

Lennart Souchon

# Strategy in the 21st Century

The Continuing Relevance of Carl von Clausewitz

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# Preface

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) is said to have murmured the words *Eppur si muove* during the Roman inquisition trial in 1633. The heliocentric world view of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) is a scientific sensation in the Middle Ages and yet is condemned by the Catholic Church as heresy. It is a source of great trouble for the astronomer Galileo, whose observations of the tides make him the first person able to prove this “mathematical model”, as the church calls it until 1822. He conceals his phenomenal discovery that the earth revolves around the sun behind the Latin words in order to protect it. Galileo is not formally rehabilitated in religious doctrine until October 1992, during the term of Pope John Paul II. This drawn-out development illustrates how difficult it is to fundamentally change ingrained ways of thinking and doing things even if new findings compel them to be.

Nowadays, the view from a space station allows the earth to be identified on its heliocentric orbit as a tiny element of the seemingly infinite universe, as an island of life set in great complexity and galactic solitude. While ways of thinking, cultures and forms of rule have drifted apart in certain regions of the world throughout history, in Mesopotamia, Egypt, in the Indus Valley, in Central Asia and in China, the world today is closely connected due to global networks and worldwide travel, trade and services. The urban centres in Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia are linked in real time. The depletability of natural resources, the continued growth of the world’s population and the horrendous possibility that man has to devastate the planet Earth with nuclear weapons are well-known facts. The prosperity and security enjoyed in some parts of the world tremendously contrast with the immense poverty experienced in overpopulated regions. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the rainforests, agriculturally used soil and the seas are elements and bridges that connect rich and poor zones around the world. At the same time, mankind faces a multidimensional threat consisting of international Islamist terrorism, failing states, organised crime, human trafficking, cyberwarfare and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which force us to rethink national security policy.

At the end of the twentieth century, the states of Eastern Central Europe became members of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and the European Union (EU). For them the prosperity, democracy and security in the North Atlantic Alliance appear highly attractive. As in the period after the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), the G20 states are seen nowadays as a broad concert of nations that may dominate international politics in future times.

The Western societies were attacked by the Islamist terrorists on 11 September 2001. The world witnesses a strategic challenge that can ultimately take on apocalyptic dimensions if the tectonic peril of this precarious security situation fails to be comprehended and confined. The North Atlantic states are in agreement regarding the operational level and unite in the fight against Islamist terrorist networks. However, comprehending this altered threat situation and bringing about a strategic realignment in thinking and action are difficult processes comparable to Galileo Galilei's discovery and the Catholic Church's reaction to it. The metaphor "peace is the emergency" frequently cited in the 1970s proves to be fitting for the day, the dangerous enemy being beyond grasp with traditional patterns of thought.

Another aspect renders peaceable optimism out of the question: Predominant number of crises and armed conflicts arise today within societies and at the same time have transnational networks. The fight against international terrorism demands completely different ways of thinking, strategies and capability profiles to be developed for modern armed forces. But political and military decision-makers have great difficulty in abandoning their outdated analytical methods and decision-making procedures for handling security policy issues and adapting to the requirements of the present. Global conflicts involve different value systems and cultures and fundamentalist radicalisation. It must be doubted whether the bureaucratic institutions are indeed able and willing to change traditional ways of thinking. Regarding those challenges, there is a need for a complete overhaul in strategic thinking and action with the aim of defining new approaches to capability profiles and forces structures.

The Western military interventions in Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa reveal a common pattern. They have been planned at the operational level without a precise political purpose, holistic and intermediate goals or an appropriate allotment of military and civilian resources and are shortsighted in the way they are being conducted. They are not succeeding in establishing stable conditions of peace and threaten to fail if foreign troops are withdrawn. This holds equally true for the Russian engagement in Syria or for the involvement of Saudi Arabia in Yemen.

An added factor in Germany is the moralising dimension in the basic attitude towards international operations. It is enhanced in parliamentary committees for party-political reasons by an invocation of ethics aimed at regimenting rational government decisions. A holistic management of Bundeswehr operations is only possible if security policy is based on a strategy. Long-term military operations at the beginning of the twenty-first century call for clear objectives, appropriate military capabilities and an adaptable leadership culture. It is just as hard to imagine consensus-based innovations and restructuring measures being implemented in major military organisations as it is in civil enterprises, even though conviction in

management theory is that organisations with a hierarchical structure are more adaptable and faster in bringing about change. Especially in organisations in which the management is innovative and flexible that new ways of doing things can be adopted quickly. These results also pervade the constant efforts the Bundeswehr undertakes to bring about reform. While the security challenges grow in complexity, there is a striking stoic reluctance to take innovative and decisive action.

Prudent policymakers develop a holistic strategy aimed at achieving a stable state of peace before intervening in regional conflicts. They first define the political purpose before ordering plans for a military operation to be developed and then seek wide political support through discourse.

One important prerequisite for initiating future-oriented changes is that of understanding the basic phenomena of our day. In *Maxims und Reflections*, Goethe postulates: “What is true, good and excellent is also simple and always the same in itself, however it makes its appearance” (Koopmann, 2006, 187).<sup>1</sup> Clausewitz condenses this contemporary finding in his empirical analysis of war and concludes: “Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult” (On War, 119). This sentence is a generalisation of a finding that Clausewitz applies exclusively to war.

The noted rise of national and collective responsibility for global developments in international politics, the likewise limited ability to comprehend matters holistically with the goal in mind and the continued operational use of armed forces overcome from the Cold War era are creating a dangerous situation in today’s polycentric world. The declining power of the West unlocks a power vacuum which is filled by an expansionist China and aggressive Russia. Global threats such as mass migration, international terrorism and climate change are intensively discussed without leading to determined measures of the international community to curb these developments.

The major threats in the twenty-first century are continuous regional wars as well as terrorist attacks and the failure of international political cooperation due to populist conservative nationalism.

The destruction of the World Trade Center and the infliction of damage on the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, operations in which 19 suicide attackers killed more than 3000 people and caused damage totalling more than a trillion US dollars at a cost of around USD 100,000 US dollars, must be rated as a benchmark of the probable effectiveness of Islamist hyper-terrorist attacks.

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<sup>1</sup>All German quotations from *Vom Kriege* refer to: Carl von Clausewitz. *Hinterlassenes Werk. Vom Kriege. Achtzehnte Auflage mit erweiterter historisch-kritischer Würdigung von Professor Dr. Werner Hahlweg (On War. Eighteenth edition with additional historical-critical commentary by Prof. Dr. Werner Hahlweg)*, published by Dümmler in 1973. Page references for pages 1-1251 are the same for the 19th edition, published in 1980. All English quotations are taken from *On War* in the edition translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989. The individual books are referred to by Roman numbers and chapters by Arabic numbers. All other German quotations are unconfirmed translations.

Islamist terrorists use their clout as a means to counter the influences of Western culture and the media-propagated fear as a weapon to achieve their goals. Generations of Muslims are growing up in the Maghreb, Caucasus and Middle East, in Central Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia, in parts of Europe and in the USA in a climate marked by poverty, a high population density and growth rate, poor education, a lack of prospects, high youth unemployment and corruption. These desolate social, economic and political conditions are further exaggerated by ethnic and religious conflicts, aspirations for secession and civil wars. In such a political climate, regional terrorist organisations such as Hezbollah and Hamas operate tactically with Islamic social welfare institutions and fund schools, kindergartens, hospitals and mosques. They provoke, polarise, mobilise and radicalise young Muslims. The terrorists recruit their fighters from this reservoir, going on to indoctrinate them, put them through terrorist training, provide them equipment and, finally, use them for their purposes. (Cf. Rice, 2005)

To break this vicious circle of poverty, a lack of prospects, violence and twisted Islamist doctrine effectively, it is necessary to develop a deeply founded understanding of this particular situation in the twenty-first century that takes account of the political, economic, social, religious and historical circumstances. To do so, it is helpful to pose leading questions about the power of Islamist doctrine, the social reality in the states under the Islamic crescent, the primordial violence of the peoples, the elites that hold political power and their goals. A critical look must likewise be taken at the way the policies of Western democracies are perceived and at the influence they exert. The essential elements of terrorist indoctrination must first be understood in their entirety before methods can be developed to counter the ensuing threats effectively. Every form of terrorist violence and every battle are characterised by the actions and reactions of the actors involved. Thus, thoughts on cause and effect, the influence of probability, chance, danger, effort and the relation between purpose and means are of pivotal importance.

The forms, natures and intensities of war have all been in constant flux throughout human history. “The semibarbarous Tartars, the republics of antiquity, the feudal lords and trading cities of the Middle Ages, eighteenth-century kings and the rulers and peoples of the nineteenth century—all conducted war in their own particular way, using different methods and pursuing different aims” (On War, 586). Their characteristics are blind instinct, the play of probability, chance and pure reason, which form a continuum, as well as the purposes and objectives in war, which combine with danger, physical effort, nebulous intelligence and other forms of friction.

It is trivial to demand postmodern nations to comprehend issues and their causes, to take prudent strategic action and to abandon a way of thinking that remains linked to the dimensions of classical state wars and is getting bogged down in the hustle and bustle of events of the day. In addition, numerous difficult obstacles have to be overcome in the real world to ensure that the strategic political focus is on the far-reaching employment of armed forces. This phenomenon can also be observed in the long-term pursuit of purposes both in all fields of politics and in major business enterprises. The majority of the current security challenges can be neither understood



nor resolved in day-to-day politics. Having the courage to use one's own mind, to see things in a wider context and question them, to define one's own positions and to consider the big picture when structuring things is a pivotal demand of the philosopher Immanuel Kant and an essential idea of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Kant destroys the illusion that there is truth without thinking. "Although Clausewitz's program of studies included Kant's writings, and he subsequently read the works of other systematic thinkers, he was anything but a trained philosopher" (Paret, 2015, 32). This observation must be heeded, especially since the challenges of the twenty-first century call for the political transformation process to begin now, the Cold War being history for more than a generation.

What is needed in the twenty-first century is a recollection and application of strategic thinking and acting, a renewal of the Enlightenment, so to speak, which generates the courage required to focus one's own mind and those of others on the future. There is no way of individual entities thinking about what tactics they can apply to optimise their own prospects of success anymore. Required is a prudent endeavour for a common strategy that provides for use of interdisciplinary intelligence and experience, for analytical searches for solutions to be conducted, for careful consideration to be given to critical objections and, finally, for ideas, initiative and courage to be shown. Decisions must be focused on achieving lasting results. An excellent way of developing strategies for solving complex sociopolitical and international problems is the intense interplay of creative, knowledgeable and experienced public figures, politicians, diplomats, business people and economic experts, scientists and military leaders. This applies to all fields of politics and business, though especially to security policy.

The author of this book proceeds from the political, military, economic and social situation in the beginning of the twenty-first century. He examines select principles and insights of Clausewitz's theory that can on the one hand serve as the basis for strategic thinking and action in a general sense and on the other hand can be exploited in a course of studies for future executives. This strong focus on the reality constitutes a new approach in the application of Clausewitz's theory.

A strategist thinks in broad contexts and focuses on the picture as a whole rather than on its parts. For him progress is a synonym for successful action, that is to say, specific action to achieve a higher purpose using the available means. According to Clausewitz, the ultimate purpose of every war is to achieve an advantageous peace. War encompasses the entire spectrum of military operations from armed observation in peacetime to total defeat of the enemy, and thus crisis, conflict and war as we conceive them today. This instrumental definition shall serve as the reference frame and the conceptual basis for this book.

Whenever major deficits are diagnosed in the areas of strategy, the relation between purpose and means and the use of the military instrument, there are two ways of achieving long-term improvements in the situation. One way is to competently advise decision-makers so that they grasp what security challenges were important in their entirety, understand what the central elements of a strategy are and thus can find appropriate guidance for making their decisions. The final step involves presenting methods for making strategic decisions and ideas on how to

organise and provide strategy consulting at the government level. The other is to provide up-and-coming executive personnel education in strategic thinking and action.

In philosophy, *genius* is a mental benchmark. It combines intelligent, holistic thinking on a broad education basis with the ability to act rationally in pursuit of a particular purpose. Engaging in prudent, professional, creative and at the same time critical dialogue with policymakers requires a few more qualities, such as courage, imagination, sound judgement and clear personal standpoints. The demands a person must meet to be deemed a *military genius* or its business equivalent, a top executive, are very high. This is why theory-based education must be introduced for up-and-coming executive personnel. It, above all, requires a lot of persuading to be done with the present-day decision-makers in armed forces, governments and the business world and the issue to be made the subject of a broad public debate.

As a Navy officer and scientist, the author was faced with the fundamental question about the rationality of military planning and the use of armed forces and was unable at first to find any convincing answers. What theoretical foundations and philosophies govern strategic action? Is the essence of things understood? Is thinking impartial and unprejudiced? How is criticism handled? Does reason rule? Are there clear standpoints established and are there decisions based on them prudent, courageous and far-reaching? Do I defend my standpoint convincingly and argue correctly?

Given the fast pace of day-to-day life in that decade, most of these substantial questions seem to be utterly secondary and thus remain unanswered. People have a sense of deep-seated insecurity and dissatisfaction, but are also critical and curious. In his quest for theoretical foundations, the author has studied the works of Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Hegel, Clausewitz, Jomini, Moltke, Mahan, Ruge, Liddell Hart and Aron. Clausewitz is in the author's view the only one who examines the essence and rationality of strategy, looking at the nature of things in his attempt to glean new insights, and places his findings in a higher theoretical context, proceeding from what he learns in practice. Nevertheless, even he encounters immense opposition and substantial criticism. His main work *On War* is not easy to decrypt due to the profound and dichotomic way in which complementary pairs of terms and their relationships are presented. Despite this, the pith of his work is of exceptional value and a basis of singular significance both for the study of strategy and for strategic thinking and action. Items of fascinating, timeless knowledge on the one hand and contradictions and unclear or sketchy passages on the other constitute both an inspiration and an obstacle to studying the insights he gained almost 200 years ago, but they must on no account be generalised apologetically, idealised as doctrine or indeed canonised.

My thoughts and doubts about the rationality of acts of policy lead to a practical question: How can strategic thinking be exploited in government, the armed forces and many other areas of society? In the mid-1980s, I served as an admiralty staff officer at the German Ministry of Defence, bearing responsibility for drafting the *Konzeption der Marine* (Naval Concept) and providing input for the *Konzeption der Bundeswehr* (Bundeswehr Concept), the *Defence White Paper* 1985 and the

*Militärstrategische Zielsetzung der Bundeswehr* (Military Strategic Objective of the Bundeswehr). I started my work on each of these tasks with a blank sheet of paper. Nobody around me was able to give me a convincing answer when I asked for a definition of “concept”. Looking into it more closely, I realised that a concept was a clearly outlined basic idea, and nothing more. It is not a strategy, let alone a war plan. This vacuum with respect to strategic ideas and the deficits in strategic thinking are still a problem today. For example, the White Paper 2006 on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr was presented to the public as a strategy but in comparison with the equivalent American, British and French documents lacks the necessary compelling logic and clear statements on the relation between purpose and means expressed in Clausewitz’s core ideas. The Federal Ministry of Defence redefined the Federal Republic of Germany’s security policy interests in the *Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien* (Defence Policy Guidelines, 2011). The degree to which they are implemented in the country’s national security provision remains to be seen.

It took hundreds of years for the geocentric Ptolemaic world view to be replaced by the heliocentric view of Copernicus and Galileo. Devising a course of study in which the focus is no longer on opportunistic improvisation but on strategic thinking and action is also a long process, and one whose success is not assured at all. We can at any rate wonder when we will hear the words *eppur si muove*.

Potsdam, Germany

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction



**Abstract** Souchon presents select lines of thought and insights of Clausewitz’s theory and methods of implementation to improve the strategic culture in the twenty-first Century. This book pursues three objectives: The First is to present Clausewitz’s findings strictly based on his original work “Vom Kriege” (On War) from a present-minded perspective, interpret them in depth and highlight their timeless significance for understanding social conflicts. The Second is to expose the potential of the main elements in Clausewitz’s work and to show a methodology and depth of thought associated with strategic assessments in the twenty-first Century. The Third is to clarify whether these elements help in forming and implementing strategies and improving strategic culture as a whole. Souchon argues that this is the only appropriate approach to fathom the phenomena of twenty-first Century wars.

When the United Nations Security Council votes on 17 March 2011 a no-fly zone in Libya, Germany, Russia, and China abstain. This is a debacle for German security policy because it fails to support its closest allies, the USA, France and the United Kingdom in an important decision, without any consulting taking place *within* the Atlantic Alliance, and snubs them in the way it handles the making of a singular decision.

Another case of short-sighted strategic involvement is the armament and training of Kurdish forces fighting the Islamic State in northern Iraq beginning 2014. The consequence is the strengthening of Kurdish ambitions to form a united Kurdistan upsetting the governments of Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Similarly questionable is the German involvement in the civil war in Mali in 2016. This engagement is not the result of a sound strategic analysis but the attempt to help overstretched French forces.

The interests and goals of German security policy have not yet been defined in the reunified Germany. Under constant pressure from the media, which Peter Sloterdijk aptly calls stress producers (Sloterdijk, 2011), action is taken on the basis of the priorities of day-to-day politics, often intermingled with departmental and party politics, rather than in line with long-term political purposes, let alone a higher-level national strategy concept. Ministries struggling with bureaucratic busywork,

armed forces focused on day-to-day actions, political foundations and research institutions devoid of ideas and a scientific community concentrating on theory work mostly operate in isolation beside one another, though often seemingly against each other. The lack of specifics between the Chancellery and the ministries in the field of strategy, for example, the reality of interministerial staffing, party-political dictates and the basic overly cautious attitudes of some decision-makers reduce every result to the lowest common denominator. There is no courage to take important decisions with primary regard to the matters themselves. Multilateralism is a method in international relations, yet it is propagated as a strategy in German politics. Voting procedures in the European Union and NATO, which require every nation to approve decisions, force them to substantiate their positions. In Germany, however, the political will to define these positions does not exist.

A national security strategy or grand strategy defines values, interests, risks, goals and methods of action at regular intervals, sets priorities, links the political will to the methods and means for implementing it and is a subject of public debate. Models in the use of such a procedure are to be found in France, the United Kingdom and the USA. A grand strategy is only practical if the public is informed consistently and thoroughly and given the opportunity to get involved. Intensive communication and critical discussion with all the institutions of political and social relevance are required to devise a strategy and ensure its continuity.

If Germany could exist as a land of bliss, policy-making without a strategy would be a possibility. As it cannot, however, the lack of a strategy renders it a less oriented and often unpredictable actor in international politics in Europe, the North Atlantic world and at the global level.

The transformation from a bipolar world order to a polycentric disorder opens powers such as China, Russia and India possibilities for their struggle to increase strategic influence in global politics. The situation is extremely dangerous due to Russia's occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and East Ukraine and China's military outward reach for Islands in the South China Sea. Smaller nations like Iran, North Korea struggle for nuclear weapons is destabilizing regional orders. Japan, South Korea, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are forced to review their own political commitments.

The security of the European states is threatened in the twenty-first Century by numerous state failures in North Africa and in the Broader Middle East. This opens the door in the Arab States for religious wars, organised crime and mass migration. Terrorist opponents take advantage of grey areas in which they generate initiatives and conduct their attacks where and when they choose. They are strongly influenced by religion, ideologies and the cultural traditions, disregard international legal norms and Western moral standards and often approvingly accept dying for their causes. The Western armies fielded to fight these adversaries are tangled to occidental principles, the strict observance of international law and are conducted under the public pressure to minimize fatalities and casualties. The tectonic shift in the nature of these armed conflict has not yet been fully grasped. The lengthy NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan is merciless in the way it reveals this failure.

European Nations are particularly affected by the lack of strategic culture. There are two ways to remedy this. One is to establish a modern and competent strategy consulting body for governments that is able to identify *ex ante* the main security risks and challenges and do the groundwork for strategic decisions to be made, proceeding holistically and looking to the future. The other is to provide up-and-coming executive personnel education in strategic thinking so that they learn how to do practical work with a greater strength of mind for the purpose of achieving political goals with the allotted means.

Strategy consultation can only be successful if it calls for rational, matter-of-fact analyses and assessments and a methodical discussion and consideration of possible solutions *prior to* an event. A consultation project of this kind is difficult to implement as all the higher military and civilian educational institutions provide superficial instruction on the concepts and strategies of NATO, the European Union and select countries, but do not go into them in depth. In addition, major institutions tend not to teach their up-and-coming executive personnel to think for themselves, to engage in critical discourse and to act with courage, but rather to efficiently achieve pre-defined goals under stringent conditions. This does not permit holism, critical discussion and logical transparency. It is time to provide select future leaders targeted education that gives them a command of strategic thinking. How can this be achieved?

First, it is necessary to define the German term *Politik* and the words *war*, *primacy of politics* and *strategy*. Then, it is necessary to define a *standpoint* and the resulting *political purposes*. What is true has to be distinguished from what is false and logically substantiated. In complicated areas of international politics, a stringent connection between theory and reality must be established. Finally, it is necessary to bring in approaches that take account of the character traits and leadership qualities of the political and military decision-makers, while not forgetting the influence of *probability and chance*. The wisdom of Clausewitz's strategy theory extends far beyond the realm of security policy and can be applied both to a business enterprise's disputes over markets or hostile takeovers and to the development of a value-based management culture within large companies.

International interventions most often lack clearly stated *political purposes*. Equally important aspects are ultimate and intermediate goals, strict deadlines, and the ability to evaluate the opponent's actions professionally and proactively during a mission and to respond to them effectively. Without a strategy and prior assessment of the relation between purpose and means, soldiers are ordered into action with a patchwork of tactical targets and in the end blamed for not having achieved the vaguely framed goals. What is called for is a method of thinking that is in line with Kant's *sapere aude*. The ability to understand the challenges of today in their entirety, to structure them and to develop possible solutions to them is becoming an important resource in modern security policy affairs and setting standards in the selection and education of future elites.

There is no modern, present-minded interpretation of Clausewitz's method of thinking and pith of what he writes that supports the study of his principles and their application to problems related to international politics, the armed forces or the

economy in the twenty-first century. So far, there has only been sectoral research on the focal points with which, a classification scheme in which and intensity levels at which Clausewitz can be used for analysing a war and advising decision-makers. To holistically understand and evaluate concrete decision-making situations on the foundation of Clausewitz's theory and develop options for strategic action, it is necessary to create a universally applicable edifice of ideas. Concrete notions on this issue are presented in the following section.

This study offers strategy scholars a foundation for their studies of strategy based on Clausewitz's theory in a clear and simple language. It is in addition a structured compendium that forms a theoretical foundation for specific lines of thought and action and develops distinct ideas for implementing them in present and future security policy affairs. The book starts with a political science style introduction to the subject of war as a part of social life and not of art or science. It reveals how late in the history of man unbridled conquests combined with the brutal expansion of power or the struggle of societies for survival became subjects of theoretical reflection. The history of strategy undoubtedly begins with the Greeks. Nevertheless, holistic definitions of strategy are not found until the eighteenth Century. We currently live in an extended period of peace, but a look at European history shows that this state is the exception rather than the rule. Many major wars of the past began with a number of minor ones that first flared up in separate trouble spots and only later combined to form devastating conflagration, with their strategic dimensions only having been grasped in hindsight. There are numerous minor wars today in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America. The inability to deal with these wars is blatant. This means that the dimensions and characteristics of the dangerous challenges of the early twenty-first Century have so far been neither recognised nor understood holistically. Hence, future consequences cannot be estimated soundly.

This book examines and answers the question of what a strategist can learn from a social science thinker who developed his ideas in the context of his experiences in the Napoleonic era. It all depends on how Clausewitz's analyses and findings are used. Formulated with philosophical acumen, the timeless axioms created by Carl von Clausewitz build upon a broad interpretation of the historical setting. His theory of war focuses on what is genuinely perceptible and can be verifiably accounted for and assessed by means of facts. This phenomenological approach, coupled with classical rationality, reveals the essence of war. Clausewitz deals with politics, war, peace and strategy in a holistic context and presents his findings with elaborate philosophical abstraction. This hermeneutic interpretation of reality, the resulting consequences and their abstraction are an important method of gaining knowledge. When applied to real events, his theory is of timeless value and indispensable to us in the twenty-first Century.

This book depicts Carl von Clausewitz's background, his development and the pith of what he states as a Prussian war theoretician. He benefits from a unique philosophical climate in Berlin. The plan to provide education in strategic thinking, strategic action and strategy development in the twenty-first Century does not hence start at scratch and can be implemented holistically and substantially if it is thought

through, ordered, abstracted and framed along the lines of the pith of what Clausewitz states. My study presents an interpretation strictly oriented on Clausewitz's "Vom Kriege" in correlation to select aspects of his theory from a twenty-first Century perspective. It argues that his theory can be applied in the methodical formation of strategies for responding to terrorist forms of war and the lack of power on the part of collective institutions and individual nations to do so effectively.

My book is a result of the enhancement of the international reputation of Clausewitz's work in the past few decades due to numerous representations and historical interpretations of it in German, English, French, Russian, Japanese and many other languages. There is a wide range of specialist literature on Clausewitz, the most prominent examples being the theoretical works of Hahlweg, Paret, Howard, Bassford, Aron, Schössler, Strachan and Echevarria II.

In contrast, Carl von Clausewitz's key findings and their operationalization are only discussed in a small segment of contemporary literature on war. The complexity of the aforementioned dichotomous statements and the extensive body of secondary literature, which mostly focuses on military history or the textual interpretation of the philosophical methodology, constitute a major obstacle to the implementation of Clausewitz's work. I have no knowledge of any convincing text exegesis of *On War*—in a comprehensible, interesting and plausible fashion—coupled with hermeneutic interpretations of his findings that are based on a holistic perspective and are apt for analysing future challenges.

This book has three objectives. The first is to present Clausewitz's findings strictly oriented on his original work "Vom Kriege" from a present-minded perspective, interpret them in depth and highlight their timeless significance for understanding social conflicts. The second is to expose the potential of the main elements in Clausewitz's work and to show the methodology and depth of thought associated with strategic considerations in the twenty-first Century. The third is to clarify whether these elements help in forming and implementing strategies and in improving the strategic culture as a whole. While often overlapping, these objectives also severely diverge.

In other words, the intention is to use Clausewitz's findings to fathom the phenomena of twenty-first Century wars. This is the only approach that enables these phenomena to be comprehended, tendencies and belligerent actors to be grasped and strategic thinking and action to be developed. As outlined before, this approach to analysing the theory of war is designed to serve as a seminal work for the education or self-education of future leaders—be they commanders, politicians, presidents or CEOs—or guide them in their private studies. Great commanders are not born as such—their knowledge and skills are the products of their intensive study of the theory of war and their practical experience. Likewise, strategies are not the fruit of inspiration but have to be developed methodically and purposefully on the basis of the ground-breaking findings that have evolved over the last few centuries.

Here is a brief summary of this genesis. Thought starts to be given to the command of large armies about two thousand five hundred years ago, at the time of Confucius. The military objective of defeating an opponent without a fight is said

to be an important insight of *Sun Tzu*, the Chinese strategist (approx. 550–480 B.C.). His principles on waging war with circumspection are of timeless value. From the Greek thinkers to the Roman, from *Machiavelli* to *Frederick the Great*, numerous figures in history have sought to grasp the characteristics of war and put them down in writing. Most of these works can only be understood in the context of the period in which they were written and in association with the arsenals, military capabilities and tactics of their day and do not contain any statements that are of lasting importance to us.

Two early nineteenth Century theoreticians on strategy *Carl von Clausewitz* and *Antoine-Henri Jomini*, established contrary schools of thought that are still highly relevant today. The two scholars include analytic observation and the demand for knowledge, reason and responsibility in political and military action in the development of theories on war. Both provide ways of thinking for analysing war that take account of both intellect and reason.

Jomini is considered a systematician with respect to warfare who goes in almanac fashion and abides by the rules in structuring Napoleon's campaigns in his mind, focusses his analyses on battles and publishes his set of rules and recommendations for the successful commander in *The Art of War* (1837). He has the unique ability to grasp all the facets and difficulties inherent in a strategic situation and to predict how it will develop. Before the Russian Campaign, Jomini forecasts operational and logistic bottlenecks and the possibility of failure to Napoleon I, but is not taken seriously. The disaster encountered by the French Army during the Russian Campaign (1812/13) and its subsequent rout confirm Jomini's assessment (Cf. Langendorf, 2008, 243). A digression in the sixth chapter is devoted to his work.

Effectively acting as an opposite to Jomini and his abidance by the rules, Clausewitz abstracts war on the theoretical level, distinguishes its core elements and phenomena and sets them in relation to the superordinate policy in *On War*. His terminological precision, logic, dichotomous way of thinking and careful consideration of the elements, which he combines in an abstract overview of the tendencies and characteristics of wars, bear important testimony to the history of ideas and enjoy high international recognition. Heuss honours Clausewitz's work, saying that "because the intellectual exactitude of the book emphasises what is lasting and simple, the work of a logician who knows how to talk about his subject with linguistic force and yet with a kind of grace." (Heuss, 1951, 67) In his analysis entitled "*Clausewitz-Engels-Mahan: Grundriss einer Ideengeschichte militärischen Denkens*" and published in 2009, Schössler calls for an in-depth study of Clausewitz's findings: "What matters, though, is that I believe it takes an eye trained to understand Hegel or the entire classical philosophy to discover such dimensions in the text *On War*." (Schössler, 2009, 106).

This highlights the dilemma. The casual reader quotes Clausewitz *à la carte* to enhance the legitimacy of his arguments without taking the effort to fathom their deeper meaning. Others, such as *Aron* and *van Creveld*, distort Clausewitz's statements by reducing the meaning of the Fascinating Trinity, as the German term *Wunderliche Dreifaltigkeit* is now known in English, to the people, the army and the government and then dismissing him as an apologist for wars between countries

and battles of annihilation. The British strategist *Liddle Hart* accuses Clausewitz of having expressed his theory of war in a far too abstract and complicated way. Without expanding on the substance of Clausewitz's statements, he polemically says: "By the iteration of such phrases Clausewitz blurred the outlines of his philosophy, already indistinct, and made it into a mere marching refrain—a Prussian *Marseillaise* which inflamed the blood and intoxicated the mind. In transfusion it became a doctrine fit to form corporals not generals. . .and reduced the art of war to the mechanics of mass-slaughter." (Liddle Hart, 1967, 355) This emotional criticism, which is based on dubious assumptions, reveals the differences in the levels of mental abstraction. Liddle Hart cultivates an image of military forces "tended to ensure that the forces were composed of good 'fighting animals'." (ibid. 353).

Clausewitz's ideas on how to comprehend war and strategy and his demands on commanders- or, by analogy, on decision-makers in politics and business—are above those of 'fighting animals' and are of lasting value to strategic thinking to this day. His book is neither a compendium of military doctrine, nor a field manual nor a dogmatic set of rules for supreme commanders. It is utterly wrong to abstract and classify his work as such.

Clausewitz abstracts war across its spectrum as the continuation of politics and condemns any immature criticism in the *Two Notes by the Author (On War, 69 f.—see excerpts in Chap. 4.1)*. Offering us a theory with philosophical arguments, he does not confine himself to the character of war, but also analyses human factors, the *moral qualities* of the commander—meaning his intellect and temperament—and the virtues of the army. He was not yet 24 years old when he developed his first theses and devises basic ideas on the subject of strategy to which he will adhere all his life. It is not until the end of his period of activity (approx. 1827–1830) that he manages to systematically integrate these ideas into an overarching whole (Cf. Aron, 1980, 25).

Almost two hundred years later, there is still intensive interest in his theory, which lays bare the innermost characteristics of social conflicts and the very own relations in them. He comprehends the rational, irrational and emotional elements of war as a single phenomenon and war itself as an instrument of policy. Having carefully studied 130 campaigns and spoken about experiences to Gneisenau, who witnessed the fighting on the side of the 13 North American colonies opposing British colonial rule, Clausewitz defines the characteristics and dependencies of the wars waged during his era. Convincing in their logic and precision, though not always transparent, in their wording due to the language of his day, his lines of thought are so complex and comprehensive that they arouse great interest among military commanders, scientists, politicians, and even economists to the present day. In contrast to the theses of eighteenth and nineteenth Century philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Fichte and Kiesewetter, Clausewitz's empirical analyses of war are grounded in his own experiences. He selects core elements of war and their relations and elaborates on them. His theoretical analyses and practical assessments, which he structures dichotomously and condenses deductively at varying levels of consideration, form a logical whole.



On the other hand, Clausewitz does not leave us a consistent compendium, but an inductive collection of material in varying states of editing which he collected over decades, but did not put into any final order. Concentrating on the basic ideas helps to overcome many difficulties. Once the gist and characteristics of the most important arguments, principles and recommendations are laid bare, timeless conclusions can be drawn. Clausewitz provides the intellectual assistances for this.

For our scientific and military analysis purposes, we use a selection of basic elements of his theory to comprehend the paradigmatic wars of the twenty-first Century and understand their characteristics. In times of insecurity or radical political change or in view of dangerous combinations of risks, studying the pith of what he wrote gives a lot of food for thought and valuable insights that help us to grasp the essence of war, the overall situation, important factors, frictions and demands on the moral qualities of the actors systematically and holistically, to show how they bear relation to each other and to evaluate them. Of course, the train of thought, argument, choice of words and style of writing of a German classic cannot meet modern expectations of language. It is rather a knowledge of history and philosophy, a great skill in abstract thinking and a certain feel for language that are of particular advantage for interpreting his work.

Carl von Clausewitz is a Prussian war theoretician who describes the essence of war and synthesises the dichotomous acquisition of knowledge about war in the form of the *Fascinating Trinity*, which combines *primordial violence* and the *play of probability and chance* with the *instrument of policy* (See Chap. 3). This description and synthesis are unique in that they offer intellectual freedom for strategic thinking and action. They reveal the characteristics of events in their entirety, permit hermeneutical access to the rationality of purposeful action while account is taken of the effects of probability and chance and allow a grasp to be gained of the impact of emotionality and moral factors on the actual course of each war. In accordance with Hegel's logic of essence, they are an enduring link between the explicit state of war and the implicit events in a war. They are an intermediary between being and acting in war.

Clausewitz's ideas are particularly helpful for specifically identifying the essential features in complex twenty-first Century decision-making situations, structuring them and developing possible courses of action. This interdisciplinary interpretation of his theory is developed as an independent approach in this book. Experience shows that, things being as they are, knowledge, understanding and mastery of Carl von Clausewitz's ideas enable effective structures to be established for estimates of the situations in today's wars in Asia, the Middle East, Africa as well as South America, a profound understanding of the factors to be gained and holistic assessments of the actors involved to be made and prevent superficial entanglement in the backward-looking way of thinking that is common today.

When the tendencies and factors of the *Fascinating Trinity*, for example, are applied to theatres of war around the world, it is possible to identify *the opponent*, the *play of forces* and the impacts of *primordial violence*, *hatred and enmity* and to evaluate their relations in terms of an overarching whole from the points of view of a politician and a commander. When the situation in an international operation is

complex, analysing it by means of the Fascinating Trinity, the appropriateness of means, which is established by comparing one's own capabilities with those of the opponent, and the relation between purpose, objective and means can foster clarity of thought in strategic thinking and substantially improve individual judgement. This logical sequence of steps, from the theory to specific case studies and practical application, can yield key findings for shaping future security policy. If this is achieved, the admittedly difficult discursion into Clausewitz's theory can be considered highly successful.

This study is structured so as to present the development of strategic thinking on the basis of the pith of what Clausewitz stated, with the Fascinating Trinity as their synthesis, and to postulate how advantageous use could be made of it in the present day.

The *first* chapter outlines the history of Europe as a belligerent genesis up to the tectonic changes following the East-West confrontation from the political science point of view. The very first strategic question concerning the motives for and causes of war renders it interesting to look at Prussia and the French Revolution because the relationship between the middle classes and war is still the determining social element of war today.

In the twenty-first century, mass-army wars between countries fighting to defend their territories against a clearly identified enemy have become a rare fringe issue. They have been replaced by hybrid wars in geographically remote regions against terrorist groups. The opponent fights covertly, using light weapons and taking advantage of his familiarity with the local conditions. He learns fast and is quick in adapting his action to changes in the situation. Fighting such an opponent is a very difficult challenge. The fundamental change in the character of wars at the beginning of the twenty-first Century calls for commanders to be educated in strategic thinking and—building on this—the method of waging war to be modified.

The use of Clausewitz's theory in strategic analyses of future wars demands two steps to be taken that provide the necessary knowledge: The first one, taken in the *fourth* chapter, involves the portrayal of the situation in Prussia at the beginning of the nineteenth Century, the life and work of Carl von Clausewitz in the light of his day and the belligerent and philosophical milieus in which he socialises. Previously a great power, Prussia is degraded to a French satellite state after its defeat in 1806. The end of Prussia's independence and rational politics and its vassal-like submission to Napoleon's sceptre inspire enormous reform in both the social domain and the military that is backed up by a revolution in education. Prussia's social reorganisation takes place in a climate of political creativity and is marked by an immense intellectual profundity. This is then followed by a discussion of three interpretations of Clausewitz's theory: the historical, the philosophical and the present-minded interpretations. In the subsequent chapters, primarily the third interpretation, the one related to the present, combines with the profound understanding of meanings of philosophical words and of reality as a process to form a holistic basis for analysing and assessing wars and the consequences for strategic thinking in the future.