

## Introduction

In the chapter on the nature and purpose of war we roughly sketched the general concept of war and alluded to the connections between war and other physical and social phenomena, in order to give our discussion a sound theoretical starting point. We indicated what a variety of intellectual obstacles besets the subject, while reserving detailed study of them until later; and we concluded that the grand objective of all military action is to overthrow the enemy—which means destroying his armed forces. It was therefore possible to show in the following chapter that battle is the one and only means that warfare can employ. With that, we hoped, a sound working hypothesis had been established.

Then we examined, one by one, the salient patterns and situations (apart from battle itself) that occur in warfare, trying to gauge the value of each with greater precision, both according to its inherent characteristics and in the light of military experience. We also sought to strip away the vague, ambiguous notions commonly attached to them, and tried to make it absolutely clear that the destruction of the enemy is what always matters most.

We now revert to warfare as a whole, to the discussion of the planning of a war and of a campaign, which means returning to the ideas put forward in Book One.

The chapters that follow will deal with the problem of war as a whole. They cover its dominant, its most important aspect: pure strategy. We enter this crucial area—the central point on which all other threads converge—not without some diffidence. Indeed, this diffidence is amply justified.

On the one hand, military operations appear extremely simple. The greatest generals discuss them in the plainest and most forthright language; and to hear them tell how they control and manage that enormous, complex apparatus one would think the only thing that mattered was the speaker, and that the whole monstrosity called war came down, in fact, to a contest between individuals, a sort of duel. A few uncomplicated thoughts seem to account for their decisions—either that, or the explanation lies in various emotional states; and one is left with the impression that great commanders manage matters in an easy, confident and, one would almost think, off-hand sort of way. At the same time we can see how many factors are involved and have to be weighed against each other; the vast, the almost infinite distance there can be between a cause and its effect, and the countless ways in which these elements can be combined. The function of theory is to put

h  
s:  
t;  
s.w  
t  
e  
  
s  
r  
y  
s  
k  
e  
r3  
l  
2  
  
e  
:  
:  
i  
:  
:  
i  
:  
:  
s  
s  
t  
t

## Absolute War and Real War

War plans cover every aspect of a war, and weave them all into a single operation that must have a single, ultimate objective in which all particular aims are reconciled. No one starts a 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. The former is its political purpose; the latter its operational objective. This is the governing principle which will set its course, prescribe the scale of means and effort which is required, and make its influence felt throughout down to the smallest operational detail.

We said in the opening chapter that the natural aim of military operations is the enemy's overthrow, and that strict adherence to the logic of the concept can, in the last analysis, admit of no other. Since both belligerents must hold that view it would follow that military operations could not be suspended, that hostilities could not end until one or other side were finally defeated.

In the chapter on the suspension of military activity<sup>1</sup> we showed how factors inherent in the war-machine itself can interrupt and modify the principle of enmity as embodied in its agent, man, and in all that goes to make up warfare. Still, that process of modification is by no means adequate to span the gap between the pure concept of war and the concrete form that, as a general rule, war assumes. Most wars are like a flaring-up of mutual rage, when each party takes up arms in order to defend itself, to overawe its opponent, and occasionally to deal him an actual blow. Generally it is not a case in which two mutually destructive elements collide, but one of tension between two elements, separate for the time being, which discharge energy in discontinuous, minor shocks.

But what exactly is this nonconducting medium, this barrier that prevents a full discharge? Why is it that the theoretical concept is not fulfilled in practice? The barrier in question is the vast array of factors, forces and conditions in national affairs that are affected by war. No logical sequence could progress through their innumerable twists and turns as though it were a simple thread that linked two deductions. Logic comes to a stop in this labyrinth; and those men who habitually act, both in great and minor affairs, on particular dominating impressions or feelings rather than according to strict logic, are hardly aware of the confused, inconsistent, and ambiguous situation in which they find themselves.

<sup>1</sup> Book Three, Chapter Sixteen. Eds.

## A. Interdependence of the Elements of War

Since war can be thought of in two different ways—its absolute form or one of the variant forms that it actually takes—two different concepts of success arise.

In the absolute form of war, where everything results from necessary causes and one action rapidly affects another, there is, if we may use the phrase, no intervening neutral void. Since war contains a host of interactions<sup>1</sup> since the whole series of engagements is, strictly speaking, linked together,<sup>2</sup> since in every victory there is a culminating point beyond which lies the realm of losses and defeats<sup>3</sup>—in view of all these intrinsic characteristics of war, we say there is only one result that counts: *final victory*. Until then, nothing is decided, nothing won, and nothing lost. In this form of war we must always keep in mind that it is the end that crowns the work. Within the concept of absolute war, then, war is indivisible, and its component parts (the individual victories) are of value only in their relation to the whole. Conquering Moscow and half of Russia in 1812 was of no avail to Bonaparte unless it brought him the peace he had in view. But these successes were only a part of his plan of campaign: what was still missing was the destruction of the Russian army. If that achievement had been added to the rest, peace would have been as sure as things of that sort ever can be. But it was too late to achieve the second part of his plan; his chance had gone. Thus the successful stage was not only wasted but led to disaster.

Contrasting with this extreme view of the connection between successes in war, is another view, no less extreme; which holds that war consists of separate successes each unrelated to the next, as in a match consisting of several games. The earlier games have no effect upon the later. All that counts is the total score, and each separate result makes its contribution toward this total.

The first of these two views of war derives its validity from the nature of the subject; the second, from its actual history. Countless cases have occurred where a small advantage could be gained without an onerous condition being attached to it. The more the element of violence is moderated, the commoner these cases will be; but just as absolute war has never in fact been achieved, so we will never find a war in which the second concept is so prevalent that the first can be disregarded altogether. If we postulate the first of the two concepts, it necessarily follows from the start that every

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter One, Book One. Cl.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Two, Book One. Cl.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapters Four and Five, Book Seven. Cl.

### CHAPTER THREE

war must be conceived of as a single whole, and that with his first move the general must already have a clear idea of the goal on which all lines are to converge.

If we postulate the second concept, we will find it legitimate to pursue minor advantages for their own sake and leave the future to itself.

Since both these concepts lead to results, theory cannot dispense with either. Theory makes this distinction in the application of the two concepts: all action must be based on the former, since it is the fundamental concept; the latter can be used only as a modification justified by circumstances.

In 1742, 1744, 1757, and 1758, when Frederick, operating from Silesia and Saxony, thrust new spearheads into Austria, he was well aware that they could not lead to another permanent acquisition such as Silesia and Saxony. His aim was not to overthrow the Austrian Empire but a secondary one, namely to gain time and strength. And he could pursue this secondary aim without any fear of risking his own existence.<sup>4</sup>

However, when Prussia in 1806, and Austria in 1805 and 1809, adopted a still more modest aim—to drive the French across the Rhine—it would have been foolish if they had not begun by carefully reviewing the whole chain of events that success or failure would be likely to bring in consequence of the initial step, and which would lead to peace. Such a review was indispensable, both in order to decide how far they could safely exploit their successes and also how and where any enemy successes could be arrested.

Careful study of history shows where the difference between these cases lies. In the eighteenth century, in the days of the Silesian campaigns, war was still an affair for governments alone, and the people's role was simply that of an instrument. At the onset of the nineteenth century, peoples themselves were in the scale on either side. The generals opposing Frederick the Great were acting on instructions—which implied that caution was one of their distinguishing characteristics. But now the opponent of the Austrians and Prussians was—to put it bluntly—the God of War himself.

Such a transformation of war might have led to new ways of thinking about it. In 1805, 1806, and 1809 men might have recognized that total ruin was a possibility—indeed it stared them in the face. It might have

<sup>4</sup> If Frederick had won the battle of Kolin and in consequence had captured the main Austrian army in Prague with both its senior commanders, it would indeed have been such a shattering blow that he might well have thought of pressing on to Vienna, shaking the foundations of the monarchy and imposing peace. That would have been an unparalleled success for those days, as great as the triumphs of the Napoleonic wars, but still more wonderful and brilliant for the disparity in size between the Prussian David and the Austrian Goliath. Victory at Kolin would almost certainly have made this success possible. But that does not invalidate the assertion made above, which only concerned the original purpose of the King's offensive. To surround and capture the enemy's main army, on the other hand, was something wholly unprovided for and the King had never given it a thought—at least until the Austrians invited it by the inadequate position they took up at Prague. Cf.

...tice deeply rooted

...ical considerations

...e enemy. One will  
...quired, and a mod-  
...will be much the  
...iscalculated, that  
...emy, but weaker.  
...his moral impulse  
...the best he can;  
...have no ground  
...a faint and starv-

...lent and compul-  
...either side makes  
...ously threatened.  
...admitted, as it  
...so be willing to  
...ing the enemy,

...it aims at being  
...t of a war seem  
...al solution soon  
...y operations, or  
...dually becomes  
...not be needed.  
...cern will be to  
...enemy's favor  
...ll.

## B. War Is an Instrument of Policy

Up to now we have considered the incompatibility between war and every other human interest, individual or social—a difference that derives from human nature, and that therefore no philosophy can resolve. We have examined this incompatibility from various angles so that none of its conflicting elements should be missed. Now we must seek out the unity into which these contradictory elements combine in real life, which they do by partly neutralizing one another. We might have posited that unity to begin with, if it had not been necessary to emphasize the contradictions with all possible clarity and to consider the different elements separately. This unity lies in the concept that war is only a branch of political activity; that it is in no sense autonomous.

It is, of course, well-known that the only source of war is politics—the intercourse of governments and peoples; but it is apt to be assumed that war suspends that intercourse and replaces it by a wholly different condition, ruled by no law but its own.

We maintain, on the contrary, that war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means. We deliberately use the phrase "with the addition of other means" because we also want to make it clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different. In essentials that intercourse continues, irrespective of the means it employs. The main lines along which military events progress, and to which they are restricted, are political lines that continue throughout the war into the subsequent peace. How could it be otherwise? Do political relations between peoples and between their governments stop when diplomatic notes are no longer exchanged? Is war not just another expression of their thoughts, another form of speech or writing? Its grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic.

If that is so, then war cannot be divorced from political life; and whenever this occurs in our thinking about war, the many links that connect the two elements are destroyed and we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense.

This conception would be ineluctable even if war were total war, the pure element of enmity unleashed. All the factors that go to make up war and determine its salient features—the strength and allies of each antagonist, the character of the peoples and their governments, and so forth, all the elements listed in the first chapter of Book 1—are these not all political, so closely connected with political activity that it is impossible to separate

#1  
UNITY

17  
#2  
POLITICS

#3  
Continuation  
of politics

#4  
Grammar  
#5  
Divided

planning...?

BOOK EIGHT

the two? But it is yet more vital to bear all this in mind when studying ac-  
practice. We will then find that war does not advance relentlessly tow-  
the absolute, as theory would demand. Being incomplete and self-con-  
dictory, it cannot follow its own laws, but has to be treated as a part  
some other whole; the name of which is policy.

law

In making use of war, policy evades all rigorous conclusions proceed  
from the nature of war, bothers little about ultimate possibilities, and c-  
cerns itself only with immediate probabilities. Although this introduce  
high degree of uncertainty into the whole business, turning it into a k  
of game, each government is confident that it can outdo its opponent  
skill and acumen.

Instrument

So policy converts the overwhelmingly destructive element of war int  
mere instrument. It changes the terrible battle-sword that a man needs b  
hands and his entire strength to wield, and with which he strikes home o  
and no more, into a light, handy rapier—sometimes just a foil for the excha  
of thrusts, feints and parries.

Thus the contradictions in which war involves that naturally timid cr-  
ture, man, are resolved; if this is the solution we choose to accept.

If war is part of policy, policy will determine its character. As pol  
becomes more ambitious and vigorous, so will war, and this may reach  
point where war attains its absolute form. If we look at war in this lig  
we do not need to lose sight of this absolute: on the contrary, we m  
constantly bear it in mind.

Only if war is looked at in this way does its unity reappear; only then c  
we see that all wars are things of the same nature; and this alone will p  
vide the right criteria for conceiving and judging great designs.

Policy operates directly

Policy, of course, will not extend its influence to operational deta-  
Political considerations do not determine the posting of guards or t  
employment of patrols. But they are the more influential in the planni  
of war, of the campaign, and often even of the battle.

That is why we felt no urge to introduce this point of view at the sta  
At the stage of detailed study it would not have been much help and mig  
have been distracting. But when plans for a war or a campaign are un-  
study, this point of view is indispensable.

Nothing is more important in life than finding the right standpoint  
seeing and judging events, and then adhering to it. One point and o  
only yields an integrated view of all phenomena; and only by holding  
that point of view can one avoid inconsistency.

If planning a war precludes adopting a dual or multiple point of view  
that is, applying first a military, then an administrative eye, then a politic  
and so on—the question arises whether policy is bound to be given pre-  
cedence over everything.

It can be taken as agreed that the aim of policy is to unify and reconc  
all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values, a  
whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy, of course,  
nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests agair  
other states. That it can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests, a

CHAPTER SIX

vanity of those in power, is neither here nor there. In no sense can the art of war ever be regarded as the preceptor of policy, and here we can only treat policy as representative of all interests of the community.

The only question, therefore, is whether, when war is being planned, the political point of view should give way to the purely military (if a purely military point of view is conceivable at all); that is, should it disappear completely or subordinate itself, or should the political point of view remain dominant and the military be subordinated to it?

That the political view should wholly cease to count on the outbreak of war is hardly conceivable unless pure hatred made all wars a struggle for life and death. In fact, as we have said, they are nothing but expressions of policy itself. Subordinating the political point of view to the military would be absurd, for it is policy that has created war. Policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political.

If we recall the nature of actual war, if we remember the argument in Chapter 3 above—that the probable character and general shape of any war should mainly be assessed in the light of political factors and conditions—and that war should often (indeed today one might say normally) be conceived as an organic whole whose parts cannot be separated, so that each individual act contributes to the whole and itself originates in the central concept, then it will be perfectly clear and certain that the supreme standpoint for the conduct of war, the point of view that determines its main lines of action, can only be that of policy.

It is from this point of view, then, that plans are cast, as it were, from a mold. Judgment and understanding are easier and more natural; convictions gain in strength, motives in conviction, and history in sense.

From this point of view again, no conflict need arise any longer between political and military interests—not from the nature of the case at any rate—and should it arise it will show no more than lack of understanding. It might be thought that policy could make demands on war which war could not fulfill; but that hypothesis would challenge the natural and unavoidable assumption that policy knows the instrument it means to use. If policy reads the course of military events correctly, it is wholly and exclusively entitled to decide which events and trends are best for the objectives of the war.

In short, at the highest level the art of war turns into policy—but a policy conducted by fighting battles rather than by sending diplomatic notes.

We can now see that the assertion that a major military development, or the plan for one, should be a matter for purely military opinion is unacceptable and can be damaging. Nor indeed is it sensible to summon soldiers, as many governments do when they are planning a war, and ask them for purely military advice. But it makes even less sense for theoreticians to assert that all available military resources should be put at the disposal of the commander so that on their basis he can draw up purely military plans for a war or a campaign. It is in any case a matter of common experience

military point

✓

ing actual  
ly toward  
self-contr  
a part of

roceeding  
and con  
roduces a  
to a kind  
ponent in

var into a  
needs both  
ome once  
exchange

mid crea  
pt.

As policy  
reach the  
this light,  
we must

then can  
will pro

il details.  
ls or the  
planning

the start.  
nd might  
are under

point for  
and one  
olding to

of view—  
political,  
en prece

reconcile  
lues, and  
course, is  
ts against  
rests, and

and annihilated in their forward positions before they could withdraw to their unapproachable islands, was ignored. Only after three months of inconclusive fighting were Falkenstein and Wrangel succeeded by Moltke and the King's nephew, the flexible and solidly Prince Frederick Charles, and then operations were conducted with a skill which established Moltke in the all-important royal favour for good. But Moltke still had far to go before he was universally accepted as the King's sole military adviser, and thus the virtual Commander-in-Chief of the Prussian forces in time of war. His plan of campaign against Austria had to be ratified by a sort of War Council, where it came under heavy criticism.<sup>1</sup> His distribution of forces was altered on Bismarck's insistence by the Ministry of War, to give protection to the Rhineland, and royal intervention was needed to uphold Moltke's original plans. Nor did his presence as the King's chief adviser inspire any great confidence in the public. "The King, in his seventieth year, at the head [of the armies]", said one officer, son of the great Boyer, "the decrepit Moltke at his side. What is the outcome likely to be?"<sup>2</sup> The army commanders were still wilful to the point of outright disobedience. Vogel von Falkenstein, commanding a detachment deployed against Hanover, defied Moltke's instructions and in consequence led his forces to humiliating, though short-lived, defeat. The Crown Prince, commanding the easternmost of the three armies with which Moltke planned to invade Bohemia, changed his position so as to give better protection to Silesia and thus nearly dislocated the whole plan of campaign. Frederick Charles, advancing in the centre, moved so slowly that it seemed at one moment as if Benedek, the Austrian Commander, would be able to fall on the isolated Crown Prince with overwhelming superiority and defeat the Prussian armies in detail. Moltke's decision to keep his armies separated and to unite them only on the battlefield came under the heavy criticism of most of his colleagues.<sup>3</sup> Finally, when at last the Austrians stood at bay before Frederick Charles, with the Crown Prince swinging in on their right flank and the army of the Elbe threatening their left rear, Frederick Charles, instead of fighting a holding action, launched his full forces in a premature attack which,

<sup>1</sup> *Prinz Friedrich Karl von Preussen: Denkwürdigkeiten aus seinem Leben*, ed. W. Foerster (Stuttgart 1910) Hereafter referred to as *Frederick Charles Denkwürdigkeiten*, II 12.

<sup>2</sup> Kessel, *op. cit.* 444. Roon, *Denkwürdigkeiten* II 409.

<sup>3</sup> Kessel 472-3. See also the criticisms by Friedrich Engels in the *Manchester Guardian* of 3 July 1866, reprinted in W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chalton, *Engels as Military Critic* (Manchester 1959) 133.

even had it succeeded, would only have driven the Austrians back to safety out of the closing jaws of Moltke's trap. Moltke's messenger checked the commander of his reserve division, General von Manstein, just in time; who then made the famous comment: "This seems to be all in order; but who is General von Moltke?" By nightfall the Austrian army was routed, losing twenty-four thousand men killed or wounded and thirteen thousand prisoners. The question was not asked again.

#### §4 The Reform of the French Army

A few French soldiers had studied Moltke's activities. "Be as rude as you like about this army of lawyers and oculists", warned General Bourbaki in 1866, who had visited Berlin two years earlier, "but it will get to Vienna just as soon as it likes."<sup>1</sup> But in general the French did not consider the Prussians as a force to reckon with on the same level as the Austrians who had resisted the French so stubbornly in Italy, and to them the news of Sadowa was a thunderclap. The obvious explanation of the Prussian victory, the one which was adopted with enthusiasm, was that the battle had been won by the Prussian needle-gun, and once the French army was also equipped with a breech-loading rifle its natural superiority would again be decisive.<sup>2</sup> But some of the wiser heads, the Emperor among them, saw that the roots of Prussia's victory lay deeper: in her success in training a short-service conscript army; in her power to mobilise it rapidly, and her ability to convey it, with its supplies, to the battlefield without the disorder which had attended the French army's entry into Italy. To cope with such an adversary France would have to attain new standards of efficiency in military administration, and she might even have to reconsider the fundamental principle of a small army of long-serving professionals, on which her military organisation had hitherto been based.

When in the autumn of 1866 the military authorities of France examined the situation, they estimated the military strength of Prussia to be about 1,200,000 trained men. That of France, according to one official estimate, was 288,000, out of which contingents had to be found

<sup>1</sup> *Revue*, *Cinquantenaire* IV 34.

<sup>2</sup> Du Bouché, *Seven Years* III 64. Stoffel, *Reports* 3, L. M. Case, *French Opinion on War and Diplomacy during the Second Empire* (Philadelphia 1954) 234.