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In My View

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Ian Oliver

IN MY VIEW . . .

Sir,

In his commentary, "Clausewitz: A Non-Strategy For Today," Army Captain William M. Shaw II has made an all too common mistake—he has taken Clausewitz's theories as *prescriptive* rather than *descriptive*. For example, Clausewitz is no advocate of "absolute war." He merely says that, left to its own devices, war will become pure violence. This is neither moral nor amoral; it is merely a statement of fact. As Shaw acknowledges, however, Clausewitz goes on to explain that war is "never left to its own devices" but is constrained both by its political goals and by the friction inherent in warfare.

While I can understand Shaw's misreading of Clausewitz's discussion on absolute war, I cannot fathom how he could have read *On War* and come to the conclusion that Clausewitz's theory promotes an "eighteenth-century political theory [where] the power of the monarch, the embodiment of the state, is absolute." This is precisely the conception that Clausewitz argues against, for his whole work has to do with the fundamental change in warfare growing out of Napoleon's mobilization of the people. Clausewitz, in fact, makes the same distinctions that Alexander Hamilton and James Madison made fifty years earlier in the pages of *The Federalist*.

To say that such thinking promotes the view that "war is an appropriate, natural and deliberate action of the state to preserve or promote its power" is not, as Shaw describes it, "repulsive, idolatrous, morally contemptible, and inconsistent with any democratic concept of government but again merely a statement of the obvious. The United States certainly saw war as both appropriate and natural when it declared war against Japan on December 7, 1941 "to preserve . . . its power."

As to his comments on Clausewitz's "inordinate reverence for violence," Clausewitz is again stating the obvious, as every combat veteran knows only too well. It was the academic theorists' mistaken notion that war could be surgical and sanitary and bereft of bloodshed that led to many of our problems in Vietnam. When those whose moral principles and ideals had propelled us into the war found that they had blood on their hands, they recoiled in horror and became some of the war's most outspoken and vociferous critics. But if they had read Clausewitz, they would have known that in war "blood is always its price; slaughter is its character." If they had weighed this price *before* they got us involved, perhaps the entire tragic episode could have been avoided.

As someone once observed, one of the reasons that there are those Americans who hate and resent their military is that we are a constant reminder that the Millenium has not yet arrived. I suspect that that may also be the reason why Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* is so repugnant to Captain Shaw.

Harry G. Summers, Jr.
Colonel, US Army

Sir,

I am writing this letter in outraged response to Capt. William M. Shaw II's letter published in the "In My View . . ." section of the September-October 1983 issue.

Captain Shaw is obviously badly mistaken in his analysis of the American people. They do not, as he implies, seek peace at any price. Their goal has always been security—the freedom to live without foreign interference. If this goal can be achieved through the use of peaceful means, all the better. But if this freedom must be bought on the battlefield, then Americans have always demonstrated their willingness to pay the price.

Perhaps he has been misled by the term "Peacekeepers" assigned to the Marines in Beirut; "Protectors of freedom and civilian security" would be more accurate.

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Military Operations Research Society

The 52nd Military Operations Research Symposium will be held 5-7 June 1984 at Fort Leavenworth, KS, hosted by the Combined Arms Operations Research Activity (CAORA). The theme will be "Evaluating C³I Systems." The deadline to request applications for registration is 2 May 1984. A Secret clearance and certification of need-to-know are required for attendance. For more information or to request application forms, contact the MORS office at (703) 751-7290.

