

CLAUSEWITZ VERSUS WOLFOWITZ. IRRECONCILABLE PARADIGMS

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Abstract

Carl Clausewitz's main book, "On War", suffered from its inception continued misinterpretations and distortions, compounded by the frequent opacity of the text itself. One of the most damaging such misinterpretations has probably been the one suggested by Paul Wolfowitz in the framework of the so-called "Wolfowitz Doctrine". The primary objective of the present note is to demystify the situation and to correct the main points of incoherence, in order to contribute to a more accurate interpretation of Clausewitz's thinking. We identify first the main characteristics of "On War" including its implicit moral dimension, and subsequently examine the main areas of incoherence in Wolfowitz's interpretation, among which the excessively ambitious definition of "minimum objectives" originated in an erroneous understanding of the concept of "Total War". As a result, we see that this latter misinterpretation frontally clashes against what is most likely Clausewitz's main thesis, i.e. War as a Rational act. War is a political act and as such is part of a dynamic in which decisions must be taken considering their likely effects, in order to reach the optimal outcome. Given that armed conflicts invariably produce damaging, undesirable losses, preventing them and limiting their scope and duration are obvious demands of rational decision-making, clearly implied in Clausewitz's work. Limitation of war is thus a desirable, appropriate, necessary and efficient objective, contrary to the Wolfowitz's misinterpretation, which needs urgent correction.

Keywords

European Union; International Security; Peace; Political Rationality; United States

1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING WAR

Very few works have so profoundly marked war theories as the complex, multidimensional text that Carl Clausewitz succinctly titled "On War" (or "About War")¹. Its fundamental thesis, deceptively simplistic, may perhaps be summarized in a few words: War does not interrupt politics, but is an essential, inseparable part of them. This is not, as some still repeat from very diverse political perspectives, a celebration of conflict, and even less a cynical *boutade*. The point is, quite the reverse, to demonstrate that contrary to the perspective that makes War an illogical exceptionality, armed conflicts have always their internal logic. True, in order to de-cypher this logic, one needs to have the necessary keys and information elements, and Clausewitz tells us without any doubt that this is a formidable task. But it is also an essential one because, ultimately, in order to avoid war or at least to minimize its consequences, it is absolutely necessary to understand its dynamics, reasons and possible solutions. Thanks to Clausewitz – and this is, perhaps, his greatest and more lasting contribution – war is no longer an un-understandable escape from logic, the more or less apocalyptic triumph of folly, but a social, political process which, as any other such processes, has certain origins, certain motivations, certain objectives and solutions. It is impossible to limit this idea to just one particular quotation because it is present throughout the work of Clausewitz; but it is very important in this respect to read in depth the whole of Chapter 1 in the First Book of "On War".

It must be noted that Clausewitz carefully avoids any far-reaching moral judgement. This is perhaps one of the reasons why this book has been systematically presented by some as lacking moral sense. This is not the case. The simple fact is that the author is conscious that his objective is not to pass ethic judgement about human behaviour, but to point out that armed conflicts are part of that behaviour, and that they are therefore covered by the same laws applying to any other area of social activity. This is, beyond doubt, the first essential step for any further moral or ethical reflection. In that sense, Clausewitz's contribution precedes and facilitates such a reflection.

¹ We will use for this study the authoritative 1976 Howard and Paret translation (see references).

2. CLAUSEWITZ IN HIS TIME

Carl Von Clausewitz (1780-1831) was not a philosopher, even less a moralist, but he was not without moral sense either. The fact is that his objective in "On War" was simply not in the field of ethics. This distant approach has provoked continued misunderstandings, compounded by the fact that some of his expressions are certainly obscure and could be interpreted as signs of a certain degree of bellicism. In order to understand why the German thinker may seem sometimes to celebrate violence – although this is not, as we will see, the author's position – it is useful to review the historical background and context of the time when the book was written.

The most important factor during that historical period was beyond any doubt the Napoleonic Wars, whose horror and nature, so different from previous conflicts, impregnated Clausewitz's works: "Clausewitz's insights are thoroughly grounded in the military experience of the Napoleonic Wars, especially that of the Russian campaign— he was, after all, both a historian and a theorist" (Drohan 2006). Napoleonic Wars in this context must be understood in the first place as a subversion of existing order at all levels, and especially concerning the total mobilisation of society, as well as the ideological component of conflict as a confrontation of peoples and nations, no longer part of a dynastic logic. The leadership element, accepted by the whole of society and therefore mobilising it, is closely connected to the influence of the French Revolution and the global participation of citizens in the common effort, be it of social or bellic nature.

Clausewitz understood very well that the profound social changes brought to the whole of Europe by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had not been defeated by the triumphant Allies and the Vienna Congress but, on the contrary, and even though Napoleon's own troops had been defeated in the battlefield, the ideological contributions that they disseminated throughout Europe had profoundly permeated the Continent. Clausewitz does not seem interested, however, in the social, moral or philosophical dimensions, rather and almost exclusively he is focused on the consequences of such a situation on the military doctrine area. And it is in this field that the clearest consequence of these cataclysms creates a new military doctrine which considers War not as a punctual, exceptional event, but as a political act which may be more or less frequent but which is always regulated by the same inexorable laws.

3. THE LOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF CLAUSEWITZ

It is essential to understand and highlight that Clausewitz is not an author who advocates unlimited or absolute war. On the contrary, his positions lead logically to the rejection of this possibility, as lacking rationality. War is, certainly, an act of violence aimed at compelling the enemy to accept and implement our will. But it is an act whose limitation is precisely, according to the author, rationality: it is an instrument, possible but not necessarily desirable, that must be kept "at hand" and that, if need be, must be carefully and sensibly dosed. It must however be recognised that the bellic phenomenon has its own dynamics and feedback processes; in that sense it is not an exaggeration to affirm that the "natural" tendency of War is towards the extremes: human passions, once unleashed, will suffer few brakes; on the other hand, the temptation to maximise the impact and the benefits of such strenuous efforts and incurred sacrifices will be correlated to the dimension of the sacrifices themselves, and this is an endless spiral potentially leading to indefinite confrontation. Unless, of course, we accept Clausewitz's thesis and we, therefore, consider that conflict is always oriented towards the achievement of some kind of political objectives; and must never be left to its own laws and dynamics. This takes Clausewitz to a new stage of thought, in which he considers that in order to be really absolute, and therefore lacking in logic, War must necessarily be conceived as an isolated act, external from politics and State dynamics, conducted exclusively by the operating armies, and aiming at a total final result. Clausewitz clearly considers such an idea preposterous and without foundation, as he firmly believes – and demonstrates – that War follows the laws of politics. Accordingly, it simply does not make sense to preconize an absolute, ultra-political War.

However, Clausewitz does not take his brilliant approach to the field of moral or ethical conclusions, even though at that stage of his reasoning he could perfectly well have chosen to follow that road, if only to support his main thesis. He is, however, eminently a military person, a thinker on War, and he carefully abstains from passing any moral judgement. With a coherence and consistency which one is tempted to brand as traditionally Germanic, he sticks to his field and refuses to venture into other connected, but different areas. Perhaps he considers that other thinkers may be better placed to do that.

Indeed, there is no scarcity of philosophers contemporary to Clausewitz who will focus on the subject of violence from the moral or ethical

viewpoint. For Hegel, as for Clausewitz, war is an essential feature of human life: it is not absolute evil, but a rational possibility. Under a clear influence of the French Revolution, Hegel tells us that modern War mobilises the entire citizenship and through that means it reinforces the coherence and consistence of societies. The most pessimistic side of the author seems focused on the problems and challenges in ensuring respect for international law, which will always be closely correlated to the capabilities of states to exercise pressure, in a dynamic in which, naturally, the most powerful states will have a tendency to adapt their respect of the law to the extent to which it is consistent and supportive of their own interests and motivations. Nonetheless, Hegel proposes to always try to ensure respect for at least certain principles, even in situations of War:

„The fact that states reciprocally recognise each other as states remains, even in war – the state of affairs when rights disappear and force and chance hold sway – a bond wherein each counts to the rest as something absolute. Hence in war, war itself is characterised as something which ought to pass away. It implies therefore the proviso of, the *jus gentium* – that the possibility of peace be retained (and so, for example, that envoys must be respected), and, in general, that war be not waged against domestic institutions, against the peace of family and private life, or against persons in their private capacity” (Hegel 1821, 319-320).

This logic is similar to that followed by Fichte, albeit the latter takes a somewhat more extreme position, while keeping in line with a comparable logic. Fichte, whose postulates are otherwise quite different from Clausewitz's – even though the two are often associated – thinks that War may be a sacred cause, even a moral necessity for a Nation (in this case, the embryonic German fatherland). True, there may be other interpretations, with different nuances and perspectives, of the author's position (Martinez Cinca 2004), but it can be safely argued that Fichte provides the basis for subsequent ideologies and even for the virulent nationalism of the XXth century. He thus becomes, at least to some extent, and more or less consciously, the intellectual inspirer for the processes which would eventually lead to extreme nationalistic violence the following century. Whichever is the exact degree of Fichte's responsibility and bellicism, it would be plainly wrong to associate Clausewitz to this trend.

Fichte is contradicted in a most direct way by his own mentor, Kant, whose intellectual construction considers war as a clear evil, to be eradicated, a radical idea which goes far beyond any positions of both Fichte and Hegel. Nonetheless, it is clear that Kant is not the utopian idealist that some current neo-Hobbesian thinkers would like to depict, in an almost cartoon view. Such a simplistic approach is perhaps best represented by Kagan's works and in

particular in his "Paradise and power" (Kagan 2003). This particular book is not far from the easy maniqueism and simplistic style of fashionable self-help best sellers.

Immanuel Kant speaks to us, in reality, of an ever closer movement towards perpetual peace; it is not about the establishment of a Kingdom of Peace on Earth, and even less about the creation of a utopian society. What the Prussian thinker proposes is much more rational: a contractual model through which war becomes more and more difficult and therefore less likely. It is not difficult to find this idea in the foundational thesis behind the birth of the current European Union; on the contrary, this is part of the basic approach of founding fathers such as Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, whose historical gamble for a Community bringing together former rivals had a Kantian flavour from the very start. There was and there is, however, a constant realistic approach underlying the process of European integration, combined with an idealistic element: it is a possibilistic logic, a Kantian one. This is also what has been given the name of "functional" method of European integration: the achievement of broader goals through realistic, small steps. One clear reference to this can be found in a relatively recent and rather courageous speech pronounced – perhaps with a bit wishful thinking – by former Commission President Prodi at the University of Ulster in 2004:

„Kant may have been pleased to see what we have done in the European Union - a form of supranational democracy in a Union of sovereign Member States. In some way, our Union enshrines the essence of Kant's federation of sovereign democracies" (Prodi 2004).

In that sense, Kant is not at all in contradiction with the deeper level of philosophy underlying Clausewitz's works. Both authors are in agreement that violent conflicts follow a social, collective, political logic; that they are not just punctual interruptions of reason, but, unfortunately, part of the nature of human society. None of them, on the other hand, preconizes the necessity or desirability of war. True, Kant (1795) condemns from the start bellic violence from a moral point of view while Clausewitz does not explicitly do so. But we must bear in mind that passing any kind of global moral judgment is not at all the objective of the latter.

This coincidence, or confluence, between Kant and Clausewitz, is an important point which deserves to be highlighted, as Clausewitz is too often mistakenly associated to a supposedly active bellicism, and this erroneous interpretation is at the origin of the appropriation of the thesis of the German thinker by the "hawks" from different schools of thought, past and present, across the Planet, as we will see in subsequent chapters.

4. AN IMPLICIT ETHIC DIMENSION

As we have noted earlier on, Clausewitz is careful to avoid any grand declaration of principles either in favour or against the legitimacy of war; beyond a small number of side comments which are often of difficult interpretation, there is no significant explicit declaration in either sense. However, this does not mean that his work lacks any implied prescriptive ethical dimension. Quite the opposite: his insistence on the strength of moral reason, even though considered from a utilitarian point of view (that is to say, moral reason plays a role in military affairs because it has a strong impact on effectiveness and therefore must be taken into account by any military planner), constitutes a clear re-introduction of the moral dimension in the bellic area. Even from that limited, utilitarian point of view, military action has in that sense a complex implicit moral dimension: it can become the resort of the weak, whenever they are motivated by the belief in a just cause, to successfully defeat a more powerful, but less convinced of the sanctity of his mission, enemy.

It is interesting indeed to take a moment to examine the consequences of this important aspect of Carl Clausewitz's work. Military strategy, intelligence, and understanding of the laws ruling War is for the author a weapon not necessarily at the disposal of the most powerful contender, but belongs to those who have the intellectual capacity and courage to accept the true nature of armed conflicts. It is absurd to see in Clausewitz a proponent of absolute War and even less, as some tried to demonstrate after World War Two, the inspirer of the remarkably desperate and unreasonable resistance by the Nazi forces and German society at large, long after the disappearance of any reasonable expectation of victory, when any rational observer would have concluded that defeat was certain and imminent. Clausewitz's conception is precisely the opposite: he prones rational analysis of conflicts, and limitation of those to the achievement of the political objectives of the actors. It necessarily follows that both absolute War as well as continuation of the conflict when the result is clearly certain, and it is only a matter of time to reach it, lacks any

sound rational foundation, according to the author. In that sense, numantine¹ resistance – or extermination War – do not fit in Clausewitz's construction.

Military strategy as the weapon of the righteous weak: this is indeed an extrapolation, among many other possible ones. Clausewitz himself never goes as far as that, because that would be a moral prescription and we have abundantly made it clear that this is not the point of the author. Neither in one sense, nor in the other. It would be as wrong to criticise an imaginary ultra-militarism, as to utilise Clausewitz to support absolute War, or War to the point of extermination.

5. WOLFOWITZ'S PARADOX

In 1990 Paul Wolfowitz outlined on paper his main thesis, which would prevail for very long years in the United States' official military doctrine, which it continues to influence today – perhaps in a more insidious, indirect way – on the basis of a model which claimed to be based, among others, precisely on Clausewitz. In a very summarized way, we could say that his basic point is that the United States, endowed with unprecedented power and with the appropriate structures to make it work, must prevent its adversaries from reaching positions of power through all necessary means including, if need be, unlimited (in terms of intensity) and preventive war.

„I think one has to say it's not just simply a matter of capturing people and holding them accountable, but removing the sanctuaries, removing the support systems, *ending states* [emphasis added] who sponsor terrorism. And that's why it has to be a broad and sustained campaign” (Wolfowitz 2001).

Long before the above declarations, Wolfowitz had put on paper in a famous draft the pillars of his doctrine for pre-emptive and unilateral action in the draft Defence Planning Guidance (US Dpt. of Defense 1992); and he had also signed, together with a remarkably large number of those who would be the future "hawks" in the George W. Bush Administration, a very telling collective letter:

„The only acceptable strategy is one that eliminates the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. In the near term, this means a

¹ Numantia, Celti-Iberian village in Central Spain, is said to have resisted Roman conquest until the very end, when according to traditional accounts, most of the surviving inhabitants and warriors burnt their city and threw themselves into the flames. *Gaius Plinius Secundus* sang the courage of the defenders.

willingness to undertake military action as diplomacy is clearly failing. In the long term, it means removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power. That now needs to become the aim of American foreign policy" (Abrams *et al.* 1998).

This is in stark contrast with the Powell Doctrine, which was predominant at that stage and which advocates i.e. for proportional use of force and exit strategies. As Powell (1995) himself put it, prior to deciding to go to War, all "political, diplomatic and economic means" must be tried.

Some eminent thinkers have tried to link this line of thought with a so-called new-Wilsonianism (Nye 2004); they seem to forget, however, that the Wilson Doctrine can't be narrowed to the promotion and defence of the interests of the United States, but refers to values globally valid and supported by supra-national institutions, both points - in particular the latter - inapplicable to the Wolfowitz Doctrine. Proposals such as Fukuyama's, which could be interpreted as aiming at helping failed States (Fukuyama 2004), are in reality motivated by concern regarding the effects the de-composition of the institutions in such States could have on other Countries. This is, obviously, not Wilson's motivation. What is more, the underlying subplot in Wolfowitz's thesis is precisely an alleged - but not demonstrated - failure of progressive interventionism, with the collapse of its hopes that the World would be marching towards a set of common rules which would effectively safeguard Peace (Bacevich 2013). We are actually much closer to the realism of Huntington, which, with total clarity, upholds the same type of ideas:

„Western belief in the universality of Western culture suffers three problems: it is false; it is immoral; and it is dangerous. That it is false has been the central thesis of this book" (Huntington 1995).

It is urgent, according to Huntington, to revise Western action and to undertake an effort to win allies and create safety firewalls, in order to maintain techno-military superiority:

„[...] and, most important, to recognize that Western intervention in the affairs of other civilizations is probably the single most dangerous source of instability and potential global conflict in a multicivilizational world" (Huntington 1995).

Wolfowitz's thesis is, as we can see, an intellectual manifestation which is very close, almost identical, to the rather apocalyptic doctrine of Huntington. It has little to do, however, with Clausewitz, whom he claims to appreciate as one of the sources for his thinking.

The paradox is that Clausewitz's thought, when analysed in depth, is actually supportive of conclusions opposite to those of he who claims to be his pupil. Indeed, the Prussian thinker clearly distinguishes between total war - the destruction of the enemy, illustrated by the above quoted language of

"ending states" - and ideal war - the achievement of sufficiently satisfactory, limited objectives. Moreover, his main thesis, on the rationality of war, is implicitly in frontal contradiction with extermination war or total destruction. The latter is usually impossible and therefore not a rational option except in extremely limited circumstances, and in that case it would not be desirable anyway: in a situation of such a disparity of power, that would permit one side to destroy the other so thoroughly, the same objectives could surely be obtained through more limited efforts. Indeed, war is for Clausewitz - and this is perhaps the best definition ever proposed - violent action to compel one of the subjects to submit to the will of the other. Under such premise, rationality of the process and of the subjects impose limitation of war to the minimum required for submission. When the enemy fulfils our will, war ends.

Now, the only situation in which an enemy on track to defeat will continue to fight until its destruction - a situation likely to lead to "total War" - is when conditions for Peace are not rational enough to offer incentives preferable to the continuation of war, even if that leads to certain defeat. That is to say, war will continue to its ultimate consequences whenever the demands by the prospective victors will not have sufficient rationality in order to offer a minimum acceptable to the impending losers. This may happen in particular when decisions are taken outside the rational process, by emotional, visceral or mystical reasons, impervious to logic.

What to say, then, about the appropriation of Clausewitz to justify pre-emptive war? A good example, and another profoundly misleading misinterpretation, can be found in the final version of the famous 2002 US National Security Strategy, which, while loosely claiming Clausewitzian roots, indicates that:

„[The] greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction - and the more compelling case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent such an attack by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act pre-emptively" (NSS 2002).

On such basis, the intellectual civil and military group associated to Paul Wolfowitz concludes that the "anticipatory action", better known as "pre-emption", is not only compatible with Clausewitz's thought, but it emanates somehow from it. Pre-emption would be for those authors a "success", and it would have "successfully completed a regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq, via its military instrument [and] has made more progress in ten months than the UN has made in ten years" (Dungan 2004, 3). More than a decade after the invasions, with war raging in Afghanistan and Iraq and conflict extended to a

point never seen before in the Middle East, it is difficult to suffocate a feeling of bitter irony, evoked by such unfounded triumphalism. Other thinkers have more sophisticated approaches, such as the one which distinguishes between "pre-emption" and "prevention", in order to justify at least partially such doctrines. However, and very significantly, even those admit that "On War" might misinform people who are considering preventive war as a policy option (Gray 2007). Indeed, reality is quite different: "On War" can't in any case be interpreted as specifically supporting any doctrine advocating preventive – or pre-emptive – use of War. It is simply a question which does not feature in the book parameters: Clausewitz does not pronounce himself on the matter.

Nonetheless, and on the basis of his position on the diverse, multidimensional nature of War, mixing reason, luck, and passion, it can be inferred that the author is clearly reluctant towards any unnecessary initiation of an act of incalculable and profound consequences, unless all other options are clearly exhausted. I underline all other options because, naturally, there will always be a very large number of options before conflict becomes inevitable. Ultimately the demand for exhausting all possible reasonable options implies a rejection of preventive military action. We can however accept that the limits between "pre-emption" and self-defence may sometimes be blurred: but only the latter is specifically supported by Clausewitz's work. We can therefore conclude with reasonable certainty that the rationality of War as a political act, which is Clausewitz's main underlying theme in "On War" – without prejudice of his accurate consideration of emotional and random aspects of conflict – is a very powerful antidote against preventive War, as well as against extermination War. Regarding the latter, it is important to underline that Clausewitz preconizes the utilisation of overwhelming force only in the battleground: that is to say, in the area of tactics, not in the field of strategy, and even less in the area of politics.

6. PRESENT IMPACT OF THIS INTERPRETATION

Paul Wolfowitz's thesis is, as we have seen, just the opposite. This is probably due, at least partly, to the extraordinary ambition of his "minimum objectives", which are basically nothing less than to *destroy* USA's opponents. This is really almost the opposite of what Clausewitz proposes – in particular in "On War"; yet the former author invokes frequently the Prussian writer. Such a misappropriation – perhaps misinterpretation – of Clausewitz's

positions has been a regular feature, a historical constant, which has created numerous, unnecessary problems, hindering efforts to apply Clausewitz's real thinking to the quest for Peace and stability. One could almost say that the works of the Prussian, and in particular "On War", are cursed with such a misinterpretation: indeed, from the very beginning, from the very first print, "On War" suffered spurious alterations which, even though subsequently corrected, seem to have left as a strange heritage a certain trend to permanently "correct" the work of this author in one sense or another, with overly numerous reviews being in turn criticised by other, equally numerous authors. For example, it is worth highlighting the criticism of professor Keegan's interpretation which is presented by C. Bassford in "War in History". In essence, Bassford maintains that professor Keegan's rejection of Clausewitz stems precisely from this type of bellicist misunderstanding (Bassford 1994).

The Wolfowitzian version of this constant misunderstanding could perhaps have been relegated to the obscure realm of abstruse political science curiosities, had it been conceived under different circumstances. As it happens, it was established just before one of the main cataclysmic events in recent times, one of a particularly spectacular nature, which gave it unprecedented global repercussion. This, combined with a conjunction of political circumstances, created the conditions for Wolfowitz's thesis to receive, despite their evident mistakes, a remarkable impulse and momentum, with consequences lasting to this date. That cataclysm was, of course, the set of terrorist actions perpetrated on the 11th of September 2001. The thesis of Wolfowitz would play over the next years a key role in the definition of policy reactions by the Republican George W. Bush Administration. And, in spite of later developments, they continued to play a certain role in subsequent events, with continued consequences in present times.

That is so because, despite the rapid succession of rise and fall in Paul Wolfowitz's subsequent career, and the loss of personal prestige after his removal from the World Bank, his thesis remained relatively unaffected. A historical misunderstanding was thus stabilised and continues to be regularly brought back to the fore today. This misunderstanding is most particularly widespread among those who support the most bellicist theories within neo-conservative movements, but other sectors are not unaffected either. Notwithstanding the existence of a real stream of interesting academic contributions recalling Clausewitz's works real meaning, the Wolfowitzian misinterpretations continue to create confusion. It is an urgent task to address this problem, so that the theoretical contributions from "On War" can play to

the fullest their enormous role in promoting reason and pragmatism. And, ultimately, to ensure that the cool-head thinking of the Prussian is not misinterpreted as a celebration of war:

„As war is no act of blind passion, but is dominated over by the political object, therefore the value of that object determines the measure of the sacrifices by which it is to be purchased. This will be the case, not only as regards extent, but also as regards duration. As soon, therefore, as the required outlay becomes so great that the political object is no longer equal in value, the object must be given up, and peace will be the result” (Clausewitz, Book I, Chapter II).

7. CONCLUSIONS

Sadly, Clausewitz died before the publication of "On War", thus depriving upcoming generations from possible revisions and updates, and more importantly, from any clarifications by the author on the most obscure chapters of his work. Both Clausewitz's demise and the publication of his work preceded by one decade and a half the arrival of the 1848 wave of nationalistic revolutions throughout Europe; the latter would have been, undoubtedly, a most interesting element to integrate in the military analysis of our thinker, both on the mass mobilisation element, as well as on what concerns the purely military aspects of the confrontations. Clausewitz's work relative ambiguity and even cryptic nature – the latter often hidden behind a false *façade* of simplicity – also contribute to the remarkable diversity of interpretation, including on key premises. Nevertheless, Wolfowitz misinterpretation, closely connected with the general postulates which provided the framework for the disastrous organisation of the Second Iraq War adventure, remains beyond any doubt one of the most damaging ones, in terms of theoretical and practical impact. This crystallised, notably, in an approach which overlooks any meaningful gradualism, dismisses global inter-departmental approaches, and conspicuously ignores the need for an exit strategy.

The traumatism created by the collapse of the actions undertaken under this approach has greatly contributed – and this is possibly one of its gravest consequences – to subsequent unfortunate decisions and even to a trend towards inhibition in the face of pressing needs to act in other conflicts where a more rational approach – a more Clausewitzian approach- would have clearly been more appropriate and more effective in stopping or at least reducing violence and instability. The case of Syria seems a very clear illustration. In view of the evolution of events, it is fair to say that the wrong

decisions and mistakes made on Iraq have saddled subsequent key decisions in Syria – while the situation in that Country remains terribly chaotic. The extremism of Wolfowitz's postulates, and the tendency towards inhibition in front of highly complex, almost un-understandable conflicts, which are not considered political but cultural, are actually two sides of the same coin. Confronted with an imaginary irrationality of war, leaders and citizens seem naturally deemed to choose between inaction or excessive action. Under this approach, intermediate options seem to be lacking. It is in that context that an appropriate interpretation of Clausewitz is more necessary than ever: the Prussian tells us clearly that War is a political act, necessarily situated in the realm of reason, and only reason can provide effective, appropriate and lasting solutions and responses. This is an exercise which, quite naturally, requires many nuances and balancing acts, beyond the simplicity of the previously examined extreme positions.

In summary, war is a political act; has always been, will always be. This could perhaps be the formulation to capture Clausewitz's best and longer lasting intellectual legacy. It is important to stress that this does not mean that war is inherent to politics, that it is necessary, nor that Peace is a utopian state of affairs. True, Clausewitz is clearly not proposing to "abolish War". He is not, however, opposed to defending Peace as the most desirable state, and he never hints at any kind of opposition to the regulation of possible cases where war can or cannot be legitimate. Indeed, an in-depth reflection on the thesis of political rationality of war could reasonably lead to the conclusion that in order to avoid armed conflicts from a preventive point of view, as well as to limit their destructive reach and duration once they have started, rationality, moderation and regulation are appropriate, necessary and effective instruments. It is my belief that this is a natural extension of Clausewitz's postulates, and that this conclusion is consistent with his key "On War" masterpiece on the matter. On the other hand, it is clearly incompatible with Wolfowitz's interpretation, and its subsequent variations. I believe we have demonstrated that this is because Wolfowitz's vision can't reasonably claim to be based on Clausewitz's work. In these turbulent times, it is urgent to correct this misinterpretation.

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