

Peer Review

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

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This is another outstanding contribution by Ami-Jacques Rapin to our understanding of the evolution of strategic thought. It is based on careful reading of the available sources, especially in German, and it puts Clausewitz in the context of his own times in ways that enrich his value as a theorist for ours.

In terms of an English readership (given that Rapin has chosen to write the article in English), he makes four key points that correct the interpretations offered by Peter Paret and that underpin the dominant English-language translation – that by Paret and Michael Howard. First, despite appearances to the contrary, Clausewitz had not arrived at a settled definition of strategy in 1804. Instead, because he regarded strategy as an ‘open’ concept, he was as ready to address its relationship with policy as he was with tactics. Secondly, he did not see the relationships between these three as fixed. Thirdly, much of his thinking on this topic – especially in its early stages – was shaped in response to Buelow, whom he so vigorously criticised in *Vom Kriege* but with whom his engagement was clearly more productive. Fourthly, in this and other respects, Clausewitz's thinking constantly evolved and was not set between 1804 and 1807. Rapin specifically follows Werner Hahlweg in stressing the years 1808-12 as formative, but he ends by making use of the last of Clausewitz's historical studies, that on the 1799 campaign in Switzerland, to clinch his arguments.

The article depends on Rapin's exploration of three concepts within Clausewitz's writing. Two of them have been almost entirely neglected by Clausewitz scholars. The first, higher tactics, was central to much Napoleonic warfare – and to Napoleon himself. Rapin relates this idea to the actions of corps and armies. Napoleon recognised its application to corps, but the idea of separate armies operating in conjunction with each other seems anachronistic – even for Napoleon. Rapin's definition omits any reference to

divisions, a more familiar higher formation by 1789. Was their appearance also relevant to the concept of higher tactics? And, if so, their prevalence warrants inclusion.

Rapin's attention then switches to a much more important concept – Kriegfuehrung. It is pervasive in Vom Kriege, not least adjectivally, as Rapin points out, and yet it has too often been seen (not least in English) as a synonym for strategy. Rapin sees it on its own terms: the concept that unites war and policy and so gives Clausewitz's 'open' definition of strategy expression. His argument gives Clausewitz's apparently narrow definition of strategy meaning and relevance for more modern interpretations of the use and understanding of strategy.

The third set of concepts concerns the distinction between Ziel and Zweck in Clausewitz's writings, which has become central to the debate about that between means and ends. Rapin breathes life into an old argument by saying that between 1804 and his writing of book 1, chapter 1 of Vom Kriege, he revised his definitions, making clear that Zweck applied to war's political aim.

The article is clearly written on the whole. Readers probably need to be told what the Tugerbund was (p.4), and on p. 15, in the second sentence of the third paragraph, 'he' should make clear that the reference is to Ruehle von Lilienstern. The title of the article in English is cumbersome: it would be helped if 'among' was replaced by 'between'. On p.5 in para 2, rephrase 'it will not be undertaken' to read 'it will not undertake'. On p. 7, para 4, the opening line should read 'The definition with which Clausewitz took issue'. On p. 10, second para, line 2, replace 'however' with 'although'. In the next sentence, 'reflections on the art of war' reads better than 'of'. On p. 21, beginning of para 3, 'the political purpose' needs to be followed by 'traverses', not 'traverse'. On p. 25, top line, insert 'the' after 'as a matter of'.

Otherwise, publish!

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.