally "shapeless," the dual nature of *On War* is obvious to anyone who cares to spend some time in it.

30 The "closing of the Clausewitzian mind" is actually a two-step process that cannot be examined in detail here. After the trauma of Iena (1806), like so many Germans of his generation, Clausewitz trades an intellectual cosmopolitanism for an epistemological nationalism and, by the same token, Montesquieu for Fichte. After the trauma of Russia (1812), like so many veterans of the campaign, he is prematurely aged. On the closing of the German mind after Iena, see Friedrich Meinecke's classic *Cosmopolitanism and the National State*, Princeton University Press, 1970. On the trauma of the veterans of the Napoleonic Wars, see Philip G. Dwyer, "It Still Makes Me Shudder": Memories of Massacres and Atrocities during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars," *War in History*, November 2009.

31 Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, Princeton University Press, 1976, p.245 and 281.

32 Though post-traumatic stress disorder has been known at least since the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, PTSD has remained something of a taboo in the military world to this day. Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, Simon & Schuster, 1995.

On the one hand, there is Clausewitz the Codifier. As Liddell Hart will say, uncharitably but not inaccurately: “Clausewitz contributed no new or strikingly progressive ideas to tactics or strategy. He was a *codifying* thinker, rather than a *creative* or *dynamic* one”³³

And indeed, far from creating an original toolbox, Clausewitz borrows the concept of “friction” from Ruhle von Lilienstern, that of “escalation to the extreme” from Guibert, that of “center of gravity” from Reveroni de Saint-Cyr, etc.³⁴

Clausewitz is a selective Codifier: ironically, though he rationalized his selective study of history by arguing that the older the wars, the less reliable the sources, the opposite turned out to be just as true. Unlike Generals Camon and Colin two generation later, Clausewitz did not have access to the 32 volumes of Napoleon’s correspondence (published under Napoleon III) and, as a result, his understanding of the Napoleonic Way of War is rather crude. Napoleon was in fact as much from Minerva as he was from Mars and, in that respect, Liddel Hart’s *The Ghost of Napoleon* is a useful corrective to Clausewitz’s *On War*.

Clausewitz the Codifier is selective in another sense as well: like so many of his contemporaries, he has a marked tendency to over-rate the value of “Experience” (Erlebnis) and to make sweeping judgments on the basis of his own *contingent* experience. Thus, his experience of *some* Napoleonic battles (Iena, Borodino, Waterloo) leads him to draw general conclusions that he would never have drawn had he taken part in *other* Napoleonic battles (Marengo, Austerlitz, Ulm). In addition, since he had an exceptionally bad experience with military intelligence throughout his career, he all too often makes sweeping (and silly) statements on the subject. As a *Prussian* officer, he is at the receiving end, and only sees shock and firepower; he is also traumatized by the behavior of his fellow officers at the time of Iena, and gives a disproportionate importance to the question of moral factors (a topic whose importance was otherwise recognized at its *juste valeur* by just about every writer from Lloyd to Lilienstern).

Beside Clausewitz the Codifier, there is also what could be called Clausewitz the Deconstructionist. While he may no longer have the serenity of mind to study and learn, Clausewitz still has the ambition to “avoid every common place, everything obvious that has been stated a hundred times” and to “write a book that would not be forgotten after two or three years.” Since his *ego* keeps writing checks that his *cogito* can’t cash, his quest for originality at all costs leads him at times to adopt what could be called a Rousseau-like strategy: “if I am not better, at least I am different.”

Different from whom? Above all, different from Jomini. By the time Clausewitz begins *On War*, Jomini has already published a dozen volumes and is the most celebrated military writer in Europe. Jomini is the perfect foil. With the death in 1813 of his *pere spirituel* Scharnhorst, it is Jomini the *frere enemi* who will gradually come to occupy the center of Clausewitz’ intellectual world. Much of *On War* amounts to a kind of “shadow-boxing” in which Clausewitz multiplies implicit or explicit barbs against Jomini yet, when it comes to proposing an alternative theory, all too often takes refuge in a theory of anti-theory (war-is-the-realm-of-fog-and-friction-and-chance-and-uncertainty). In that respect, Jomini was not wrong to argue that Clausewitz “has

³³ Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, second revised edition, Meridian Book (1967) p.340.

³⁴ General Lucien Poirier, *Les Voix de la Strategie: Genealogie de la Strategie Militaire* – Guibert, Jomini, Fayard, 1985; Laure Bardes and Martin Motte, eds., *De la Guerre? Clausewitz et la Pensee Strategique Contemporaine*, Economica, 2008.

raised more doubts than he has discovered truths.” As Raymond Aron himself pointed out, Clausewitz does not always avoid a “dogmatism of anti-dogmatism.”³⁵

To this formal distinction between Clausewitz the Codifier and Clausewitz the Deconstructionist, one must add an even more important distinction between a pre-1827 Clausewitz, and a post-1827 Clausewitz. As Beatrice Heuser puts it:

“In sum, then, we are left with two different sets of Clausewitzian teaching: on the one hand we have the draft papers of 1804 and 1808, the instructions to the Crown Prince, other historical pieces, and Books II-VI of *On War*, all dating from the years before 1827, all the works of ‘Clausewitz the Idealist.’ On the other hand there are Books VII, VIII, and the revised Book I of *On War*, written between 1827 and Clausewitz’s final posting in 1830, which are the writings of ‘Clausewitz the Realist.’”

We still do not know what caused Clausewitz to experience such an “agonizing reappraisal” in 1827. Since his evolution from 1816 to 1827 eerily mirrors that of Guibert between his *Essai General de Tactique* (1770) and his *Defense du Systeme de Guerre Moderne* (1779), it may well be that Clausewitz re-read Guibert in 1827 and finally saw the light. Or it could be that the publication in 1827 of Jomini’s *Vie Politique et Militaire de Napoleon* led Clausewitz to revise his opinion of Napoleon as the “God of War.” Or a combination of both.³⁶ But the fact is that, out of the six hundred pages of *On War*, only 150 pages at most can be called “realist.”

Last but not least, besides the Codifier/Deconstructionist and the Idealist/Realist, the dual nature of Clausewitz is also illustrated by Theorist/Historian opposition. In the ten volumes of his complete works, only three are about theory, the rest is about history. While the Theorist has a very German *esprit de systeme*, the historian has a surprisingly, well – French *esprit de finesse*, and had he not wasted years seeking “originality” at all costs as a pedantic theorist, had he not repressed his aesthetic sensibility, Clausewitz could have become a historian as good as his contemporary Tocqueville.

Clausewitz certainly managed to be “different” from Jomini. But is he really “better,” as his disciples today would have you believe? When it comes to the metaphysics of war, Clausewitz is unquestionably “deeper” than Jomini. When it comes to the reality of war in its multiple dimensions, though, Jomini is unquestionably “broader” than Clausewitz, since his theory includes politics, logistics, intelligence, communications, and the maritime dimension.

³⁵ At other times, as Hew Strachan pointed out recently, Clausewitz goes out of his way to loudly magnify his differences with contemporaries, yet ends up borrowing heavily from them without acknowledging his debt. Strachan also draws attention to the translation strategy of Howard and Paret, in which Clausewitz’s terminology has been altered in order to 1) avoid having to acknowledge a conceptual convergence between him and his main contemporaries and 2) make it look as if the central focus of *On War* is the intersection of Policy and Strategy, when it is in fact the intersection between Strategy and Tactics. Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz’s On War: A Biography*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007.

³⁶ Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz*, Random House, 2002, p.32. To complicate things further, other interpreters have argued that *On War* “contained both a militant ‘Old Testament’ and a more measured ‘New Testament’ – but they are interwoven rather than conveniently divided.” Hugh Smith, *On Clausewitz: A Study of Military and Political Ideas*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, p.65 (emphasis added). American Clausewitzians have apparently never heard of Guibert. Yet, as Beatrice Heuser pointed out recently: “As with Clausewitz, we find that Guibert changed his views about war over time and, as with Clausewitz, particularly on the issue of limited or absolute war. Only Guibert saw this distinction a good half century before Clausewitz had his sudden revelation on the subject. Unlike Clausewitz, Guibert had since his youth understood the existence of both of these forms of war. And what is most amazing is that Guibert understood this distinction before the French Revolution had created the *levee en masse*.” “Guibert: Prophet of Total War?,” in Roger Chickering, ed. *War in an Age of Revolution 1775-1815*, Cambridge University Press, 210, pp.59-60/

Nowhere is this more apparent than on their respective treatment of the question of Logistics. Strictly speaking, there is no *concept* of Logistics in *On War*: “The knowledge and skills involved in the preparations will be concerned with the creation, training and maintenance of the fighting forces. It is immaterial what label we give them...” All these activities for Clausewitz belong primarily to the realm of peacetime *organization*, as opposed to wartime *operations*. Tellingly, the name of Lazare Carnot, the “organizer of victory” during the French Revolution, appears only once in *On War*.

At the other extreme, there is Jomini’s expansive definition of Logistics: “Logistics is the art of moving armies. It comprises the order and details of marches and camps, and of quartering and supplying troops; in a word, it is the execution (sic) of strategic and tactical enterprises.” For Jomini, the concept includes not only what we mean today by Logistics but, as Michael Howard pointed out, comes close being synonymous with the modern concept of “Command, Control, Communication, and Intelligence.” Though Moltke, out of patriotism, will later credit Clausewitz for Prussia’s successes in 1866-70, Moltke’s interest in command-and-control issues (General Staff) and in the “communication revolution” of his time (railroads-and-telegraphs), along with his view that the “essence of strategy” resides in the fine art of *mobilization*, makes him a disciple of Jomini rather than Clausewitz.³⁷ And there is nothing more Jominian than the American saying: “Amateur talk strategy, professionals talk logistics.”

By the time of Clausewitz’s death in 1830, Jomini had already published twenty volumes, Clausewitz had published a grand total of three articles. Normal scholars, who know that Clausewitz read and wrote French quite well, would be naturally inclined to examine the possible influence of Jomini on Clausewitz. In particular, they would want to ascertain the extent to which Jomini’s accusations of plagiarism against Clausewitz are founded.

But the Clausewitz Nuts (as they are affectionately known in the American military world) are anything but normal scholars. To this day, not only is there still no critical edition of *On War* but, on the question of plagiarism, the most you will get from Clausewitz’s disciples are elliptical contortions along the lines of “There is some justification, therefore, for Jomini’s complaint that Clausewitz plagiarized him, though hardly to the extent the Swiss theorist claimed (...) Clausewitz was not a plagiarist, but he did draw freely from others’ ideas, sometimes nearly *verbatim* (sic).”³⁸ Yet, it is safe to assume that, if ever a doctoral student is bold enough to go through the complete works of Clausewitz’s contemporaries and compare them with *On War*, the verdict about Clausewitz will be reminiscent of Samuel Johnson’s remark: “What is new is not particularly good, and what is good is not particularly new.”

When it comes to asserting the originality of *On War*, the American disciples of Clausewitz have not hesitated to make the most extravagant claims, going as far as to argue that Jomini’s considerations on politics in his *Summary of the Art of War* (1838) were influenced by Clausewitz’s *On War* (1832-34).³⁹ In fact, a quick google search would have been enough to

³⁷ Michael Howard, “Jomini and the classical tradition in military thought,” in Michael Howard, ed. *The Theory and Practice of War*, Indiana University Press, 1965. On Moltke, see Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking war from Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.7

³⁸ Antulio Etcheverria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 17 and 192.

³⁹ Jomini, we are told, “benefited from its author’s reading of *On War*, which caused him to make a number of accommodations for Clausewitz’s views, such as introducing the term *politique* (politics), which parallels in meaning the Prussian’s *Politik*.” Antulio Etcheverria, *op. cit.*, p.15. Strangely enough, the part of the *Summary* in which Jomini accuses Clausewitz of plagiarism has been left out of just about every American edition between 1862 and 2008. See Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War – Restored Edition*, Legacy Books, 2008.

realize that Jomini's *Summary* is just an extension of his *Tableau Analytique* published in 1830 (i.e. before *On War*), and that the *Tableau* not only discusses politics at length, but makes a very "modern" distinction between *politique de la guerre* and *politique militaire*.⁴⁰

Clausewitz's study of war is limited to two centuries; it leaves out technology, intelligence, logistics, the law of armed conflicts, and a few other trifles; and unlike Jomini's concrete typology of the nine kinds of war, Clausewitz only offers a bookish opposition between "wars of annihilation" and "war of observation." So, where exactly is the true originality of Clausewitz? The so-called Clausewitzian Trinity, which allegedly defines an "essence" of war?⁴¹

Interestingly, from 1832 until 1976, nobody paid much attention to the (twofold) trinity mentioned in Book I of *On War* – and for a good reason: previous generations of commentators had a modicum of knowledge of philosophy and were fully aware that, far from being something strikingly original, the Clausewitzian Trinity is actually one of the many variations on an old philosophical trope on the "three kinds of efficient causes" (natural, divine, human) running from Plato to Hegel.

If abbreviated as *violence, chance, rationality*, the Clausewitzian trinity fails to capture an "essence" of war that would be distinct from, say, an "essence" of coup d'état or of revolution. If abbreviated more loosely as *passion, chance, reason* or, as is often the case, *irrationality, non-rationality, rationality*, the Clausewitzian trinity actually applies to just about every human activity, from trout fishing to casino gambling.⁴²

In his 1976 biography, Paret made the grandiose claim that "by remaining suspended between the three magnets or energy fields of violence, of politics, and of chance and creativity, which to varying degree interacted in every war, theory gained the universality that allowed it to analyze all wars, past and present, as well as the flexibility that would enable its major propositions to accommodate whatever social and technological changes the future might bring." The truth is, at this level of generality, this alleged "universality" is simply a banality. As even a

⁴⁰ The fac-simile of Jomini's *Tableau analytique des principales combinaisons de la guerre, et de leur rapports avec la politique des états*, 3me edition, Anselin, Paris, 1830, is available at http://books.google.ro/books?id=IQQ7AAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=jomini+traite+analytique&source=bl&ots=Rgc3BieslN&sig=jzpBPJPOOKqcxSTx6yA0iouqXs&hl=ro&ei=UL77TMTsCMWt8QOW29DxCw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBYQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁴¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 89: "As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government." The people-army-government trinity actually gained prominence only with the publication of Harry G. Summers's *On Strategy: A Critical analysis of the Vietnam War* (Presidio Press, 1982). A decade later, Martin Van Creveld pointed out this Clausewitzian construct was useless to understand the new "non-trinitarian wars." (*The Transformation of War*, Free Press, 1991). In order to increase the shelf life of *On War*, Clausewitz's disciples then countered that the "true trinity" was actually the first one (violence-chance-rationality.)

⁴² One of the main merits of Strachan's book on Clausewitz is to deflate the importance of the post-Cold War theological discussions about the Clausewitzian Trinity. For one thing, Strachan points out, there are plenty of trinities in *On War*, and there is no particular reason to focus on this one. For another, contrary to the assertions of Paret and Howard, there is no reason to think that the undated note is posterior to the 1827 note, therefore that Book I has a special status, therefore that the paragraph in Book I on the twofold Trinity has a special significance.

Clausewitzian hardliner conceded recently: “Clausewitz came close to saying that war has no nature of its own.”⁴³

But enough with theology. Unless you have read only one book in your life, it should be apparent that, whether you look at it as a work of philosophy or as a work of history, Clausewitz’s *On War* does not quite rise to the level of Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of Laws* or Thucydides’s *The Peloponnesian War*. What makes *On War* nonetheless unique is that it is a sort of unplanned, non-linear, and unfinished *Phenomenology of the Military Mind* in which, by progressing from the study of Combat to Battle, and of Battle to Campaign, the consciousness of the Soldier-Philosopher gradually discovers the importance of Politics.

How should we read Clausewitz today? A few years ago, a literature professor at the Naval Academy suggested that *On War* be read like a work of poetry, which is a bit excessive - if only because Clausewitz’s prose is so turgid. But it would be entirely fitting to approach *On War* as the most philosophical *Bildungsroman* - a genre particularly popular in post-Napoleonic Germany.⁴⁴

For the military world, what is the main value of *On War* today? One could argue that, at a time when three hundred thousand U.S. veterans from the Afghan and Iraq wars are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and when the National Endowment for the Arts partners with the Department of Veterans Affairs to hold writing-as-therapy workshops (Operation Homecoming), the U.S. military institution would be wise to recognize – nah, to *advertize* - that Clausewitz himself was suffering from PTSD; that *On War* most certainly started as the continuation of therapy by other means; and that, over time, the badly-damaged Clausewitz nonetheless managed to write what Bernard Brodie himself called “not simply the greatest, but the only great book on war.”

The Indirect Return of the Indirect Approach

The Era of Clausewitzology lasted from 1976 to 2006. It was a uniquely American, and post-Vietnam, phenomenon.

In Europe, the golden age of Clausewitz was around 1870-1914. By the time of the Great War, eight of the ten volumes of Clausewitz’s complete works had already been translated in French, and it is through the French translation that non-Germanic Europe discovered Clausewitz and debated the respective merits of the offensive vs. the defensive, of the moral versus material factors, etc. Already discredited in the interwar era, Clausewitz after 1945 came to be seen in the Old World as belonging to an era which Europeans would rather forget. Until his death in 1970, British strategist Basil Liddell Hart, the most influential strategist of the century, never missed an opportunity to criticize Clausewitz, and his best-selling *Strategy* (1954), constantly re-edited, has remained the main book on strategy in Europe. Even Raymond Aron’s monumental *Penser la Guerre: Clausewitz* (1976) was at bottom an attempt to “liddell-hartize” (or to “emasculate,” as some German critics saw it) Clausewitz.⁴⁵

⁴³ Peter Paret, op. cit. p.368; Antulio Echeverria, op. cit., p.192.

⁴⁴ Bruce Fleming, “Can Reading Clausewitz Save Us from future Mistakes?” Parameters, Spring 2004, www.carlisle.army.mil/USAWC/Parameters/Articles/04spring/fleming.pdf. Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, new edition.

⁴⁵ On the French Clausewitz, see Colonel Benoit Durieux’s monumental *Clausewitz en France: Deux Siecles de Reflexion sur la Guerre, 1807-2007*, Economica, 2007. Written between 1970 and 1975, Raymond Aron’s *Penser la Guerre: Clausewitz* (Gallimard, 1976) must be seen against the backdrop of the rivalry between Aron and General Beaufre (a disciple of Liddell

In the New World, by contrast, the first American edition of *On War* appeared only in 1943 and, to this day, much of Clausewitz's writings remain untranslated. The historical centrality of Jomini in U.S. military culture was such that it was not until the late 1950s that Clausewitz began to make a tentative appearance, mostly among American civilian strategists (Huntington, Osgood, Kissinger, Brodie). In the early sixties, despite the efforts of Peter Paret, the "Clausewitz Project," aimed at translating the Prussian's complete works, never got off the ground. It is not until 1976-81 that *On War* will become mandatory reading in the Naval, then Air Force, then Army, war colleges.

How to explain the rise of Clausewitzology? Future historians will probably point out that the post-Vietnam era was marked by a feeling of defeatism on both sides of the Atlantic, illustrated by books like George Kennan's *The Cloud of Danger* (1977) and Raymond Aron's *A Plea for Decadent Europe* (1977), and that the orchestration of the Clausewitz revival was part of a broader program for the moral and intellectual re-armament of the West.

At the same time, they will no doubt acknowledge that one man played a central role in the Clausewitz revival: the German-born historian Peter Paret who, in 1976, publishes both a new translation of *On War* and a 450-page sanitized biography, *Clausewitz and the State* (in which the name of Liddell Hart does not appear once).

Paret's position as the "authorized" interpreter of Clausewitz will be quickly strengthened after the death in the late seventies of both Hans Rothfels, the leading European specialist of Clausewitz, and Bernard Brodie, the "American Clausewitz."⁴⁶ In 1986, Paret will become the main architect of a re-writing of *Makers of Modern Strategy* (a popular textbook published in WWII) and, through this three-pronged editorial strategy, Paret will "lock" the image of Clausewitz the man, and the interpretation of *On War*, for the next thirty years. By 1986 as well, the perceived need for a "unified theory of war" will lead to the quasi-deification of Clausewitz in war colleges.⁴⁷

During the Era of Clausewitzology, the instrumentalization of Clausewitz often took the form of a "weaponization," at various levels.

First, Clausewitz was used as a weapon by the military institution at large against their civilian masters, first retrospectively, as a way to exonerate the U.S. armed forces for the failure in Vietnam (Harry Summers' 1982 *On Strategy*), but also prospectively, as a way to pre-empt the recurring temptation of the political class to involve the U.S. military in anything other than conventional wars (the 1984 Weinberger-Powell doctrine). During those thirty years, the concept of "War" will come to mean only what Clausewitz says War is (i.e. conventional interstate war), and everything else will be called "Operations Other Than Wars." (OOTW)

Ironically enough, the most "intellectualist" military writer will end up being used as a convenient alibi by bureaucratic officers who see in the concept of "decisive battles" an argument for ever-increasing defense budgets, while recoiling at the actual use of force in situations deemed never "Clausewitzian" enough to justify military interventions (the

Hart) for the title of France's leading strategist. On the rivalry, see Christian Malis, *Raymond Aron et le Debat Strategique Francais*, Economica, 2005.

⁴⁶ On the Brodie-Paret protracted conflict over Clausewitz, see Barry Steiner, Bernard Brodie and the Foundations of American Nuclear Strategy, University Press of Kansas, 1991.

⁴⁷ See for instance Michael I. Handel, ed., *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*, Routledge, 1986.

bureaucratically savvy, but operationally risk-adverse, Colin Powell recalls having almost an “aneurysm” when Secretary Albright bluntly confronted him: “what’s the point of having this superb military you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?”).

Second, with the abolition of conscription and the rise a professional All-Volunteer Force from 1973 on, there was a clear determination, on the part of the officer corps, to re-claim a strategic discourse which, since the end of WWII, had been high-jacked by civilians. After the fall of Saigon, civilian strategists will be turned into convenient scapegoats by military intellectuals for whom Clausewitz was a fellow career officer, i.e. someone for whom war is about “fighting,” not about “detering,” “bargaining” or “signaling.” Regrettably, the deification of Clausewitz and his alleged timeless truths was going to mark the beginning of thirty years of intellectual “group-think” within an increasingly insular U.S. military.

Third, during the so-called Second Cold War of the 1980s, the U.S. military had no choice but to shift its attention away from the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the Fulda Gap anyway. What better guide for doctrine and planning than a Clausewitz who constantly equate “strategy” with “operational strategy”?⁴⁸

Fourth, in a post-Cold war era marked by the exacerbation of inter-service rivalries over ever-shrinking budgets, Clausewitz became the weapon of choice for land forces (especially “Big Army”) against the techno-centric Revolution in Military Affairs promoted by the Air Force and the Navy.⁴⁹ Against the dream of “information dominance” of the network-centric warriors, the Clausewitzians never waste an opportunity to re-assert the idea that war is the realm-of-fog-and-friction-and-chance-and-uncertainty. And in that respect, even though it was mostly driven by service parochialism, this counter-offensive provided a much-needed reality check.

Fifth, in the 1990s as well, Clausewitz will also be used by the most retrograde spokesmen of Big Army as a weapon against those (often in the Marine Corps) who want to see the military institution pay greater attention to emerging forms of irregular warfare. During this period of intense “intellectual terrorism,” the Clausewitzian Nuts will make ample use of a book of “strategy” written by a contemporary of Clausewitz, and that war college students today would be well-advised to master: Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The Art of Being Right: 38 Ways to Win an Argument* (1831).⁵⁰

Sixth, another unintended effect of Clausewitzology will become apparent only after 9/11. Since war was considered synonymous with “conventional war,” “operational strategy,” and “decisive battles,” the U.S. military massively out-sourced many seemingly unrelated activities to private contractors. While contractors had represented only one percent of U.S.

⁴⁸ As one former officer pointed out: “One unfortunate outcome of the [American] army’s preoccupation with the central front and a ground war against the Soviet Union was a growing identification, even empathy, between the U.S. Army in Europe and the German Wehrmacht on the Eastern front in World War II.” (Stephen L. Melton, *The Clausewitz Delusion: How the American Army Screwed Up the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, Zenith Press, 2009, p.83). The revelation in the 1990s that the behavior of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern front was as barbaric as that of the SS did not put an end to the “Prussian dandyism” in vogue among some U.S. Army officers.

⁴⁹ The network-centric approach is best illustrated by William A. Owens, *Lifting the Fog of War*, Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2000. For a Clausewitzian critique, see Barry Watts, *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War*, NDU Press, 1996, and Williamson Murray, “Clausewitz Out, Computer In: Military Culture and Technological Hubris,” *The National Interest*, June 1997. www.clausewitz.com/readings/Clause%26Computers.htm.

⁵⁰ Hence the venomous fatwas of the Clausewitzian ayatollahs against blasphemous articles like Tony Corn’s “Clausewitz in Wonderland,” web special, *Policy Review*, September 2006, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/6795>

presence during the 1991 Gulf War, the “corporate warriors” had come to represent fifty percent of all forces in theater by 2003 (today, in a theater like Afghanistan, contractors even outnumber soldiers). Only belatedly did the Pentagon begin to realize that the U.S. armed forces had put themselves “on the horns of a dilemma”: they can’t go to war without contractors, but they can’t win wars with them either. ⁵¹

Today, the generational divide over Clausewitzolatry is nowhere better illustrated than in the exasperated tone of Major Andrew Godefroy, the editor-in-chief of the *Canadian Army Journal*, in a recent article entitled “Letting Clausewitz Go”:

I find it disconcerting how every time I suggest to my fellow staff-trained army officers and war studies colleagues that it is time for the Canadian Army to let Clausewitz go, they give me this look like I just kicked their dog and stole their security blanket. Nearly two decades of war in the Balkans and Southwest Asia have shown us repeatedly and quite plainly that no matter how hard one rubs this imposed Clausewitzian intellectual touchstone, there is, in reality, very little to be gained from trying to re-invent ourselves as 19th Century Prussian philosophers and general staff officers... ⁵²

Major Godefroy is of course fundamentally right: in this day and age, U.S. business schools don’t bother with Adam Smith, U.S. law schools barely mention Montesquieu, and there is no reason for U.S. war colleges to continue to deify Clausewitz. Turning to Clausewitz in the hope of understanding better today’s “persistent conflicts” is just as hopeless as turning to Smith or Montesquieu to understand modern phenomena like the “financialization of the economy” or the “judicialization of politics.” Just because there is a need for a joint *doctrine* does not mean there is also a need for a unified *theory*. After all, there is no such thing as a unified theory of economics, law, or diplomacy, and that does not prevent businessmen, lawyers, or diplomats from doing their job reasonably well.

At any rate, the need to go beyond *inter-service* jointness and toward *inter-agency* jointness calls for an intellectual shift away from Clausewitz and toward Liddell Hart. For ultimately, the difference between the two is not just a matter of “direct vs. indirect” approach at the operational level. It is a difference between a theory that focuses on the intersection of strategy and tactics, and one that focuses on the intersection strategy and grand strategy.

In retrospect, the beginning of the end of the era of Clausewitzology in military circles may have started as early as 1989, with the adoption by the U.S. Marine Corps of a “maneuver” doctrine (FMFM-1) which self-consciously distinguished itself from the “attrition” doctrine associated with “Big Army.” While paying lip service to Clausewitz, this new doctrine was clearly closer to Liddell Hart in spirit. ⁵³

⁵¹ Peter W. Singer, Can’t Win with ’Em, Can’t Go to War without ’Em: Private Military Contractors and Counterinsurgency, Policy Paper 4, Brookings, September 2007, www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2007/0927militarycontractors/0927militarycontractors.pdf

⁵² Major Andrew Godefroy, “Letting Clausewitz Go: The Lesson the Canadian Army Must Learn from Afghanistan,” *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 10, issue 3, summer 2010. www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol10/no3/doc/09-godefroy-eng.pdf. The author hints that, were not so many staff officers employed in such meaningless tasks as preparing PowerPoint presentations, they would not need to fancy themselves as Prussian officers in order to maintain their martial self-image.

⁵³ “Warfare by attrition seeks victory through the cumulative destruction of the enemy’s material assets by superior firepower and technology. An attritionist sees the enemy as targets to be engaged and destroyed systematically.... In contrast, warfare by maneuver stems from a desire to circumvent a problem and attack it from a position of advantage rather than meet it straight on. The goal is the application of strength against selected enemy weakness... While attrition operates principally in the physical

At the policy level, though, the end of Clausewitzology began only in 2002, with the official recognition, via the U.S. National Security Strategy, that *intra-state* conflicts now represent a greater threat than *inter-state* wars (“America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing states.”) Then, in 2005, the Pentagon’s Directive 3000 officially gave the same importance to non-combat missions as to combat missions. In 2006, the Pentagon published the now-famous counterinsurgency manual (FM 3-24), downloaded over two million times, and whose “population-centric” approach represented a radical revolution for a military institution used to thinking in terms of “enemy-centric” warfare. By 2010, Secretary Gates, in a major *Foreign Affairs* article, made it clear that the two main military missions would be security cooperation and counterinsurgency.⁵⁴ With the Pentagon’s additional concern about financial warfare, “lawfare” and cyber-warfare, it is fair to say that Clausewitz’s *On War* has never been less relevant as today.

Obviously, no self-respecting military institution will ever officially trumpet that Clausewitz has become obsolete. *Vom Kriege* may have very little heuristic value, but it still has a significant bureaucratic value: the Clausewitzian idea of “decisive battle” is what justifies the idea of overwhelming force, which in turn justifies technological superiority, which in turn justifies big budgets. There are nonetheless several ways in which the military institution has “signaled” that the Clausewitzian paradigm is today obsolete. One such signal is the concept of “hybrid war,”⁵⁵ which fulfills three functions:

First, state actors can no longer be automatically equated with ‘conventional warfare,’ and non-state actors with ‘irregular warfare.’ Today, some state actors (Iran) are likely to use irregular means, while some non-state actors (Hezbollah) are just as likely to use conventional means. Second, the concept of hybridity is also designed to emphasize the blurring of the distinction between “criminal insurgency” and “political insurgency.” Last but not least, the unique threat posed by the combination of extreme lethality of means (including potentially WMD) and extreme fanaticism (martyrdom operations) mean that the traditional logic of “deterrence” has lost some of its relevance.

As it now stands, the concept of “hybrid war” remains under-developed, but it can be elaborated further to accommodate just about everything that the Chinese put under the generic concept of “unrestricted warfare.” In that respect, it is fair to say that “hybrid warfare” will become the dominant form of war.

But perhaps the clearest indication of the decline of the Clausewitzian paradigm is the increasing frequency of references to the “Indirect Approach” in Pentagon documents.

realm of war, the results of maneuver are both physical and moral. The object of maneuver is not so much to destroy physically as it is to shatter the enemy's cohesion, organization, command, and psychological balance.”(Fleet Marine Force Manual FMFM 1 – Warfighting, U.S. Marine Corps, 1989, <http://www.theusmarines.com/downloads/FMFM1/FMFM1-1.pdf>

⁵⁴ The unreported story of the previous decade is in fact the quiet extension of U.S. security assistance from 49 to 149 countries. In retrospect, the decade after 9/11 has been not so much a New Counterinsurgency Era as a New Security Cooperation Era. See Derek Reveron, *Exporting Security: International Engagement, Security Cooperation, and the Changing Face of the U.S. Military*, Georgetown University Press, 2009.

⁵⁵ Colonel Steven Williamson, *From Fourth-Generation Warfare to Hybrid War*, U.S. Army War College, 2009, www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA498391&Location=U2

This concept, which rests on two pillars (the *line of least resistance* and the *line of least expectation*), was developed by British strategist Basil Liddell Hart. Unlike the concept of “hybrid warfare,” which is too often limited to tactics-and-technology, the concept of “indirect approach” operates at every level of war: tactical, operational, theater-strategic and national-strategic (i.e. grand strategy). As military analyst Shawn Brimley pointed out, entire paragraphs of the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review seem lifted out of Liddell Hart’s 1954 book on strategy:

Consider the following passage from the 2006 QDR: “To succeed in [irregular warfare], the United States must often take an indirect approach, building up and working with others. This indirect approach seeks to unbalance adversaries physically and psychologically, rather than attacking them where they are strongest or in the manner they expect to be attacked. Taking the ‘line of least resistance’ unbalances the enemy physically, exploiting subtle vulnerabilities and perceived weaknesses. Exploiting the ‘line of least expectation’ unbalances the enemy psychologically, setting the conditions for the enemy’s subsequent defeat.’⁵⁶

While the Indirect Approach is mentioned ten times in the 2006 QDR, the name of Liddell Hart himself, unlike that of his longtime friend T.E. Lawrence, never appears once, as Brimley points out. Why this conspicuous absence? The short answer would have to be that, within U.S. military circles, Liddell Hart’s reputation has not recovered from the revelations twenty years ago of his post-1945 falsification of the historical record and of his “collaboration” with German generals. Time to set the record straight.

The Charge of the Liddell Hart Brigade

One of the things they don’t teach you in war colleges is what could be called “intellectual terrain appreciation,” and in particular the importance of “discursive strategies” at work in strategic discourses. Strategic theories are presented from an arch-traditional “history of ideas,” rather than a more modern “intellectual history,” standpoint. But ideas don’t float freely.

Even more so that in the case of the never-ending wars of interpretation over classics like Machiavelli’s *The Prince* or Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* (which are largely confined to academic circles), the wars over Clausewitz’s *On War*, as shown earlier, have been more than just “wars of ideas.”⁵⁷ In strategic debates, Ideas get quickly entangled with questions of Interests, Institutions, and even Identities (the “British way,” the “American Way,” etc.) As Stephen Walt pointed out long ago:

...The groups that play the largest role in shaping strategic thought (e.g., the military services, defense contractors, and so-called "defense intellectuals") also have a large stake in the conclusions that are drawn. Naturally, they are unlikely to favor strategic proposals that undermine their own positions. Efforts to silence or discredit their critics will be common as well, even when such critics are correct. Far from being a

⁵⁶ Shawn Brimley, “Stumbling into the Future? The Indirect Approach and American Strategy,” *Orbis*, Spring 2008. The author also notes that, since 9/11, the U.S. military has spent 58 days in large-scale conventional combat, and 4,000 days in counterinsurgency warfare (make that 5,000 days as of this writing)

⁵⁷ On the German interpretations of Machiavelli at the time of Clausewitz, see Friedrich Meinecke’s classic *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d’Etat and its place in Modern History* [1924], Yale University Press, 1957. On Kant, see Eric Easley, *The War over Perpetual Peace: An Exploration into the History of a Foundational International Relations Text*, Palgrave, 2004.

"free exchange of ideas," therefore, debates on strategy are heavily influenced by the political and organizational interests of the participants. In other words, much of the strategic community has a greater interest in defending their positions than in pursuing truth.⁵⁸

In short, *strategic thinkers* are also, invariably, *policy entrepreneurs*, and the realm of strategic theory is more "the continuation of politics by other means" than a dispassionate "intellectual quest for truth." Discursive strategies, translation strategies, editorial strategies, even curriculum design strategies, constitute an integral part of the "terrain" with which military students must familiarize themselves in order to avoid the most glaring misreadings.⁵⁹

Of all strategic thinkers, Basil Liddell Hart was probably the one who, for better and mostly for worse, was the most "committed" policy entrepreneur. Like Clausewitz, if in a different way, Liddell Hart is a tragic figure. His experience of the Somme (1916) was for him not unlike what the experience of Iena (1806) had been for Clausewitz – albeit in slow motion. After the war, like many soldiers of his generation, Liddell Hart experienced mostly the kind of "survivor guilt" common to many soldiers of his generation.⁶⁰ Discharged from the military on medical grounds in 1927, he will develop an increasing contempt for the military brass only retrospectively, during the course of his historical research on the Great War. Thanks to his frontal assaults on WWI generals (*Reputations: Ten Years Later* 1928), he became (too) famous at an early age, and failed to realize on time that his repeated verbal *offensives a outrance* were alienating a growing number of military and political leaders.

For most of his active life, Hart was essentially haunted by two questions: before 1940, how to avoid a repeat of the slaughter of the Great War? After 1941, how to prevent the Soviet Union from being the main beneficiary of a defeat of Nazi Germany? These were indeed the two questions that mattered and, in order to promote what he considered to be the right answers, Hart had no scruples, freely borrowing from others (Cameron, Colin, Corbett, Fuller) without due acknowledgment.⁶¹

By 1932, Liddell Hart had become convinced that military intellectuals were somehow as important as military commanders.⁶² If he could not be a "Leader," he could at least be a "Prophet." His *Ghost of Napoleon* (1933) is both an attempt to show the influence of military

⁵⁸ Stephen Walt, "The Search for a Science of Strategy: A Review Essay," *International Security*, 12, 1, Summer 1987. See also Carl Builder's classic *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, and Peter Trubowitz, ed., *The Politics of Strategic Adjustment: Ideas, Institutions, and Interests*, Columbia University Press, 1999.

⁵⁹ Adding to the "fog and friction" of the strategic conversation is the dialogue among the deaf between soldiers and politicians: "Among practitioners, politicians often conflate strategy with policy objectives (focusing on what the desired outcome should be, simply assuming that force will move the adversary toward it), while soldiers often conflate strategy with operations (focusing on how to destroy targets or defeat enemies tactically, assuming that positive military effects mean positive policy effects)." Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security*, 25, 2, Fall 2000, <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/betts%2025.2.pdf>.

⁶⁰ As pointed out by Hew Strachan, "'The Real War'": Liddell Hart, Crutwell, and Falls," in Brian Bond, ed., *The First World War and British Military History*, Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁶¹ As Azar Gat puts it: "He used strong medicines to get his message across, was anything but impartial, and had little use for balance and restraint. By the standards of scholarly discussion, these, of course, are dubious and unacceptable credentials. But then, Liddell Hart was playing a somewhat different game, and in a different league." *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.681.

⁶² "The inspiration of new ideas and the introduction of new methods in military organization, strategy, and tactics, have played a part that is quite as significant as the feats of executive military genius, if far less emphasized." B.H. Liddell Hart, *The Ghost of Napoleon: Lees Knowles Lectures 1932-1933*, Faber and Faber 1993, reprint Greenwood Press, 1980, p.13.

intellectuals (Bourcet, Guibert, du Teil) on the greatest military commander (Napoleon), a frontal attack on that false prophet Clausewitz (“the Madhi of Mass”), and a bid to establish himself as the true Prophet of the 20th Century (the Madhi of Maneuver?).

For Liddell Hart, Clausewitz’s original sin was his failure to realize the dual nature of the Napoleonic Way of War. “General Bonaparte” was all about mobility and surprise, and it is only after Iena that “Emperor Napoleon” opted systematically for mass and firepower: “General Bonaparte applied a theory which created an empire for him. The Emperor Napoleon developed a practice which wrecked his empire. And, a century later, evolved by Clausewitz into a system, it brought down three other empires in collapse.”

Obviously, Liddell Hart was not unaware that, in the great scheme of things, the combination of the Industrial Revolution (at the technological level) and of the Social-Darwinist *Zeitgeist* (at the cultural level) had played a much greater role than Clausewitz’s “system” in fostering the so-called “Spirit of 1914.” But that did not quite absolve Clausewitz:

It was Clausewitz who also developed, if he did not generate, the idea that the destruction of the enemy’s armed forces was the only true object of strategy. He made it a dogma without meaning to do so – carried away by his passion for pure logic ... While he saw the limitations which reality placed upon the abstract ideal, he tended to set up the latter as his ideal in the actual conduct of war ... Unfortunately, his qualifications came on later pages and were conveyed in a philosophical language that befogged the plain soldier, essentially concrete minded... In justice to Clausewitz one must draw attention to his reservations, but for true history one must concentrate attention on his abstract generalizations, because it was the effect of these that influenced the course of European history ... Not one [military] reader in a hundred was likely to follow the subtlety of his logic ... In transfusion it became a doctrine fit to form corporals, not generals.

One would be tempted to object that it is not the military writer Clausewitz, but the military commanders Moltke and Foch, who made *On War* mandatory reading in war colleges, and were therefore responsible for the “transfusion” - and the resulting intoxication of the officer corps. Ultimately, though, since Clausewitz’s explicit goal was to write a pedagogical treatise for military officers, Liddell Hart was not wrong to argue that Clausewitz the military *educator* should have had the common sense to foresee that “not one reader in a hundred was likely to follow the subtlety of his logic.” On the part of the Prussian, this was indeed a pedagogical mistake of the first order. Thus, while Clausewitz may not be “guilty” like a Moltke or a Foch, it is fair to say he was nonetheless “responsible.” As the French would say: *responsable, mais pas coupable*.

In retrospect, *The Ghost of Napoleon* was Liddell Hart’s “culminating point of victory.” A year later (1934), his extravagant praise of T.E. Lawrence, though motivated in part by a desire to cash in on the “Lawrence of Arabia” phenomenon, already showed the limits of his political acumen. His subsequent critique of a Continental Commitment betrays a Captain’s conception of politics - one in which tactical-operational considerations are the *only* criteria on which to base “policy and strategy.” On the eve of WWII, his argumentation in favor of the superiority of the defensive had become as doctrinaire as Foch’s argumentation in favor of the superiority of the offensive on the eve of WWI.

Since Liddell Hart had neglected to build for himself an institutional base at some university, his financial dependence on journalism put him in an increasingly precarious position when his views began to diverge from that of his editors (the fact that his private life began to unravel in parallel with the political situation no doubt contributed to his increasing doctrinaire rigidity – not to mention his heart attack in June 1939). By the time Churchill came to power in 1940, Liddell Hart's writings gave no indication that he would be willing to play the role of a loyal one-man Red Team; and so it is that, instead of being his "finest hour," World War II ended up being his "wilderness years."⁶³

For the record, though, it should be noted that his October 1940 proposal for a "negotiated peace" with Hitler was conceived as a purely tactical move, a "truce" of sorts explicitly designed to allow both Britain and America the time to beef up their military capabilities, strengthen their bargaining position, and "bring about any desired revision of the peace terms by the pressure of the most practically convincing of arguments – the possession of air superiority combined with control of the seas."⁶⁴

More controversial are Liddell Hart's relations with German generals after World War II. In U.S. military circles, the reputation of Liddell Hart has yet to recover from the revelations contained in John J. Mearsheimer's *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History* published in 1988.⁶⁵ Here again, though, it is important to keep things in perspective: one the one hand, Hart's engagement with German generals was initially the result of fortuitous circumstances: as it happened, in 1945, some seventy high-ranking German officers were interned five miles from Liddell Hart's country house. On the other hand, and more importantly, Hart's continued engagement with them until 1953 cannot be understood outside the context of the main debate of the time: the question of German rearmament.

As mentioned earlier, the main question for Hart after 1941 was how to prevent the Soviet Union from being the main beneficiary of a defeat of Nazi Germany. In the years 1945-1953, the main answer was: by re-arming and re-integrating Germany in the West. And from his standpoint, if whitewashing German generals was the price to pay, so be it.⁶⁶ Self-proclaimed academic realists who profess to be "shocked, shocked, shocked" by Liddell Hart's devious maneuvers, and by the self-serving nature of his *Memoirs* (really? as opposed to whom?), only show themselves to be boy-scouts with no experience with the real world of politics (not for nothing is Mearsheimer's brand of "neo-realism" derided in some quarters as "the science of realpolitik without politics.") In the end, the most charitable thing that can be said about

⁶³ Writing in 1944, Liddell Hart made this revealing comment which shows how painfully aware he was of the fact that he had missed the boat: "A long historical view not only helps us keep calm in a "time of trouble" but reminds us there is an end to the longest tunnel. Even if we can see no good hope ahead, an historical interest as to what will happen is a help in carrying on. For a thinking man, it can be the strongest check on a suicidal feeling (sic)." B.H. Liddell Hart, *Why Don't We Learn From History?*, Hawthorn Books, 1944, p.12, <http://pkpolitics.com/files/2008/05/liddell-hart-why-dont-we-learn-from-history.PDF>),

⁶⁴ Quoted by Brian Bond, *op. cit.*, p.134.

⁶⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History*, Cornell University Press, 1988. A doctrinaire proponent of a Neo-Hobbesian theory of international relations known as "offensive realism," Mearsheimer found in Liddell Hart the ideal foil for a demolition of "defensive realism."

⁶⁶ "The Other Side of the Hill [1948] represents the greatest paradox of his [Hart's] career. Intellectually and historically it was highly tendentious. But as a work of skilful propaganda in the service of the campaign for West German rearmament it may well have been the book by which he achieved his greatest influence on the course of history, with its subtle, yet ultimately far-reaching, effect on West German attitudes towards the Wehrmacht generals in the 1950s, thus crucially influencing public opinion on the rearmament issue." Alaric Searle, "A Very Special Relationship: Basil Liddell Hart, Wehrmacht Generals and the debate on West German Rearmament," 1945-1953, *War in History*, 5, 3, 1998.

Mearsheimer's *acharnement* against Liddell Hart is that it tells us more about the former's naivete than about the latter's cynicism.

Only late in life did Liddell Hart realize that, far from being limited to military strategy, the Indirect Approach had a much wider sphere of application in life - beginning with the fine art of "speaking truth to power." By 1954, he would wonder out loud:

Is there a practical way of combining progress toward the attainment of truth with progress toward its acceptance? (...) Opposition to the truth is inevitable, especially if it takes the form of a new idea, but the degree of resistance can be diminish – by giving thought not only to the aim but to the method of approach. Avoid a frontal attack on a long established position; instead, seek to turn it by flank movement, so that a more penetrable side is exposed to the thrust of truth. But, in any such indirect approach, take care not to diverge from the truth - for nothing is more fatal to its real advancement than to lapse into untruth.⁶⁷

That said, as his *Memoirs* (1965) were to show, Liddell Hart's rapport to Truth remained until the end as problematic as young Saint Augustine's rapport to Chastity ("Lord, make me chaste – but not yet!").

What is left of Liddell Hart today? As Richard Swain rightly argues:

Liddell Hart's continuing value as a military theorist would seem to reside more in the general propositions upon which his specific policy prescriptions are based than in the adequacy of the latter to their time and circumstances. It is important to observe that Liddell Hart's theoretical galaxy was well-established by 1933, the year Hitler came to power in Germany – that is, before Britain had an identifiable continental threat...⁶⁸

Curiously, though he was instrumental in popularizing the concept of "grand strategy," Liddell Hart himself never produced a grand theory. Like Clausewitz, he talked the talk but rarely walked the walk. By 1934, he had nonetheless managed to study the application of the Indirect Approach at the tactical level (*Lawrence of Arabia*), the operational level (*The Ghost of Napoleon*), the strategic level (*The Decisive Wars of History*), and the level of grand strategy (*The British Way of Warfare*).⁶⁹ By 1954, he had also clearly seen that "by carrying destructiveness to a "suicidal" extreme, atomic power is stimulating and accelerating a reversion to the indirect methods that are the essence of strategy."

Between the two editions (1954 and 1967) of his book *Strategy*, Liddell Hart chose to focus his revisions on the question of *guerrilla warfare*, and to argue in essence that Churchill

⁶⁷ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, preface, p.xxi.

⁶⁸ Richard Swain, "B.H. Liddell Hart and the creation of a theory of war, 1919-1933," *Armed Forces and Society*, 17, 1, Fall 1990. See also Jay Luvaas, "Liddell Hart and the Mearsheimer Critique: A "Pupil's" Retrospective," *Parameters*, March 1990, www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA515920

⁶⁹ In the wake of the British government's proclamation of the end of the "East of Suez" commitment in 1967, British military historians, eager to strengthen Britain's Continental Commitment in the framework of NATO, went out of their way to make a straw-man of Liddell Hart's concept of "British Way" and to minimize its historical importance. See Hew Strachan, "The British Way in Warfare Revisited," *The Historical Journal*, 26, 2, 1983, and Ian Speller "Corbett, Liddell Hart and the 'British Way in Warfare' in the 1960s," *Defence Studies*, 8, 2, June 2008. Forty years later, though, this denial has become a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts: today, even as we enter a new age of seapower, the Royal Navy is a pale shadow of its former self (see www.savetheroyalnavy.org).

was so taken with Lawrence of Arabia that, during WWII, he tried to be a “Winston of Europa” and, in the process, over-estimated the *military* effectiveness of armed resistance while underestimating the second and third order *political* effects of guerrilla warfare. What remained under-developed in the revised edition was the part on *grand strategy* which Liddell Hart had only sketched out in 1954:

Grand strategy should both calculate and develop the economic resources and manpower of nations in order to sustain the fighting services. Also the moral resources—for to foster the people’s willing spirit is often as important as to possess the more concrete forms of power. Grand strategy, too, should regulate the distribution of power between the services, and between the services and industry. *Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy—which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not the least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent’s will....Furthermore, while the horizon of strategy is bounded by the war, grand strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace.* It should not only combine the various instruments, but so regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peace—for its security and prosperity. The sorry state of peace, for both sides, that has followed most wars can be traced to the fact that, unlike strategy, the realm of grand strategy is for the most part terra incognita—still awaiting exploration, and understanding...

...To deal adequately with this wider subject [grand strategy] would require not only a much larger volume, but a separate volume – *for while grand strategy should control strategy, its principle often run counter to those which prevail in the field of strategy...* The object in war is to attain a better peace – even if only from your own point of view...If you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no thought for the after-effect, you may be too exhausted to profit by the peace, while it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing the germs of another war...⁷⁰

As Azar Gat pointed out in a seminal book published in 2001, though Liddell Hart the *policy entrepreneur* had opted for “appeasement,” Liddell Hart the *strategic thinker* is actually the godfather of “containment.” In many ways, George Kennan’s lectures at the National War College in 1946-47 picked up where Liddell Hart had left off. The intellectual proximity between Liddell Hart’s “indirect approach” and Kennan’s “measures short of war” was even acknowledged by the latter himself in 1957.⁷¹ Ironically enough, though, just like Liddell Hart

⁷⁰ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, pp. 322 and 353 (emphasis added). Among the grand strategic issues that Liddell Hart simply touched upon and never developed before his death in 1970 are the antinomies between strategy and grand strategy, the dynamics of coalition warfare and alliance politics, and the strategic asymmetry between revisionist and status quo powers (in his terminology, “acquisitive” and “conservative” states).

⁷¹ To Liddell Hart who had sent him an article of his on “Basic Problems of European Defense,” Kennan replied: “I read it with utter amazement, and much gratification, at the fact that our minds should have run so closely together... had I read your paper at an earlier date I should have suspected myself of subconscious plagiarism.” (Quoted in Azar Gat, op. cit., p.816). See also Giles D. Harlow, ed, *George Kennan: Measures Short of War*, National Defense University Press, 1991, <https://digitalndulibrary.ndu.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/ndupress&CISOPTR=36789&CISOSHOW=36441>).

had drifted from containment to appeasement in the 1930s, Kennan himself would follow a similar path in the 1970s.⁷²

Whatever Liddell Hart's limitations, it is also fair to acknowledge that the most innovative strategic theorists in the past fifty years have all been the children of Liddell Hart, be it Andre Beaufre and his concept of "total strategy," Thomas Schelling and his theory of "coercive warfare," Edward Luttwak and his concept of "armed suasion," John Warden and his "five ring model," and John Boyd and "maneuver warfare."⁷³ And to crown it all, it is also fair to acknowledge that the so-called "Second Cold War" was won through the most sophisticated application of Liddell Hart's Indirect Approach.⁷⁴ Today, the Chinese concept of "Unrestricted Warfare" represents the most systematic theory of the Indirect Approach.

The good thing about the return of Liddell Hart today is that he will never become an Icon in war colleges. His personality was too flawed, his method too unscholarly, his insights too scattered to be tempted to turn him into a "Clausewitz of the 20th Century."

As his biographer Alex Danchev points out, "he wrote no great book, no timeless synthesis, finished or unfinished. *Thoughts on War* is the skeleton of such a work. *The Revolution in Warfare* the sketch, *Strategy* the simulacrum. He got no further."

That said, as early as 1927, Hart was the first military critic in the West to see the relevance of the Mongol Way of War in the age of mechanized warfare. In 1927 as well, Liddell Hart was among the first Westerners to (re) discover Sun-Tzu, whose ghost will haunt Hart's writings for the next forty years. In Liddell Hart's opposition between "direct" and "indirect" approaches, it is not hard to hear an echo of Sun Tzu's distinction between the "orthodox" (*cheng*) and the unorthodox (*ch'i*) way. In fact, if Hart never took the trouble to write a treatise on strategy, it may be in part because, as he conceded with uncharacteristic humility in 1963, "in that one short book [Sun-Tzu's *Art of War*] was embodied almost as much about the fundamentals of strategy and tactics as I had covered in more than twenty books."⁷⁵

It is the spirit, more than the letter, of Liddell Hart that must enjoy a renaissance in the military world. As Brian Bond pointed out: "Whatever its shortcoming from the viewpoint of scholarship, the Strategy of Indirect Approach can be strongly defended as an educational

72 On Kennan's evolution from rollback warrior in the 1940s to defeatist whiner in the 1970s, see Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War behind the Iron Curtain*, Houghton Mifflin, 2000, and Barton Gellman, *Contending with Kennan – Toward a Philosophy of American Power*, Praeger, 1984.

73 In the realm of theory, see Andre Beaufre, *Introduction to Strategy*, Praeger, 1965; Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Yale University Press, 1965; Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: the Logic of War and Peace*, revised and enlarged edition, Harvard University Press, 2002; David S. Fadok, John Boyd and John Warden: *Airpower's Quest for Strategic Paralysis*, Air University Press, 1995, http://ebooks.gutenberg.us/AU_Press_Collection/SAAS_Theses/Fadok/fadok.pdf. In the realm of history, Liddell Hart's former assistant Paul Kennedy gave a new lease on life to the concept of grand strategy in his best-selling *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (Vintage, 1987). Twenty years later, another British historian, Jeremy Black, sought to improve on the at-times excessively materialist and mechanistic explanation of Kennedy by broadening the perspective both geographically (transcultural wars between the West and the Rest) and functionally (the importance of statecraft) in *Great Powers and the Quest for Hegemony: the World Order since 1500*, Routledge, 2008. See also, Paul Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, Yale University Press, 1992.

74 The most comprehensive account of Reagan's indirect grand strategy is Paul Kengor's *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism*, HarperCollins, 2006.

75 Alex Danchev, *Alchemist of War: The Life of Basil Liddell Hart*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1998, p.253. On Liddell Hart and the Mongol Way, see Richard A. Gabriel, *Subotai the Valiant: Genghis Kahn's Greatest General*, Praeger, 2004. On Sun-Tzu, see B.H. Liddell Hart, "Foreword," in Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated by Samuel B. Griffith, Oxford University Press, 1963 (though translated in French in 1772, *The Art of War* remained largely unknown in the English-speaking world until Lionel Giles's translation in 1910).

doctrine. There was a great deal to be said for encouraging a new generation of officers to think for themselves, and in particular to think in terms of achieving success by surprise and superior mobility; to value intellect and professional skill more than tradition and seniority; and to make the fullest use of science and technology to minimize casualty.”⁷⁶

A decade after 9/11, the absurdity of the U.S. grand strategy in the Long War is never better illustrated than by the fact that Washington currently spends \$ 100 billion dollars a year in Afghanistan chasing a grand total of 100 Al Qaeda fighters (one billion per terrorist). If there is only one reason to rediscover Liddell Hart today, it is because, as Sir Ernest Rutherford famously said in a different context: “We are running out of money, gentlemen. It’s time to start *thinking*.”

Toward a Transatlantic Way of War?

In June 2002, American pundit Robert Kagan bluntly asserted: “Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus.”⁷⁷ And sure enough, a month later, German Chancellor Schroeder took the lead in actively opposing European participation in a military intervention in Iraq.⁷⁸ Germany’s subsequent performance in Afghanistan has shown that, for better and for worse, the German Way of War these days involves much beer drinking (278 liters a year per soldier, to be exact) and very little fighting.

That said, it would be naïve to conclude that Germans have gone from one extreme to another, from Mars to Venus, from Hitler to Habermas, thus justifying Churchill’s politically incorrect remark (“the Hun is always either at your throat or at your feet.”) The truth is, Germany traded long ago Clausewitzian military power for “civilian power” (*Zivilmacht*). At the declaratory level, the rhetoric of “civilian power” may appear to be just another manifestation of the Neo-Kantian Cant peddled by post-WWII German intellectuals. In reality, “civilian power” is a sophisticated synthesis of Friedrich List and Basil Liddell Hart.⁷⁹

In the past twenty years, through sheer “civilian power,” Germany has brilliantly succeeded in establishing in Europe the kind of supremacy it had twice failed to achieve through military power, and the German chancellor has become de facto an “EU Chancellor.” Germany may be from Venus when it comes to projecting military force on the global stage, but it is definitely from Minerva when it comes to intra-European *realpolitik*.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart: A Study of his Military Thought*, Cassell, 1977, p. 59.

⁷⁷ Robert Kagan, “Power and Weakness,” *Policy Review*, June 2002, www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/7107

⁷⁸ On the rise of German leadership in post-Cold War Europe, see Julius W. Friend, *Unequal Partners: French-German Relations, 1989-2000*, CSIS, 2001. On the changing foreign policy of the Berlin Republic since 1999, see Stephen Szabo, *Parting Ways: The Crisis in German-American Relations*, Brookings, 2004.

⁷⁹ On Friedrich List, the most under-rated strategist in America, see Edward Mead Earle, “Adam Smith, Alexander Hamilton, Friedrich List: The Economic Foundations of Military Power,” in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Princeton University Press, 1986; Eckard Bolsinger, *The Foundations of Mercantile Realism: Friedrich List and the Theory of International Political Economy*, 2004 (www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2004/Bolsinger.pdf); and Emmanuel N. Roussakis, Friedrich List, The Zollverein, and the Uniting of Europe, *College of Europe*, 1968. See also Edward Luttwak, “From Geopolitics to Goeconomics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce,” *The National Interest*, 20, Summer 1990.

⁸⁰ See Haans W. Maull “Germany and Japan: The New Civilian Powers,” *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1990/91, and Ian Manners, “Normative Power Europe: a Contradiction in Terms?,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40, 20, 2002, www.princeton.edu/~amoravcs/library/mannersnormativepower.pdf. It is worth noting that, though the German concept of Civilian Power and the American concept of Soft Power both emerged at the end of the Cold War, the two are not synonymous. Civilian Power includes economic statecraft and therefore (if implicitly) the idea of “coercion,” Soft Power excludes the economic dimension and is about “cooptation” alone. On German hegemony today, see Andreas Rinke, “The EU Chancellor,” *Internationale Politik*, March 2001, <http://www.ip-global.org/2011/03/01/the-eu-chancellor/>.

This new German *Sonderweg* explains in part France's decision to reintegrate NATO in 2008. The French dream of turning Europe into a "Greater France" came crashing down with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. Since German hegemony has reduced France's role in Europe, Paris has wisely opted for a "High Seas" strategy and a rapprochement with London and Washington. For better and for worse, France's recent activism in favor of military intervention in Libya shows that, when it comes to the use of force, the French, however reluctant they may be to admit it publicly, are still closer to *les Anglo-Saxons* than to the rest of Europe.

By and large, EU political elites today remain from Venus, and the Brussels-based eurocrats in particular are distinctly less interested in "grand strategy" than in this post-modern nicety called "human security."⁸¹ That said, the Mars/Venus opposition captures only one part of the transatlantic divide. In retrospect, the US-EU gap that opened after 9/11 was due to two reasons:

For one thing, Americans and Europeans don't have the same historical experience of war - in no small part because Europeans experienced on two occasions the horrors of modern war on the "home front."⁸² In addition, fifty years of uninterrupted peace under the American umbrella have had the perverse effect of convincing most Europeans that inter-state war is a thing of the past and that intra-state war is just a matter of "risk management" - a point well-captured by Kagan.⁸³

For another, there is an *objective asymmetry* when it comes to the Islamist threat - a fact that Americans too often overlook. Simply put: at its narrowest points (Gibraltar to the South and the Bosphorus to the East), Europe is separated from the Muslim world by only 9-20 miles. The Mediterranean is Europe's Rio Grande. Unlike America, Europe has a large Muslim Street - a situation which calls for a more "indirect approach," one that puts a premium on intelligence, law enforcement, counter-terrorism and covert action.

Interestingly enough, though, the nature of the Long War itself seems to be changing today: along with the death of Bin Laden, the ongoing turmoil in the Arab world may signal a

⁸¹ Thanks to General Petraeus and his team, the French have also recently discovered David Galula (a French theorist of counter-insurgency they had never heard of), and la contre-insurrection is no longer the taboo subject it was in Paris when it was associated with the name of Roger Trinquier. See De Galula a Petraeus: L'Heritage Francais dans la Pensee Americaine de la Contre-Insurrection, Cahiers de la Recherche Doctrinale, Centre de doctrine d'emploi des forces, 2009 <http://www.cdef.terre.defense>

[.gouv.fr/publications/cahiers_drex/cahier_recherche/Galula_Petraeus.pdf](http://www.cdef.terre.defense.gouv.fr/publications/cahiers_drex/cahier_recherche/Galula_Petraeus.pdf)). On the new Entente Cordiale, see Ben Jones, Franco-British Military Cooperation: a New Engine for European Defence?, Occasional Papers 88, EU Institute of Security Studies, February 2011, www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/op88--Franco-British_military_cooperation--a_new_engine_for_european_defence.pdf. On human security, see Roland Paris, "Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?," *International Security*, 26, 2, Fall 2001, <http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~rparis/Paris.2001.IS.Human%20Security.pdf>.

⁸² Even from the perspective of the *longue duree*, there is not even the possibility of a convergence on the idea of a Western Way of War. While the idea of "civic militarism" may well resonate with American collective memory, it can only be met with skepticism by Europeans for whom "chivalric ethos" makes a more plausible paradigm. On the limits of the "civic militarism" paradigm put forward by Victor Davis Hanson, see John A. Lynn, *Battle - a History of Combat and Culture from Ancient Greece to Modern America*, Basic Books, 2003. On the persistence of medieval memory in Europe, see for instance Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940*, Cambridge UP, 2009.

⁸³ The European view of war today is best illustrated by Rupert Smith, *The Utility of force: the Art of War in the Modern World*, Vintage, 2005, and Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War: Terror, Technology and Strategy in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

shift in the center of gravity from the transnational Al Qaeda to the transnational Muslim Brotherhood and, by the same token, from military insurgency to political subversion.⁸⁴ In that respect, U.S. national security practitioners, who until now has focused mostly on the “kinetic” approach, may well discover they can learn a thing or two from the “indirect approach” of their European counterparts.

The adoption by NATO in 2010 of a new Strategic Concept must today be complemented by the re-invention of common transatlantic Strategic Culture. Today, the Pentagon’s aptly-named “Minerva Initiative” is perhaps the most telling sign that Americans are moving from Mars to Minerva⁸⁵ and, given the poverty of strategic thinking in Europe, one can only hope that the EU will establish a similar program.

If there is to be a renaissance of European strategic theory, the new French-British rapprochement at the policy level will have to be complemented by an intellectual Entente Cordiale of sorts combining the best of the British School of international relations and the French School of historical anthropology. Ultimately, it is up to British and French strategic theorists to lead Europe away from Venus and toward Minerva and, along with their American counterparts, to elaborate the intellectual foundations for a common transatlantic professional military education in the framework of the NATO Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies.

One thing is sure: without a re-invention of military education in the various NATO schools, field grade officers on either side of the Atlantic will have good reasons to stay away from war colleges by invoking the legendary General Bigeard: “In every situation, there are always two solutions: that of the war colleges – and the right one.”

Dr. Tony Corn taught European Studies at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute in Washington DC. This article is a follow-up to two previous articles: “From War Managers to Soldier Diplomats: The Coming Revolution in Civil-Military Relations and Peaceful Rise through Unrestricted Warfare: Grand Strategy with Chinese Characteristics. The views expressed here are the author’s own and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of State.

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84 Tony Corn, “The Clash of the Caliphates: Understanding the Real War of Ideas,” Small Wars Journal, March 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/715-corn.pdf>

85 Sean Kay, From Sputnik to Minerva: Education and American National Security, National Defense University, Washington DC, January 2009, www.ndu.edu/inss/docUploaded/DH_65.pdf. For historical background, see Carol Gruber, Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of Higher Learning in America, Louisiana University Press, 1975.