

CLAUSEWITZ – What is war ?

War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. It is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will. International law and custom softly limit the use of force. Force is the means of war and its aim is to compose one's will to the enemy in order to render the enemy powerless.

“War is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst. War has to be a mix between force and intellect, but force has to be stronger than intellect. Force can empirically lead the intellect and is limited only by factors inherent to war empirical factors. War is cruel and sharp, but for Clausewitz, civilized nations are less cruel, even if moderation on the ground is not accepted (being logically stupid). Civilized nations are less cruel thanks to their social conditions and their relations between them. But war comes from passion and even civilized people can be dominated by passion instead of mind. The two motives for which war is conducted are: hostile feelings and hostile intentions.

War is not a rational act, or at least not merely, even between civilized nations. War is influenced, in its conduction, by emotions. The degree of emotionality do not depend on civilization but on conflicting interests and the length of conflict. Methods of warfare, that avoid savagery, come from the intellect. But there is no logical limit to savagery. However, means has to be proportionate to the end. Strength being wasted is contrary to any statecraft principle; then the abstract world of ideas has to be connected to the real world.

If we want to force the enemy, we have to put him defenseless or in a position that makes this danger probable. There is an interaction between the protagonists: until one didn't undermine the other one, the last one can still overthrow its enemy. In fact, **resistance** comes from the means at disposition and the strength of will. More the motivation for war is strong, more the willpower is intense. Strength of will is difficultly accountable, but a good estimation enables to adjust our judgements on the probabilities of victory. From the empirical situation, it can be deduced a series of “laws of probability”, studying a series of actions, the enemy's character, his situation, etc. The probabilities of real life replace the “Extreme” and the “Absolute”, elaborated by the theory (intellect). Temper comes from practice, facts, not from mental thoughts, intellect.

War never breaks out unexpectedly; it is possible to evaluate the enemy's will for war. As perfection does not exist, the human's shortcomings constitute a moderating force.

As war is constituted of different battles, each enable to determine how will be the following ones. Knowing that material consideration have to be taken into consideration, the trend to the extreme is then moderated. As generals know war can be long, the first decision, effort and concentration of forces are not all they might be, but the first clash can be determinant (or not) of the whole conflict. From the other side, the ultimate war outcome is not to be regarded as final, but can be considered as a “transitory evil” by the enemy, who will try to change the status quo to his favor in the future. Then, until the signature of a peace agreement, it is a better to continue attacking, to avoid a shift of power.

Resources for war are coming from the country. It considers the physical features and the population. It is impossible to use all resources entirely in one time. It corresponds also to the eventual allies. Clausewitz, however, has doubts on the possibilities of entire cooperation, as allies have never exactly the same aims or desires.

The political object. It corresponds to the original objective of war and is determined by military objectives and efforts to afford it. As war is dealing with reality and not abstraction, the political object cannot be the standard of measurement, as being relative or biased by ones' perception. However, often the political object affects directly the result of it and alter calculation of probabilities. The smaller the penalty we ask at the opponent, the less he will deny it to us; the smaller the effort he makes, the less you need to make yourself. If our political aim is modest, it will be not so important and we will abandon it easily in case of problem.

If the political and the military objective are the same, like for example the conquest of a province, it is perfect. If there are not identical, another military objective, more adapted to the political purpose, has to be selected.

The less involved the population, the more political maneuvers are required. The less strains exist between belligerents, the more political maneuvers will be decisive.

Haste influences badly the war result. Speed, determined by subjective causes (as haste) influences the duration of the conflict and its results.

If two parties feel reciprocal hostility, only a desire to wait for a better moment before acting can restrain them. In fact, in a conflicting situation, inaction cannot be considered by the concept of balance of power, one will want to dominate the other one if he has the possibility (this does not mean that soldiers are combating all the time; in numerous conflicts, only a very small part of the time is occupied by military action and it is not an anomaly.) The balance is the result of combined effects of aim and strength. Only when the issue is unsure, for example if both protagonists have the same forces, peace is possible. The principle of polarity means that interests of each side are opposed and each one aims at victory. It is a zero sum game, one lose if the other one win.

There are two distinct forms of action in war: attack and defense. However, for Clausewitz, "polarity does not lie in attack or defense, but in the object both seek to achieve: the decision".

What is the interest for one at a time is not for the other at the same time. Defense is a stronger form of fighting than attack. The superiority of defense explains most of inaction period in war. But one can have interest in attacking and the other one in defending. Then, the impulse created by the polarity of interests can be inoperative. At the other side, postponing an attack can mean accepting to attack in worst conditions in the future.

The only situation a commander can fully understand is his own. There is imperfect knowledge of the situation. His evaluation of the enemy's strength comes from unreliable intelligence. As men tend to overestimate enemy's strength, partial ignorance is a major factor of delaying the progress of

military action. Delaying danger let more possibilities for restoring balance between the belligerents. The greater is the tension and the war effort, the shorter are periods of inaction. And inversely.

War is a gamble, being bound up by probabilities and chance (luck). The element in which war exist is danger, that is based on improbability. Then, only mathematical calculation is not enough to understand war world. As it is in human nature to be fascinated by uncertainty, human do not always choose certainty and they can consequently choose war as a possibility. The art of war deals with living and moral forces. That is why it cannot attain certainty. Uncertainty is balance by courage and self confidence, two essential factors in war. The greater courage and self confidence are, the greater margins for uncertainty can be high.

War is a serious means to a serious end and resemble to a game of chance. All the vicissitudes of passion, courage, imagination and enthusiasm are merely its special characteristics.

War is an act of policy. Only when war is complete, absolute in its violence, war is governed by the laws of its own nature and not anymore by policy. But generally, the settings imposed by the policy predetermine the way war is conducted. However, war is a pulsation of violence, varying in strength and speed, but always long enough to be influenced on its course and its goals by a superior intelligence. Then policy can continue to influence war. In that view, war is a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried out with other means. Simply, war requires special means in order that the trend and design chosen by the policy are not inconsistent with the means. More war is related to passion, more it will let military matters dominate political war conduction. But all war can be considered acts of policy and never something completely autonomous. "the more powerful and inspiring the motives for war, the more they affect the belligerent nations and the fiercer the tensions that precede the outbreak, the closer will war approach its abstract concept, the more important will be the destruction of the enemy, the more closely the military aims and the political objects of war coincide, and the more military and less political will war appear to be."

Even if in certain conflict the political part does not dominate, it is always an act of policy. Then it is just a question of proportion. The commander has to evaluate in what kind of war he is embarking : one where policy dominates or at the contrary one in which military part dominates.

If war objectives are not so relevant, the population has to be motivated, rather than being temper as their nature should want it.

War is composed of a trinity, three codes of law:

- The people, which corresponds to the passion (blind natural force), that is to say violence, hatred and enmity
- The Commander, that has to evaluate chance and probability
- The Government, which has to decide the policy and applicate subordination, authority.

The objective is to develop a theory that maintain a balance between the three tendencies.