

94-25

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

CLAUSEWITZ AND THE GULF WAR:
THE POLITICAL-MILITARY DYNAMICS IN BALANCE

CORE COURSE II ESSAY

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Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE 1994		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1994 to 00-00-1994	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Clausewitz and the Gulf War: The Political-Military Dynamics in Balance				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT see report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 12	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

INTRODUCTION

Carl von Clausewitz was the first military theorist to recognize and articulate in his writings the nature of war as a political instrument of government policy. In his words, "war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means." (Clausewitz 87) Thus, "[w]hen whole communities go to war-whole peoples and especially *civilized* peoples-the reason always lies in some political situation, and the occasion is always due to some political object." (Clausewitz 86-7) That political object, the reason for going to war, "will thus determine the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires." (Clausewitz 81)

He cautioned against allowing war to take over national policy, saying that "[p]olicy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa." (emphasis added) (Clausewitz 607) Thus, the military point of view must be subordinate to the political.

Within this context, the purpose of this paper is to examine the Gulf War from the political-military perspective to identify any Clausewitz fingerprints on our decision-making process leading to war, our stated political and military objectives, the political-military dynamics during the crisis, and our ending the war when and how we did.

DECIDING TO GO TO WAR - PUBLIC SUPPORT

Quickly after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the United States publicly announced four national policy objectives:

- * immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait;
- * restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government;
- * security and stability of Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf;
- * safety and protection of American citizens abroad. (DoD Rpt 31)

None of these objectives necessarily required military action, and, other than the first, it is unlikely that military action alone could achieve the objectives. Thus, the political task was to evaluate how best to employ all available instruments of politics (e.g., diplomatic, economic, military) to achieve those objectives.

The decision process leading to our using the military instrument in the Gulf to achieve our political objectives demonstrates the applicability of the Clausewitz "trinity." This trinity is a part of his theory of war that stresses the interrelationship between the people, the military, and the government. The people provide the will to fight, the military provides the capability, and the government provides the policy and ultimate decision authority. (Clausewitz 89)

The "people" element of the trinity is particularly important and evident in a democratic society such as ours. However, it is only in recent years that our government openly and publicly acknowledged its significance, particularly within the broader context of Clausewitz's theory. The Gulf War seems to represent the first major application of a conscious Clausewitzian process publicly started in November 1984 when then Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, in a speech to the National Press Club, articulated six tests for weighing whether to use U.S. combat forces abroad. (Weinberger 433-445) Among the prerequisites he established for such military action is the need to be reasonably assured of the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress - the "people" element of the Clausewitz trinity. (Weinberger 442) In establishing this analytical framework for deciding whether to employ military forces, Weinberger specifically referenced Clausewitz. (Weinberger 441)

Throughout the period from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, through the decision to deploy military forces to Saudi Arabia, through the decision to fight, to the decision to stop the fighting, President Bush and his

administration bombarded the public with explanations of why we had to act militarily. The extensive efforts by the Administration to articulate why the invasion of Kuwait affected our vital national interests, the announcement of very specific political objectives described above, the extensive nonmilitary actions taken, the use of the United Nations, and the announcement of very specific military objectives (to be discussed later) were all designed, at least in part, to obtain the support of the "people" (the will to fight).

We also see in the Gulf War, however, an extension of the "people" element of the trinity to include Congress. Although Congress may at first be considered part of the "government" element of the Clausewitz trinity, U.S. presidents have consistently disputed the Congressional authority in this arena asserted by Congress under the War Powers Resolution enacted over Presidential veto in 1973. Although President Bush did not recognize Congressional authority under the War Powers Resolution, he sought Congressional support for military action in the Gulf. In this context it is clear that Congress was treated as one reflection of the "people's" will.

Further, the extensive effort by President Bush to build a coalition of nations to act in this crisis may represent an evolutionary extension of the Clausewitz trinity to include a fourth element - the international community. This element provides the legitimacy for the armed action. This would be a logical reaction to technological and political developments in the world since Clausewitz. These developments, which have led to a growing interdependence of nations and an increase in the violence and destructiveness of war, make large scale war very much a concern of the entire international community, and argue against war by a country isolated by the international community. We may have seen the seeds of this evolution in the early 1950's when President Eisenhower asserted that a successful national security policy

required not only bipartisan support within the government, but also "*the enlightened support of the Americans and the informed understanding of our friends in the world.*" (underlined emphasis added) (Dept. of State Report 462) United States and world responses to recent crises in Somalia and Bosnia lend further support to this evolutionary process.

Whether this truly represents a general evolutionary extension of the Clausewitz trinity is not yet certain. However, at a minimum this emphasis on coalition building represents a traditional application of the "people" element of the trinity in an environment where the President concludes that domestic public support depends on international backing to overcome American isolationist tendencies.

MILITARY OBJECTIVES AND CAPABILITIES

Although the "people" component of the trinity strongly influences a government's decision to go to war and its ability to sustain a war effort, that support of the people can be obtained only if people understand what they are supporting and whether the nation is able to accomplish what it proposes. This leads to a discussion of military objectives and military capabilities (the military component of the trinity).

"No one starts war-or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so-without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war, and how he intends to conduct it." (Clausewitz 579) Weinberger agrees; he advises that "we should have clearly defined political and military objectives" before committing U.S. combat forces (Weinberger 441)

It is vital that military objectives be consistent with political objectives and achievable considering military capabilities. Our Gulf political objectives were described earlier. Our announced military

objectives were:

- * Neutralization of the Iraqi National Command Authority's ability to direct military operations;
- * Ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and destruction of Iraq's offensive threat to the region, including the Republican Guards in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO);
- * Destruction of known nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons production and delivery capability, to include Iraq's known ballistic missile program; and
- * Assistance in the restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait. (O'Neill and Kass 224)

These military objectives were consistent with the stated political objectives. However, it is important to bear in mind that the military objectives, while having to be consistent with the political objectives, need not be capable of achieving all political objectives. The military instrument remains but one of the political instruments working together to achieve the political objectives. That was clearly the case in the Gulf War. Throughout the Gulf crisis, economic and diplomatic measures continued to be employed, even as the fighting proceeded.

The process of articulating specific military objectives helps ensure that our objectives and capabilities are in tune and that appropriate levels of military force are made available to the operational commander. These objectives also serve as a beacon to focus our efforts and operational decisions and help gain and maintain the support of the people throughout the operation.

Weinberger elaborated on this Clausewitz principle, saying "we should have and send the forces needed" to achieve our objectives. (Weinberger 441) Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney's assessment of the President's action during the Gulf War suggests that President Bush reasonably considered military capabilities and requirements. Cheney remarked: "The President did things for us that were enormously helpful. When it was time to double the size of the force that we deployed, it would have been a relatively simple proposition to say let's see if we can't do it with smaller forces. He consistently said do whatever you

have to assemble the force and make certain that in the final analysis we can prevail at the lowest possible cost." (DoD Report 77)

By articulating the military objectives and supporting the force levels required by the military, President Bush showed he understood the "military" component of the Clausewitz trinity and how it relates to the "people" component. In particular, Clausewitz's views on numerical superiority and concentration supported the notion of a quicker resolution with the large number of forces deployed. (Clausewitz 194-197, 204) Equally important, a quick resolution was vital to continued "people" support. General George C. Marshall's observation in the 1940's that "a democracy cannot fight a Seven Years War" (Marshall 681) reflects a long-standing recognition of this concern. The Vietnam legacy gave President Bush added reason for concern. This understanding was crucial to developing an effective military-political relationship between the President and the armed forces which Clausewitz considered vital to success in war.

MILITARY-POLITICAL DYNAMICS

The Gulf War has been hailed by many as the perfect example of politicians allowing soldiers to fight the war. This has led some to believe that our civilian leadership did not make key "military" decisions, and that this represents the Clausewitzian view of war as it should be. This is far from the truth.

It is true that Clausewitz said "[p]olicy, of course, will not extend its influence to operational detail. Political considerations do not determine the posting of guards or the employment of patrols." (Clausewitz 606) Further, B.H. Liddell Hart criticized Clausewitz for defining military strategy to include the plan of the war, which Hart says more properly falls within the policy arena, the purview of the

government not military leaders. (Hart 319) However, to interpret these remarks as suggesting that political policy should not directly affect military details ignores most of what Clausewitz had to say about the political-military dynamics and ignores how significant military decisions were made during the Gulf War.

Clausewitz specifically recognized that political decisions and considerations are "influential in the planning of war, of the campaign, and often even of the battle." (Clausewitz 606) Further, "the assertion that a major military development, or the plan for one, should be a matter for *purely military* opinion is unacceptable." (Clausewitz 607) What Clausewitz seems to envision is a continuum from the purely political (e.g., setting our political objectives) to the purely military (a soldier's decision to shoot another soldier on the battle field), with a significant grey area in between in which the government official makes "military" decisions and military leaders make decisions with significant political policy implications. It is for this reason that Clausewitz states that "a certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy" (Clausewitz 808) and that a commander-in-chief (military leader, not our president) "must be familiar with the higher affairs of state and its innate policies." (Clausewitz 146)

What Clausewitz envisioned and what we saw in the Gulf War was a well-balanced, competent, and effective relationship between senior civilian and military leaders in the decision-making process. The President made the decisions to deploy military forces, to approve the force levels within the theater, to initiate the fight, and to stop the fight. It is also clear that military leaders planning attacks against enemy targets within Kuwait understood and appreciated the political concern for preserving the infrastructure of the country we were trying to liberate.

The line between political and military decisions was not clear cut

in theory for Clausewitz and is not clear cut in practice. For example, although targeting decisions in the Gulf War generally appear to have been left to the military commander, the civilian leadership intervened to limit bombing of legitimate targets in Baghdad after Saddam Hussein's effort to distort and exploit the impact of our having hit a bunker in Baghdad causing civilian casualties. This represents a legitimate and dynamic political adjustment to the use of the military instrument.

Because this political-military line is not precisely drawn, achieving the proper balance may often be personality driven. President Bush understood the military and was conscious of the micromanagement considered detrimental in the Vietnam War. General Powell and General Schwartzkopf, our two senior military leaders, were very knowledgeable in the political, policy arena. It is their working relationship, more than specific allocation of responsibilities, which epitomized the successful political-military relationship envisioned by Clausewitz.

The political-military relationship is probably challenged most when deciding whether to stop the fighting, that is, deciding whether the military instrument has served its political purpose.

WAR TERMINATION

The decision to stop the fighting in the Gulf when we did has been the subject of extensive second-guessing since the war ended. Those critics who feel we stopped the war too soon generally object to the fact that Saddam Hussein is still in power and that he is still able to use military force, at least internally (e.g., against the Kurd and Shiite minorities in Iraq). However, whether we object to these post-war conditions ought not be the measure of how well our military instrument served us. Rather, the focus of this debate should be on the relationship Clausewitz identified between war and our political and

military objectives.

To the extent that the complaint focuses on Saddam Hussein still being in power, Clausewitz theory would remind us that Hussein's removal from power was not a stated political or military objective. To continue fighting to seek his removal from power would seemingly reflect the war taking on a will of its own and improperly dictating policy, rather than policy dictating the course of the war.

Clausewitz acknowledged that "the original political objects can greatly alter during the course of the war and may finally change entirely *since they are influenced by events and their probable consequences.*" (Clausewitz 92) However, he would caution that any such change in objectives should reflect a conscious, thoughtful shift in policy, not a response driven by the passion of war. Historically, we saw such a passion-driven policy shift in Korea in September 1950. The shift from directing MacArthur not to go north of the 38th parallel (simply push the North Koreans out of South Korea) to directing the destruction of North Korea's army (forced reunification of Korea) was seemingly the product of exhilaration produced by military success following the Inchon landing. (Billings-Yun 2-4)

Our stated political objective seeking the security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf could have translated into a further objective to remove Hussein from power forcibly. No such public policy shift ever occurred. Some people argue that Hussein's removal from power was an ulterior political objective from the start. Even if that were so, however, that does not necessarily translate into a military objective, merely because the military success on the battlefield suddenly made the prospects of military success in this matter more achievable. There are sound reasons for our government to seek such a political objective by nonmilitary means.

To the extent that the complaint focused on failure to neutralize

the Republican Guard, the legitimate question is whether we achieved a stated military objective. It is not my purpose to evaluate the substance of this complaint, but rather, merely to stress that in assessing criticism of our war termination, we must maintain our focus on our political and military objectives.

CONCLUSION

The decision-making process in the Gulf War reveals a significant and conscious Clausewitz influence. That influence appears to be channeled through Caspar Weinberger, via his 1984 speech. Weinberger set forth Clausewitz theory in an understandable manner suitable for public consumption, and the media accepted it enthusiastically as a convenient tool for leading public debate.

By publicly announcing a specific set of criteria to judge the appropriateness of using U.S. combat forces abroad, Weinberger has had a dramatic impact on the nature of public debate concerning this issue. Public debate, which has a significant impact on government policy, has become more structured and focused on identifying our national interest in each crisis and seeking to identify and clarify our political and military objectives.

This influence is readily observable in the tenor and language of the public debate concerning the use of military forces in Somalia and Bosnia. Although our government may adjust the Weinberger factors or articulate a completely different set of factors, the combination of Clausewitz, Weinberger, and the Gulf War has changed the nature of public debate permanently.

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