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In My View

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Ian Oliver

IN MY VIEW . . .

No Deputy Assistant Undersecretary Needed, Thank You

Sir,

Scott C. Truver's review (pp. 93-95, May-June) of "The Yankee Mariner and Sea Power: America's Challenge of Ocean Space," was useful in deciding whether to purchase or locate a library copy. In his next-to-last paragraph, however, Mr. Truver seems to endorse a proposal made by Dr. Walsh for a "Cabinet-level Department of the Oceans" to accomplish lofty goals having to do with "policy decisions . . . carried out swiftly," and "interagency conflicts . . . resolved." Taxpayers should be spared the creation of yet another bureaucratic fiefdom.

The missions of the Navy Department, NOAA, State Department, state fisheries and resources agencies, and other littoral players are spelled out in law, thank you. They know each other's zip codes and telephone numbers.

Cabinet Departments of Energy and Education were created in recent years. Now their policy-making appointees and civil servants devote top priority to justifying a renewed appropriation for the next fiscal year. This enables them to continue to travel around "on official business" at taxpayers expense "in the field" engaged in "fact-finding" junkets. Another key effort is writing justifications for increased staffing at higher pay grades, leading to what Edward Luttwak has called "luxuriant bureaucratic growth."

Let's kill this proposal for a Department of Oceans before the public-policy entrepreneurs begin to repeat it in print, with visions of themselves as someday "Deputy Assistant Undersecretary For Inshore Waters (Plankton, Tides, Corrosion)."

Major Robert P. Fairchild, US Army

The Bottom Rung of the Ladder Visited Again

Lieutenant Commander Weronko's letter commenting on the article by Allen Greb and myself misses several important points, and contains at least one incorrect premise. Dr. Greb and I do not reason *from* a PGM defense to a "no first use" policy. We take as our initial position the demonstrated impossibility of using small nuclear weapons in Europe in a way which will bring military advantage to the West. Since

LCDR Weronko concludes his letter by asserting that small nuclear weapons *are* useful, our position needs elaboration:

The procedure to request nuclear release begins at the division level in Europe, possibly lower, and runs all the way to the President of the United States through every imaginable level in between including a Nato consultative body. The US Army field manuals on the subject estimate that it will take at least 24 hours, and probably 36 hours, to obtain release of the weapons. I submit that it is difficult to envision a target remaining in position after a day and a half. Given the cumbersome procedures governing nuclear weapons, 36 hours might actually be optimistic. It is clear that the United States does not expect to use tactical nuclear weapons in a timely or flexible manner. The military utility, if any, of such warheads has been sacrificed to tight political control, which is as it should be.

While some battlefield nuclear weapons have yields which are comparable to those of the largest conventional explosives used in previous wars, the 155mm and 203mm artillery-fired atomic projectiles (AFAPs) which form the backbone of the tactical nuclear arsenal are not in that small class. If used against Soviet tanks of the T-72S variety, now entering service, which has stand-off plates and a void space filled with hydrogenous [neutron absorbing!] material, an enhanced radiation warhead with a total energy release of one kiloton might, assuming perfect placement, stop 3 tanks immediately. The crews in several others would be fatally injured, but would be perfectly capable of fighting effectively for some days. If fired in large numbers, the ERW loses its purported advantage of causing relatively little collateral damage.

Actually, a 1kt ERW employed in a militarily sensible way with a burst height between 500 and 600 feet would cause 5 p.s.i. overpressures at a distance only 25 percent less than would a pure fission weapon of the same yield and with a burst height also chosen to maximize the 10 p.s.i. circle. Within the ten p.s.i. circle damage to armored vehicles would be highly probable. An overpressure of 5 p.s.i. is sufficient to destroy most civilian residential and commercial structures.

PGM technology clearly favors the defense. So would other strategies, particularly ones employing fixed defenses at critical points along the frontier. Our suggestion that PGMs and heavy unguided antitank rockets (such as the French APILAS or the German Panzerfaust III or Armbrust) replace unusable tactical nuclear weapons is rooted in an understanding of the advantages which, Clausewitz pointed out, accrue to the defense if a proper defensive strategy is adopted, and not in any "transitory superiority in technology." One thing is certain in the uncertain business of war: given time the Soviets are capable of constructing similar missiles.

A conventional deterrent deters because the potential foe can be 100 percent sure that it will be used promptly. A deterrent based upon battlefield nuclear weapons is less credible because an aggressor may well doubt Nato's resolve to use its atomic capability. Dr. Greb and I believe that if Nato were manifestly able to defend itself without reliance upon nuclear weapons, that would reduce the risk of war. Nato will never expend the effort to defend itself without nuclear weapons so long as the chimera of nuclear use remains to tantalize. A policy of "no first use" is a prerequisite to the construction of credible conventional forces. Without weakening my argument, I must point out that no potential aggressor could ever rely completely upon Nato keeping its promise not to initiate nuclear war.

Finally, if it becomes clear that the European members of Nato cannot be induced to support a long-term commitment to their own security, it may be reasonable to reconsider the American guarantees to Europe, particularly the promise of extended nuclear deterrence which puts US cities at risk to ensure the safety of Europeans. It is, in any event, reasonable to chop off the bottom rung of the escalation ladder in order to reduce the risk of nuclear catastrophe.

Peter D. Zimmerman

Clausewitz: A Non-Strategy for Today¹

Sir:

The article "Clausewitz and Strategy Today" by Col. Summers is extremely perceptive and clarifies a little-known aspect of the great German's teaching: the trinity of the people, the army, and the government in the formulation of foreign policy. This "populist" element in Clausewitz's philosophy (to stretch the point) has been generally ignored by American foreign policymakers. The failure of the people to have a say in critical issues affecting their nation's interests abroad has led to tragic consequences, especially in Vietnam. A comprehensive and damning summary of Executive actions and other misguided policies can be found in *The Imperial Presidency* by Arthur Schlesinger.

However, to state the above is not to conclude that Clausewitz's political and military philosophies are appropriate for democratic policymakers. Unfortunately, the neo-Clausewitzian view of war and society has imbedded itself so deeply in American politico-military doctrine that alternative concepts are usually unwelcome. Nevertheless, this letter may perhaps serve as an initial attempt to drive the beast from his den. Other more capable warriors can slay it.

Why is Clausewitz's philosophy incompatible with a foreign policy made in the name of a peace-loving people? On at least two counts (probably more), Clausewitz's theories fail to measure up to the most elementary criteria of decency and humanity. First, Clausewitz's view of "absolute war" is dangerous in the extreme. He says, "There is no limit to this and war may reach its absolute form." Of course, he is quick to point out that war rarely reaches its absolute form because of friction. Nevertheless, in the Kantian tradition, Clausewitz argues that "absolute war," "total war," "general war," or whatever one wishes to call it, is the reference point, the objective, which war strives to reach. His thinking has greatly influenced Western philosophies about war, and has provided the theoretical justification for a nuclear "war-fighting" strategy, as opposed to a nuclear deterrence strategy. It is just this kind of analytical perspective to which the Catholic bishops have reacted. Most people are convinced that the biological effects of "general war" are such that neither superpower can "win" a nuclear war in any rational sense of the word. However, there are disturbing reports in the press that an increasing number of political and military thinkers subscribe to the idea that a nuclear war is thinkable, fightable, and even winnable, and that the best way to "win" is to prepare for it by

¹ See Colonel Harry G. Summers, "Clausewitz and Strategy Today," in *Naval War College Review*, March-April 1983, pp.40-46.

closing "the window of vulnerability" and by stressing civil defense measures. The nuclear freeze movement is built upon just this fear that the current administration is increasing our nuclear inventory to a point equal to that of the Soviets in preparation for a general war.

Second, Colonel Summers' article fails to emphasize the traditional, eighteenth century, elitist element in Clausewitz's theory which has no place whatsoever in democratic policy formulation. According to eighteenth-century political theory, the power of the monarch, the embodiment of the state, is absolute. Whatever increases the power of the state is "good," and whatever detracts from state absolutism is "bad." In this line of thinking, war is an appropriate, natural, and deliberate action of the state to preserve or promote its power.

Such an amoral philosophy is repulsive, idolatrous, morally contemptible, and inconsistent with any democratic concept of government where the rule of law, not state power, prevails. Besides this worship of state power, Clausewitz also entertains an inordinate reverence for violence. Such phrases as "violence pushed to its utmost bounds," "no feelings of humanity," "the perfection of (absolute) war," and "the bloody solution to the crises" ring through his writings and impart to it a macabre tone. The leading military figures of World War I adhered to Clausewitz's theories almost unquestioningly, especially such flamboyant statements as "blood is always its price; slaughter is its character," and in obedience to this mindset, sent thousands of men to their deaths. The world was justly outraged at the carnage perpetrated in the name of "military science" then, and the American people should think seriously before they permit Karl von Clausewitz to remount the lectern to preach once more his antiquated, bankrupt theories.

Moreover, Clausewitz's amorality cannot withstand scrutiny by traditional sources of moral authority. For many centuries, Christian thinkers have held that war is morally justifiable if it is pursued by legitimate authority, embarked upon for a just cause, waged with a right intention, and limited to proportionate destructive means.

These criteria, to those unfamiliar with them, are drawn from the "just war" theory, a product of centuries of Catholic philosophical speculation. Presently, the just war philosophy is under attack from several directions. There have always been those who have rejected the theory because they consider it too idealistic and impractical. Opponents of this moral construct contend that the just war theory has been observed more in the exception than the rule; that it is cynically employed to justify imperialistic conquests and other abuses of power. Perhaps so. Nevertheless, the just war theory is valid as an ethical standard, an ideal of human conduct. Like the Ten Commandments, the just war theory is derived from traditional religious sources, and remains valid as a gauge for acceptable conduct. Against this yardstick Clausewitz's philosophy fails miserably.

First, to give this foremost author on war his due, he prescribes war as a sole province of the state. Rightfully so, since war must be prosecuted by legal authority. The just war theory automatically excludes "vigilante" actions by such groups as the PLO, the KKK, and the Jewish Defense League.

Second (here is where one observes his ethical poverty), it is generally agreed today that the only acceptable cause for war is to respond to a prior wrong or aggression. Moreover, for a state to consider an armed response to aggression, the

probability for better conditions after hostilities must be weighed. Clausewitz fails on both counts. His philosophy is unclear concerning the moral distinction between aggressive and defensive war. For him war is "simply" a pragmatic matter, pursued to enhance state power regardless of the moral implications. Additionally, the concept of "absolute war," technologically possible in the twentieth century with nuclear weapons and massive "firestrikes," provides no assurance that the world's biosphere will be livable after the war.

Third, according to the just war theory, rulers should seek a just peace and should intend good and not evil when they embark upon war. This criterion of right intention is less than seriously considered in Clausewitz's philosophy of power. To his way of thinking, state power is the prevailing factor in war policy, not right intention. Unfortunately, far too many people think right along with him.

Finally, by the just war theory, military authorities should employ proportionate means when waging war. Traditional Western religious sources regard war as generally evil, and the attendant loss of life as an unfortunate necessity of military campaigning. In a sinful world, force may be necessary to establish right, but force should be limited to that absolutely necessary to accomplish the mission. Human beings, made in the image of God, are not to be slaughtered like swine. Clausewitz flies in the face of this honored moral code. Such statements as quoted above, "blood is always its price; slaughter is its character," betray him. His worship of violence, utmost violence unmitigated by "feelings of humanity" is grotesque and disgusting.

A conclusive and definitive judgment regarding Clausewitz's philosophy has been made by General Douglas MacArthur. In actuality, the latter made the following statement when confirming the death sentence of a Japanese commander responsible for numerous atrocities in the Philippines during World War II, but the words appear equally applicable:

"[A] soldier . . . is charged with the protection of the weak and unarmed. It is the very essence and reason for his being. When he violates this sacred trust, he not only profanes his entire cult, but threatens the fabric of international society."

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