Strategy Research Project

On Politics – Building Upon Clausewitzian Theory

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On Politics – Building Upon Clausewitzian Theory

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Abstract

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On Politics – Building Upon Clausewitzian Theory

Success in the current global environment demands that military and political

strategic leaders expand beyond the framework provided by Clausewitz. Clausewitz's

incomplete work, *On War,* remains a key element in the U.S. military's approach toward

strategy development.[1] However, since the end of World War II the United States has

experienced diminishing effectiveness in using military power to achieve political

objectives. This diminution of effect is in part caused by the strict application of a

strategic concept written for a very different global political environment. This does not

mean that Clausewitz' excellent framework should be set aside. Rather, strategic

leaders should begin to look at ways to expand upon the framework that Clausewitz

started. With an expanded framework in place it will then be possible to see current

issues from different perspectives.

Background

United States political-military strategic doctrine and policy development is

heavily influenced by the work of Carl Von Clausewitz. His ideas provide the framework

for the ways that senior U.S. decision-makers are taught to think about strategic issues.[2]

For example, it is unlikely that many U.S. decision makers would argue with the

assertion that war is conducted to support political aims. Clausewitz' work provided the

theoretical background for the limited war concept, which is a conscious choice to limit

military strategic options.[3] Given the fact that his theories have contributed greatly to

the conceptual underpinning for why and how U.S. decision makers use military force

and that there is a growing perception of ineffectiveness, perhaps it is time to review the

efficacy of Clausewitz' constructs for the current age.

Clausewitz' Concepts

In book one of *On War*, which describes his vision of the nature of war, Carl Von Clausewitz argued that "war is not merely an act of policy, but a true political instrument."[4] Implied, but never stated, is the likelihood that Clausewitz perceived other political instruments to be used outside the portion of the political spectrum encompassing war. He concludes book one by introducing the reader to the concept of the "paradoxical trinity" which is composed of violent emotions, hatred or enmity that influence the people, the play of chance and probability that must be understood and played to advantage by the armed forces and their leaders, and finally, the acts of reason that governmental leaders use to link the act of war to political aims.[5]

Clausewitz' work was concluded in an age when virtually all of the political entities on the international stage looked alike, having been built upon the foundations of the Treaty of Westphalia. The Treaty of Westphalia, concluded in 1648 ended the Eighty Year War between the Dutch and the Spanish peoples and the Thirty Year War within the Holy Roman Empire.[6] A key legacy of the treaty was that it documented for the first time the concept of territorial sovereignty. Sovereignty is defined as supreme power, especially over a body politic or freedom from external influence.[7] Thus, Clausewitz' theories on war and international politics revolve around entities, composed of "trinities" that look like territorially sovereign States, controlled by a powerful central government and supported by an armed force making war against one another.

Influence on Limited War Doctrine

Clausewitz' writings have led strategic leaders to lean almost completely on force-on-force based operational approaches, also referred to as limited war. Clausewitz wrote, "it follows, then, that to overcome the enemy, or disarm him – call it

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what you will- must always be the aim of warfare."[8] As noted earlier, this concept

provided the conceptual underpinning for the limited war theories that took hold in

American policy circles in the 1950's.[9] It is important to note that Clausewitz' viewpoint

of the "trinity," as a territorially-defined sovereign nation state, in all likelihood led him to

the logic of a force-on-force centric approach. In his day, national leaders, propped up

by their military, made interest-based political decisions for their nation states. The

populace was primarily a pool for resources that very rarely had a say in external policy.

In that environment, the destruction of another nation states' military power was

sufficient to force that opponent to accept the winner's policy dictates, because its

leader's real basis for rule and ability to exert power internationally were undermined.

Center of Gravity

In *On War*, Clausewitz mentions a center of gravity nearly 40 times; in most of

those cases he is describing operational military situations.[10] Unfortunately, he never

had a chance to describe what he meant by the term. One definition for center of

gravity calls it "the point where the mass of an object is equally balanced."[11] While

discussing the trinity, Clausewitz wrote "our task therefore is to develop a theory that

maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between

three magnets."[12] Is it possible that he saw the center of gravity as a political object that

maintains balance within a nation while providing an impetus for war?

If accurate, this could also explain why U.S. policy makers have had such a hard

time grasping Clausewitz' concept of a center of gravity. U.S. military theorists have

interpreted the center of gravity as a military target that is key to winning wars.[13] This

fixation is likely derived from the fact that Clausewitz primarily wrote of the center of

gravity while writing about operational campaigns. Might he have written that way

because at the time when he was writing he saw the military force as the political center of gravity? Among U.S. theorists, Antulio Echevarria came closest to discussing the center of gravity as a political object, yet he too argued that it was something to be targeted by a military thrust to bring about the fall of the opponent.[14] This focus on the center of gravity as a military target is used to further justify a limited war focus. However, what if it was never intended to be a military target, but rather a target for political effect that would change the balance within the trinity thus unhinging the opponent's desire or ability to continue the conflict? If that is the case, then the center of gravity lies within the trinity as a moral or physical imperative that creates and maintains political conflict between nations or entities.

Based upon that logic, the center of gravity is a concept or object which stirs the passions for war within the populous or creates the leader's logic for war or underpins the belief in the power of the armed forces to bend fate to the advantage of the state. This in some ways is reminiscent of another trinity related to war. In his writings on the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides wrote that the three strongest motives behind war are fear, honor and interest. These align nicely with Clausewitz' trinity; honor stirs the emotions at the heart of the people, interest is derived from the logic of the leadership and fear arises when the belief in the power of the state to protect itself (or shape chance to its purpose) is called into question.

The Modern Trinity

The Clausewitzian world of sovereign states governed by ordained leaders is no longer a global reality. The advent of self-determination[15] and the rise of global interest groups[16] sparked by communications technology are changing the relationships within the trinity. Today, in many situations, it is much easier than it was in Clausewitz' era for

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a population to replace leaders that pursue policies that are not in line with popular desire. More importantly, if the population shares the leader's views, then defeating its armed forces or replacing its current leadership is unlikely to bring the lasting political change desired. The people will in time find new leaders who espouse a shared viewpoint and together they will rebuild tools to drive their own vision of political change.

Another equally important challenge is the erosion of national sovereignty. Today, likeminded individuals can find each other across international borders, create political philosophies, identify leaders and become politically active. Groups ranging from the peacefully oriented International Red Cross and Amnesty International to militant organizations like al-Qaida and ISIS represent the interests of populations across sovereign borders. Nevertheless, they are serious players in the international political arena.

Finally, the armed forces are no longer the sole tool available for political actors to use to influence change on the international stage. U.S. military doctrine has outlined what it refers to as the four instruments of power; diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME).[17] Diplomatic, information and economic tools can be used to create political effect on external populations in addition to military power. Conceptually, these four instruments might replace the armed forces as the arbiters of chance in Clausewitz' trinity.

Questions Remain

Clausewitz himself considered the work, *On War*, that has been passed down to be an early draft.[18] He clearly understood the limitations of his force-on-force theories when he wrote "the aim of disarming the enemy … is in fact not always encountered in

reality, and need not be fully achieved as a condition of peace. On no account should theory raise it to the level of a law."

While Clausewitz' work remains influential for those who study the political implications of war, questions remain. For example, what does the rearrangement of the balance of power between the elements of the trinity mean for the conduct of war today and how can the war making instrument of power be better integrated with the other instruments of power to more effectively conduct full-spectrum international politics? Before addressing these questions it would be useful to look back at the U.S. application of military power to determine how successful it has been, and where it was unsuccessful, to identify if the misapplication of Clausewitzian strategy contributed to the lack of success.

Meeting War Objectives

To determine if there is truly a reason for concern requires an assessment of the U.S. military's historical record of success at delivering on the political objectives provided by the Nation's leaders at war's outset. This assessment is done by comparing the pre-war political objectives used by U.S. leaders to justify or promote the conflict against the ultimate outcome of the conflict. Unfortunately, a simple yes or no assessment would likely lend itself to significant dispute regarding the assessed outcomes, while providing insufficient scope to detect trends. Therefore, a more complex set of criteria were created to support analysis of the United States military's record at achieving the political objectives.   The criteria include a slightly nuanced assessment of whether some or all of the objectives mentioned were met as well as a determination on how long the political change endured. For this assessment, political change is considered lasting if it held for longer than thirty years. Thirty years

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represents the likely span of time required to prevent an individual from being called to fight the same foe twice. If the two parties return to war within thirty years for largely the same reasons then the peace is considered transitory.

To determine if failure to meet political objectives is attributable in part to inappropriate application of Clausewitzian doctrine two additional scoring criteria were assessed.   The two additional criteria look at the war environment to determine first, if the U.S. opponent politically resembled Clausewitz' trinity and second, to ascertain if the United States military strategy for the engagement relied primarily upon a force-on-force (or limited war) concept.

Assessment Criteria

The criteria developed to assess the outcome of each conflict for this analysis are provided in Table 1. The numbers, described as plotting values, are assigned to assist with visualizing the results of the assessment. They are not intended to imply any relative value between the potential outcomes.

The criteria used to determine whether or not the United States' opponent in the war was composed of a "trinity" that resembled those common place at the time when Clausewitz wrote was assessed on a yes or no basis. If the U.S. opponent's leadership was not easily replaced by the population and looked to the nation's armed forces as the basis for its legitimacy then it was assessed to be a Clausewitzian opponent.

Table 1. Conflict Assessment Criteria

Outcome Description	Assessment Criteria	Plotting Value
Lasting Victory	Lasting political changes accepted by opponent	7
Transitory Victory	Transitory political changes accepted by opponent	6
Lasting Marginal Victory	Some, but not all, lasting political changes accepted by opponent	5

Transitory Marginal Victory	Some, but not all, transitory political changes accepted by opponent	4
Lasting Draw	No initial objectives are achieved, but other lasting political changes are negotiated	3
Transitory Draw	No initial objectives are achieved, but other transitory political changes are negotiated	2
Transitory Defeat	Opponent's political objectives are accepted on a transitory basis	1
Lasting Defeat	Opponent's political objectives are accepted on a lasting basis	0

Finally, the question of what type of strategy the U.S. military used was assessed on a yes or no basis. If the U.S. strategy focused primarily upon defeating or degrading the opponent's military force, then it was considered Clausewitzian or a limited war strategy. It should be noted that although the concept of limited war did not become commonplace until the 1950's for the military strategist, capability limitations or limited war aims sometimes dictated a force-on-force strategy. Therefore, some of the U.S. strategies prior to the 1950's are assessed as limited war strategies even though the term did not come into vogue until much later.

Assessment Results

To conduct the assessment, the pre-war objectives were compared to the post-war results for each United States active military engagement, from the American Revolution to the ongoing War on Terror. Passive engagements such as peacekeeping in Haiti or Cold War deterrence are not included to focus results on warfighting strategy. The results of the assessment are provided in Table 2 below. The table lists the engagement assessed, the year the engagement started, the U.S. political objectives, and finally the assessed political outcome along with the two additional assessment criteria. The engagements that the U.S. military conducted against various Native American tribes during the 19th century were combined into a single assessment. For

the five engagements which began after 1996 the assessment provided is based upon

the trend of the engagement as of February, 2016, with the exception of the Libyan War

where the political objectives were not met.

Table 2. Political Objective Assessment of United States Military Engagements

U.S. Military Engagement	Year Started	U.S. Political Objectives	Assessed U.S. Political Outcome	Clausewitzian Opponent?	Limited War?
American Revolutionary	1776	- Independence from British rule[19]	Lasting Victory	Yes	Yes
War of 1812	1812	- Ending impressment of seamen - Free trade - Ending incitement of Native Indian attacks[20]	Lasting Marginal Victory	Yes	Yes
Mexican-American War	1846	- Annexation of Texas[21]	Lasting Victory	Yes	Yes
American Civil War	1861	- Restore the Union[22] - Prohibit expansion of slavery[23]	Lasting Victory	No	No
Native Indian Wars	various	- Facilitate U.S. settlement on Native American territory[24]	Lasting Victory	No	No
Spanish-American War	1898	- Cuban independence from Spanish colonial rule[25]	Lasting Victory	Yes	Yes
World War I	1917	- End unrestricted submarine warfare campaign[26] - Freedom of navigation and trade - Arms Reductions - Adjustment of colonial claims - Restored sovereignty - Establish League of Nations[27]	Transitory Victory	Yes, but quickly replaced with representative government invalidating agreements	Yes
World War II	1941	- Prevent Defeat of Great Britain[28] - Contain Japanese Expansion and negate Japanese contribution to Axis power[29] - Unconditional surrender of Axis powers	Lasting Victory	No, the Axis governments represented popular opinion at war start	No
Korean War	1951	- (UN) Expel North Korean forces south of 38th parallel[30] - (US) End Communist aggression - (US) Unify Korean peninsula[31]	Lasting Draw	Yes	Yes
Vietnam War	1965	- Contain Communism - Protect South Vietnamese government[32] - Win "hearts and minds"	Lasting Defeat	No	Yes[33]
Grenada Invasion	1983	- Protect American citizens - Replace Communist regime[34]	Lasting Victory	Yes	Yes
Panama Invasion	1989	- Remove Manuel Noriega from power[35]	Undetermined, but trending toward a Lasting Victory	Yes	Yes
Gulf War	1991	- Uphold international order - Remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait - Force compliance with U.N. resolutions[36]	Transitory Victory	Yes	Yes

Serbia	1999	- End ethnic killings in former Yugoslavia[37]	Undetermined, but trending toward a Lasting Victory	Yes	Yes
Afghanistan War	2001	- Remove Taliban regime from power - Eliminate safe haven for al-Qaida terrorist group[38]	Undetermined, but trending toward Transitory Draw	No	Yes
War on Terror	2001	- Defeat entities that use terror[39]	Undetermined, but trending toward a Transitory Draw	No	Yes
Iraq War	2003	- Remove Saddam Hussein from power - Iraqi de-militarization - Prevent terrorists access to weapons of mass destruction[40]	Undetermined, but trending toward a Transitory Marginal Victory	Yes	Yes
Libyan War	2011	- Protect pro-democracy Libyan citizens from violent suppression.[41]	Lasting Defeat	No	Yes

Eighteen United States military engagements were assessed. The assessment found nine lasting victories, two transitory victories, one lasting marginal victory, one transitory marginal victory, one lasting draw, two transitory draws and two lasting defeats. To help visualize the results of the assessment over time the results were plotted in Chart 1 using the values provided in Table 1.
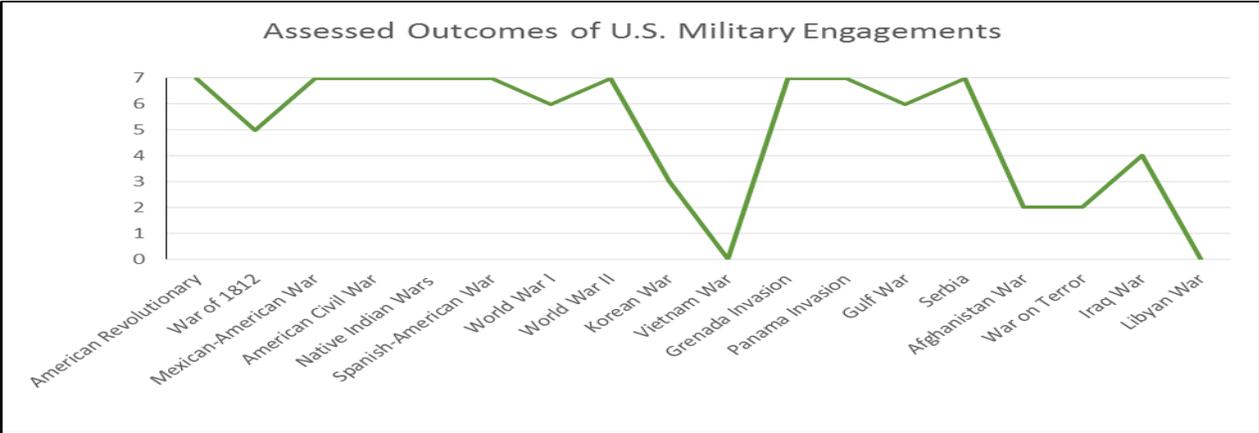

Figure 1. Assessed Outcomes of U.S. Military Engagements

It is perfectly reasonable to quibble about the assessed outcomes for some of the engagements. For example, the assessment of the political outcome of the Vietnam War as a lasting defeat is based upon the fact that the United States concluded a separate peace with North Vietnam which resulted in the South being overrun by 1975.

However, the engagement might instead have been assessed as a transitory marginal victory based upon the political status when the Paris Peace Accord was signed in 1973. Nevertheless, given that the war was still ongoing when U.S. forces where withdrawn, it is assessed as a lasting defeat. For the purpose of this paper the exact outcome of each assessment is less important than the trend of the assessments.

Further insights about the applicability of Clausewitz' theories can be drawn from the Table 2 data. For instance, in the first 165 years of U.S. history (1776-1941), before military strategists strictly adopted Clausewitzian based limited war concepts, it conducted seven wars. That equates to one war every 23.6 years, or less than one war per generation. In the following 75 years there have been eleven wars, or one war every 6.8 years. Additionally, in the first 165 year period which ended with the start of World War II, U.S. military power delivered some level of political success in all eight of the conflicts fought; six of the eight were lasting victories. In the 75 years since adopting a strict limited war approach, the U.S. military delivered some form of political success in five of the eleven conflicts; lasting victory was delivered only three times.

Next it is important to look at the strategies pursued and understand if they were relevant to the perspective of the Clausewitzian model. To gain a better understanding of the engagement environment a crosswise comparison of the results of each war against the criteria of a limited U.S. military strategy and Clausewitzian opponent is provided in Table 3. In each block, the total number assessed based upon three groupings of possible outcomes are provided. The first group represents full success in delivering the desired political outcome (lasting victory). The second grouping, labeled "incomplete victory," represents those outcomes that delivered some desired political

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effect short of lasting victory. Transitory victories along with lasting and transitory

marginal victories were included in the "incomplete victory" total.   Finally, the remainder

of the possible outcomes were consolidated under the heading "non-victory"; the

outcomes included under that heading are lasting and transitory draws, in addition to

lasting and transitory defeats.

Table 3. The Influence of Clausewitzian Theory on Strategy vs Opponent Outcomes

	U.S. Limited War Strategy	U.S. Total War Strategy
Clausewitzian Opponent	6 Lasting victories/ 4 Incomplete victories/ 1 Non-victory	0 Lasting victories/ 0 Incomplete victories/ 0 Non-victory
Non-Clausewitzian Opponent	0 Lasting victories/ 0 Incomplete victories/ 4 Non-victory	3 Lasting victories/ 0 Incomplete victories/ 0 Non-victory

In its history, the United States military fully delivered the desired political results

in the three instances when it executed a total war strategy. The results delivered by

limited war strategies for the U.S. military are more mixed. Limited war centric

strategies delivered six lasting victories, four "incomplete" victories and four non-

victories in the fourteen engagements where they were employed.   Interestingly, when

the opponent did not fit the mold of a "trinity" as it existed in Clausewitz's era, limited

war (or force-on-force) strategies failed four times while total war strategies succeeded

three times.

Interpreting the Results

There appears to be a clear break in U.S. policy regarding the application of

military power following World War II. Military power is applied far more frequently and

with less success at delivering the desired political effect in the later period. As noted,

this shift coincided with the embrace of limited war over total war theories by U.S.

political and military strategists. Given that Clausewitz' force-on-force concepts

underpin the limited war theory it is tempting to suggest scrapping Clausewitz's ideas. However, deeper reflection suggests that Clausewitz' theories, as currently applied, may be misused rather than being misguided in concept.

In the engagements assessed, when a limited war strategy was used against a Clausewitzian opponent, some form of victory was delivered nine out of ten times. The sole exception was the lasting draw delivered during the Korean War. That failure to deliver the desired political change was driven by the Chinese entry into the conflict, which changed that war's nature, rather than a failure of strategy. Thus, when applied in situations that mirror those prevailing at the time Clausewitz wrote, his force-on-force concept appears to deliver a high rate of success. Therefore, his theories still carry limited appeal.

Nonetheless, it is important to understand why U.S. military strategy has failed to deliver success in the other instances. Each of those engagements (i.e. Vietnam, Afghanistan, Libya and War on Terror) were fought against opponents that do not fit the Clausewitzian mold. Each war was fought with a limited war strategy against entities with significant populations that supported their leader's position. One possible reason for those defeats is that since the population supported the opponent's war effort, then the political center of gravity did not exist with the armed forces or fighters as assumed by Clausewitz' force-on-force approach. Perhaps in those cases the political center of gravity lies with the populace and a different strategy is required. In fact, it is possible in those instances that, another source of political power within the DIME would be more effective at shifting the political center of gravity away from conflict.

Instruments of Power and Strategy

When discussing DIME, U.S. doctrine emphasizes that military planners should not rely solely on military power to win wars. Instead, all four instruments of power should be brought to bear while waging war. While true, this doctrinal treatment tends to invert the purpose of the instruments of power as expressed by Clausewitz. The weakness with the way the instruments are addressed in military doctrine is that the focus is on using them to win the war. For Clausewitz, the purpose for using the elements of power, including the use of conflict, is to achieve political change, not to prop each other up. Thus, although the other DIME elements may help support military strategy, what is lost is the fact that they should all be focused on political objectives. Successfully executing military strategy is secondary to the political purpose and in some cases may not be necessary or helpful. U.S. strategic leaders need to shift their thinking and perhaps must oversee a structural change in the United States Government foreign policy apparatus to become more effective in wielding the DIME instruments of power.

Expanding the Clausewitzian Model

In some sense, Clausewitz left his readers with an unfinished story. He wrote of war, as an element of politics, but never provided the rest of the story. Had he completed the story it might have been titled *On Politics*, with an embedded chapter *On War*. Since Clausewitz never completed his views on the subject, we must look elsewhere for insights on the purpose of international politics and the other elements that contribute to success in the international arena.

There are many definitions for the term politics that can be summarized to mean that international politics is the complex of relations and actions between populations

aimed at improving a population's position within the global common.[42] However, in keeping with Clausewitz' trinity, populations don't act in the global commons directly, they have governments or leaders (in the case of non-sovereign entities) that act on their behalf using various instruments of power. Political conflict (or tension) arises between two such entities when the deeply held beliefs (honor) of the populations clash or when their leaders see opportunity for advantage (interest) or when the perception of growing weakness (fear) drives one to strike before it is too late. With a better understanding of the players and purpose in international politics the next step in filling out a political model is to understand what actions, other than war, contribute to international political success.

The concept of the DIME provides a useful starting point for developing a theoretical model which expands upon Clausewitz' ideas for conducting war to encompass a wider spectrum for the conduct of international politics. Some of the concepts presented may appear similar to the current discussion on hybrid war.[43] However, the term hybrid war appears to place an undesired emphasis on the military aspect of international politics and is therefore not used here. Table 4 provides an outline of some key aspects of an international politics concept that weaves all elements of national power into a more cohesive effort to create political effects internationally.

Table 4. A Conceptual Framework for On Politics

	Political Spectrum			
Action Descriptor	Advocacy	Negotiation	Pressure	War
Political Act	Persuade	Influence	Coerce	Compel
Political Target	Leaders/ People	Leaders/ People	Leaders/ People	Leaders/ People
Dominant Instruments	Information	Diplomacy	Economics	Military (Force)

According to Clausewitz, "war is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."[44] Since he considered war to be a political act, by extension there should be other political acts using different tools to create change in the political environment. Notionally, Clausewitz' assertion could be re-written using the model above as "negotiation (descriptor) is an act of diplomacy (instrument) to influence (political act) others to do our will." To structure a strategy for political change targeted at specific opponents in the global environment interlinking each of the tools available would constitute what has been referred to elsewhere as grand strategy.[45] Unfortunately, there is not enough of this type of thinking being done within the U.S. government today.[46]

Within the framework, an advocacy campaign would be an act of information to persuade another actor in the international political arena to do our will. An advocacy campaign is likely to require the expenditure of the least amount of effort and resources to execute a campaign. Information should be the dominant element of an advocacy campaign, however other elements of power may contribute. For example, the military instrument of power might contribute infrastructure for delivering information, while

diplomacy may be used to prevent another actor from blocking the delivery of information to the targeted audience.

Moving up the spectrum of political acts in terms of the level of effort and resources needed for execution is the act of negotiation. In negotiation, actors trade actions or resources in return for an improved position in the global common. Diplomacy is the primary element of power used in negotiation, but other elements may contribute as objects for barter. For instance, an actor may trade military or economic support for political change.

Continuing to increase the level of effort or resources needed to effect political change is the act of pressure. Through the use of properly targeted sanctions or embargoes entities coerce others to change political course. Pressure may be enhanced by the threat to use other elements of political power to harm the political position of the target in the global common.

Finally, war is the most costly political act on the spectrum. The U.S. military is fairly adept at the use of the other instruments of power to support a war campaign as documented in military policy. However, it must cast aside its singular reliance on limited war strategies in favor of a more nuanced approach, which in some cases should include erosion-based strategies.

When conducting international political campaigns each of the tools employed must be targeted against the appropriate segment of the trinity to shift the center of gravity away from the eventuality or continuation of conflict. When fear is the driver of conflict, then the perceived imbalance in force must be addressed. When interests are involved, then the leadership's belief that their interests are served by conflict must be

targeted. Finally, in honor-based conflict, the beliefs embedded in the population must be changed. Identifying the appropriate target and creating a comprehensive and interwoven international political campaign to deliver the desired change is a daunting task.

To be more effective at weaving the political acts described into a coherent grand strategy will require the focused efforts of a governmental organization with oversight over each instrument of national power. That organization would need to identify strategies both within and across the political spectrum for employing the various elements of power to create the desired shift in the political environment. The United States lacks an organization with sufficient structure or authority to develop and direct the execution of grand strategy. The National Security Council lacks the oversight and authority that it would need. Within the Department of Defense, the Combatant Commander Theater Security Cooperation planning structure provides some room for grand strategic thought, however, once again combatant commanders can only request, rather than direct support outside the military aspect of the DIME. Although not new, the call for reform of the international policy making apparatus remains an important strategic leadership challenge for the United States. The framework for international relations visualized in Table 4 may provide strategic leaders with a useful starting point for a discussion on roles and missions for an organization to oversee U.S. grand strategy. Whether or not that conversation ever occurs, U.S. military policy is also in need of revision.

Military Strategy Implications

The key to improving U.S. military strategic application of this concept is for military planners and leaders to re-open the strategic playbook to craft strategies

necessary for the achievement of the desired political change. It would be best if the

United States had a grand strategic planning cell which was responsible for

understanding the political composition, or "trinity," of each opposing international

political actor. This information would be invaluable to tailoring DIME campaigns

against potential opponents, and might prevent a repeat of grand strategy mistakes,

such as imposing economic hardship sanctions against an Iraqi regime where the

population has little to no influence on replacing their leaders or shaping foreign policy.[47]

Against that type of political actor a campaign targeted against the leadership or its

military support is needed. However, given that it is unlikely the U.S. government will

create a department of grand strategy in the near future it is imperative that military

planners take political configuration into consideration to select strategies tailored to the

political dynamics of the opponent before recommending a military solution.

Current U.S. military doctrine recognizes annihilation and erosion as the two

fundamental strategies for waging war.[48] An annihilation strategy is tailored to destroy

an opponent's military capacity to fight. It is also referred to as a force-on-force strategy

and is an important component of the previously discussed concepts for limited war.

Erosion is described as causing pain to erode the opposing society's or leadership's

political will. These strategic concepts mirror the thoughts of Hans Delbruck, who wrote

of two basic forms of strategy; Neiderwerfungsstrategie, which equates to annihilation

and Ermattungsstratagie, which equates to exhaustion.[49]   Delbruck's annihilation

strategy closely mirrors that enshrined in United States military doctrine. However,

Delbruck's concept of exhaustion is targeted at weakening military power over time,

unlike the U.S. military approach to erosion which is targeted at the population or

leadership. Other theorists believe the concept of exhaustion has more complicated roots.

J. Boone Bartholomees argued that the term exhaustion contained two different concepts, exhaustion and attrition, that are sometime conflated.[50] He describes physical attrition as a campaign to wear down the opponent's military capability over time. Physical exhaustion he describes as a broader campaign of attrition targeted at the opposing nation as a whole. He then goes on to discuss moral attrition and exhaustion which are recombined to target the will of leadership and populations.

Finally, total war is a blunt instrument encompassing elements of exhaustion, annihilation, and attrition into a single strategy. It works because as overwhelming force is broadly applied, eventually the appropriate blow is struck to break the opponent's will or capacity to fight. U.S. military planners should break the limited war or annihilation strategy mold that was struck following World War II to identify creative ways to employ other strategies such as erosion, attrition and total war when they fit the situation and the opponent.

The construct provided in Table 5 is intended to help military planners during operational design to think about which of strategies might fit the situation they face best. Thucydides motivations for war (fear, honor, interest) categorize why an opponent has taken the situation to the brink of war rather than accede to U.S. political demands.[51] Among them, honor, since it is the only one that can survive defeat, is regarded as the strongest and most lasting. Interest is regarded as the weakest, because once it is clear that victory is not possible, it is no longer in the interest of the opponent to continue fighting. The political configuration axis is based on the preceding

discussion regarding the configuration of the "trinity." The purpose of the table is to help

guide the military strategist to target the portion of the "trinity" where the center of

gravity can be tripped with the most appropriate application of power.

Table 5. Using Political Configuration and Motivation to Identify Potential Military Strategies

		Political Configuration	
		Clausewitzian	Representative
Motivation	Honor	Annihilation	Exhaustion
	Fear	Attrition or Annihilation	Attrition or Annihilation
	Interest	Attrition or Annihilation	Attrition or Annihilation

Against a Clausewitzian opponent force-on-force strategies, such as attrition or

annihilation, are appropriate for the reasons Clausewitz cited.   Against a non-

Clausewitzian or representative political arrangement, force-on-force strategies, are

unlikely to force a population to give up on their deeply held beliefs. Therefore, an

exhaustion strategy is required. However, against a representative opponent fighting

based upon fear or interest, destroying or reducing through attrition the opponent's

military power may be sufficient to force the population to accept that either their fears

have been realized or their interests will not be attained through further war.

Information of this nature should be provided in the mission analysis section of the

Campaign Planner's Handbook or other U.S. Military strategic planning policy

documents.[52]

Case Study – War on Terror

The ongoing War on Terror provides an interesting canvas upon which to display

the power of this conceptual model. U.S. political leaders have cast the War on Terror

as a struggle to defeat those that use terror as a weapon. Unfortunately, that definition

of the enemy has proven too ambiguous for planners to craft a winning strategy. A

more effective strategy requires acknowledging that the war on terror is really a war against radical Islamists who take literally the Koran's exhortations to conduct war against non-believers.[53] More importantly, it requires acknowledging that the terrorists are representative of a segment of the Islamic population that is not isolated within the borders of a single nation state. The center of gravity for this opponent lies in that multi-national population's honor-based interpretation of the Koran requiring them to conduct war against non-believers.

Given that understanding, the United States should take a step back from its current military annihilation-based strategic approach to craft a broad-based international political approach as depicted in Table 6. First, it should implement an advocacy campaign that makes it clear that the United States does not oppose Islam, however, it will not tolerate those who teach or advocate for versions of Islam that exhort its members to violence. Second, a negotiation campaign, conducted in conjunction with the advocacy effort, would seek to identify and influence leaders in the Islamic community to find and eliminate those who promote radical forms of Islam. Third, pressure, through economic means, would be applied both against the terror leaders and those populations that support radical forms of Islam to adopt a more moderate viewpoint. Finally, if each of the preceding political campaigns proved unsuccessful, then a war of exhaustion would need to be employed against the populations supporting radical Islam to compel adoption of a more moderate viewpoint.

Should it come to war, the exhaustion campaign might employ space and cyber capabilities to deny the targeted population access to services that they have taken for granted. It might also include using air or cyber capabilities to shut down services in

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communities where a sizable majority of the population supports radical Islamic
teachings, while sea power might isolate the radical population and its armed
representatives from the weapons systems it needs to grow its power. The bottom line
in the war on terror is that an annihilation strategy will not deliver lasting results. Even if
the ISIS or al Qaida's terror network were completely destroyed tomorrow, recent
history tells us that the population which supports radical Islam will spin out a new terror
organization to represent them on the world stage. The United States must stop
employing Clausewitzian-based strategies for situations where they do not apply.

Table 6. Political Campaign Sequencing of Tasks for Instruments of Power in War against Islamic Jihadism

	Information	**Diplomacy**	**Economics**	**Military**
Advocacy and Negotiation	- Identify and target populations supportive to Islamic jihad - Persuade Islamic jihad supporting populations to moderation - Convince moderate Islamic populations of U.S. and allied support to eliminate Islamic jihadi elements - Prepare global populations for follow-on pressure campaign	- Prevent blockage or contradiction of advocacy campaign - Gain moderate Islamic and global allied participation in advocacy campaign - Gain global allies for follow-on pressure campaign	- Identify and insulate U.S. economic interests from effects of follow-on pressure campaign - Develop economic hardship campaign targeted at leaders and populations that support Islamic jihad - Develop economic efforts to weaken Islamic jihadi military instruments of power	- Provide logistic and technical support for other elements - Respond as directed to acts of terror - Develop erosion-based war strategy targeted at Islamic jihad supporting populations
Pressure	- Inform Islamic jihad supporting populations of purpose for pressure and steps required to end pressure - Maintain support of moderate Islamic and global populations for pressure campaign - Prepare global populations for follow-on war campaign as necessary	- Gain/retain moderate Islamic and global allies participation in pressure campaign - Gain global allies for follow-on war campaign	- Conduct economic hardship campaign targeted at leaders and populations that support Islamic jihad - Conduct economic efforts to weaken Islamic jihadi military instruments of power	- Provide logistic and technical support for other elements - Respond as directed to acts of terror - Prepare to conduct war campaign

War	- Inform Islamic jihad supporting populations of purpose for war and steps required to end war - Maintain support of moderate Islamic and global populations for war campaign	- Gain/retain moderate Islamic and global allies participation in pressure campaign	- Conduct economic hardship campaign targeted at leaders and populations that support Islamic jihad - Conduct economic efforts to weaken Islamic jihadi military instruments of power	- Execute erosion-based strategy targeted at leaders and populations that support Islamic jihad - Respond as directed to acts of terror

Conclusion

Whether or not Clausewitz understood the limitations of his theories is immaterial. The U.S. military historical record shows that limited war strategies do not deliver lasting political change when the impetus for war resides within the populace. The foundations of U.S. political-military doctrine must expand beyond the incomplete works of Karl von Clausewitz to improve the way it conducts international politics, including the act of war. Although he certainly set the stage for the political application of military force in the world of his time, he did not have the chance to complete his work to account for changes to the balance of power within the "remarkable trinity." The model presented in this paper provides a basis to start the conversation on ways for the U.S. to improve its conduct of international politics by expanding upon Clausewitz' extraordinary work.

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