

Peer Review

Review of: "Clausewitz's Conceptual Relationship Among Tactics, Strategy, and the Conduct of War (Kriegführung)"

Marcel Berni¹

1. ETH Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland

This research article by Ami-Jacques Rapin seeks to “investigate the interpretative nuances of the term *Strategie* within the German military lexicon”. Focusing on strategic thinkers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the author makes a central argument: Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz’s interpretation was that “strategy” was an “open-ended” concept – open mainly to “above”, i.e. the political realm. This conclusion is supported by an impressive array of primary sources and secondary literature on the subject, as well as a comparative approach. This perspective demonstrates the development and originality of Clausewitz’s ideas on strategy, which are widely compared and contrasted with those of other, mostly German-speaking, military thinkers.

The author’s approach is important because the evolution of the ancient concept of strategy is largely forgotten. In fact, “strategy” has meant different things at different times. From the late eighteenth century to the end of World War I, it explained how war was conducted at the level of the military commander. Based on Clausewitz, a hierarchical distinction was gradually added. Later, additional concepts such as military strategy, operations, or grand strategy were introduced, making the demarcation between these levels more and more difficult – although their inventors had hoped for the opposite. From the middle of the 20th century, strategy was increasingly assigned to the political leadership.

This careful historical study will therefore help to clear up semantic confusion – at least in a historical perspective. Furthermore, Rapin illustrates the complex and often somewhat theoretical distinction that many authors have drawn – and still draw – between tactics and strategy. Moreover, this article problematises the translation of German military terms of a bygone era into modern English. I therefore appreciate that the author cites German and French original sources on many occasions.

However, there are a few, mostly methodological and formal, problems with the article in its present form. First, I would like to ask the author to briefly introduce the most important military thinkers besides Clausewitz in the introduction. Second, the introduction is too short and does not really provide the core contribution as formulated in the conclusion. In fact, in its present form, the introduction reads more like a brief state of the research. Third, I cannot find any mention of the sources consulted, the selection process, the methodology used, or the limitations of the article - either in the introduction or in the conclusion. Fourth, the chapter "The specific nature of the Clausewitzian approach" should be renamed. It hardly focuses on Clausewitz, but rather on other thinkers such as Gaugreben, Bülow, Wagner, von Lossau or Rühle von Lilienstern. Thus, the title promises something that the chapter does not deliver. Moreover, should the core argument on page 19, "strategy as an open concept", not be part of the main title of the whole article?

Finally, I have a few questions and comments for the author:

- p. 2: Shouldn't the title of chapter 2 be called "An ambiguous concept" instead of "An ambiguously concept"?
- p. 2: The claim that the same curriculum was taught at the Kurfürstliche Kadetten-Korps in Munich and at the Military Academy in Vienna needs a footnote.
- p. 4: Shouldn't the German spelling be with an ä in "Körperlich-Kräftige" instead of "Körperlich-Kraftige"?
- p. 6: Shouldn't the German "Kriegskunst" be written with a capital K?
- p. 7: Please give a brief description of what *Neue Bellona* was at the time.
- p. 10: The phrase "further discussion follow" is unclear to me. Please, be more specific.
- p. 13: The space between the words "tactics/ engagement" should probably be deleted.
- p. 14, 16, 18 (footnotes 68, 75, 80, 94, 96): By placing the footnote before the full stop on these pages, you are deviating from the normal approach (full stop followed by footnote).
- P. 15: The German plural is "Merkmale", not "Merkmals".

Overall, the article is well written in terms of its readable style and structure. Although the arguments it presents are not entirely new, it can serve as a good overview and informative source for future research.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.