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ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΔΙΕΘΝΩΝ ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΩΝ ΑΝΑΛΥΣΕΩΝ
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Is Clausewitz's On War relevant to contemporary warfare?

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A master theorist of war, author of the treatise *Vom Kriege* and perhaps one of the most respected classics on the strategic thought, Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), was the first to study warfare as a full-spectrum social phenomenon and to situate it on a solid philosophical basis. The Prussian General, acclaimed as the military figure with the greatest influence on strategic issues (Horwath, 2006), is righteously considered to be the founder of the principles for conducting war. Clausewitz formulates his perspectives in the well-known 1832 book "On War", where instead of writing a plain manual of military strategic instructions, he introduces an all-embracing analysis of the fundamental nature of warfare determining its purpose, types, and form. The book encapsulates his view of war as a rationalist tool of national state policy, an instrument that aims to achieve specific objective goals set by the political leadership. War, for Clausewitz, necessarily responds to a certain political plan and therefore "is a mere continuation of politics by other means" (Clausewitz, 2008: 28). Imperative part of Clausewitz's formula is an interactive group of three competing elements that decisively influence the development and outcome of war: People, the Army, and the Government -known oversimplified as the Clausewitzian Trinity. Clausewitz breaks down the non-autonomous phenomenon of warfare and associates the effectiveness of military operations with people and the state. The "Paradoxical Trinity" constitutes the culmination of the philosophical approach of war and reveals a plethora of military conceptions employed by strategic studies over the centuries. Clausewitzian tenet served as an enriched framework for post-19th-century European political and military thought and today still represents a standard insightful analysis for researchers of armed conflict. Though his ideas were written almost 200 years ago in a significantly different context[1], the essence of them remains enduring.

   This essay will underscore the relevancy of Clausewitz's basic key arguments using two contemporary case studies. First, it will examine the Clausewitzian correlation between war and politics using the paradigm of the ever-lasting Greek-Turkish tenuous relationship that has created a present-day canvas of increasing disputes. Secondly, it will probe the timelessness of Clausewitz's "Trinity" through the lens of the Iraq war initiated in 2003.

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[1] Clausewitz wrote his magnum opus *On War* through a transitional phase in regard to warfare.It was a period when the idea that whole societies go to war started shaping.

Throughout his book, Clausewitz ceaselessly reminds that *politics* should be considered the matrix of warfare and that every military operation should never be divorced from its political objectives (Ifestos, 1988). In the 6th chapter of Book VIII, there are clear insights about the peculiar relationship that war and politics share. Clausewitz explains that warfare constitutes a 'branch of political activity' and asserts that [war] 'cannot follow its own laws, but has to be treated as some other whole; the name of which is policy' (2008: 731). Therefore, it can be comprehended that war at heart is a *means* rather than a plain action of violence. Furthermore, according to Clausewitz, it is misleading to believe that warfare can commence independently as it eventually derives from a political goal. As he particularly notes 'war does not carry in itself the elements for a complete decision and final settlement (2009:455).' This translates into the belief that during a national crisis, the army and the commanders are being recruited only at the behest of politicians, and at the same time, they tend to follow a certain governmental political decision. In the Clausewitzian way of thinking, it is the *politicians* who define the intended purpose of the military operation each time. The role of the Generals and the military corps is to ensure *how* this intended political purpose can be achieved. To adjust this theoretical concept into the contemporary context it is enough to consider just the fact that unless there is a military regime in a country, the army itself cannot declare war on the state.

The evolution of the Greek – Turkish relationship validates Clausewitz's hypothesis about war and politics. Their diplomatic ties have revealed many times that even though the two states have been marked by a rapidly rising tension -very close to military conflict- the political agenda of both governments remains the defense of a peaceful settlement. A contemporary example that confirms Clausewitz's key argument that war is directed by politics is the Imia/Kardak rocks dispute in the Aegean Sea. Imia, a pair of small islets located in the eastern Aegean, became the main object of the military crisis between Athens and Ankara in January 1996. Occasioned by a minor incident between a Turkish freight and a Greek tugboat, Ankara unanticipatedly declared that the rocks of Imia constitute part of Turkish territory. The Greek side deliberately rejected the Turkish claims on the ground that Ankara had previously recognized the Imia islets as belonging to Italy under a bilateral agreement signed in 1932; the islets were subsequently ceded by Italy to Greece with the rest of the Dodecanese island chain by the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 (Arapoglou, 2002). The quarrel over sovereignty rights developed a vitriolic dispute and a rapid build-up of military presence around the islands (Pratt and Schofield, 1996). On 31 January both Greek and Turkish Special Forces decided to get heavily involved, landing

undetected on islets. The already heightened tension exacerbated, and the troops came to the brink of armed conflict. The anticipated command for military engagement though was never given by the two governments, respectively. Even though armed forces in both countries pushed for military escalation, *it was the Greek and Turkish Foreign Ministers* that objected to the military clash (Bayar and Kotelis,2014). The memoirs of the former chief of the Greek Armed Forces, Chris Lymperis, are particularly noteworthy; according to him, the key decision-makers in the de-escalation of the crisis were the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and the Defense Minister. Admiral Lymperis explained that his role was particularly restricted to solely providing information and executing commands. He has also insinuated that in case that Greek Special Forces had the green light to make the final decisions, the trajectory of the conflict would have been different (Lymperis,2009). A similar position was also held by the Turkish Foreign Ministry which again did not desire a clash. The political decisions taken by the elected governments which purposely refrained from engaging in a military operation, portray the relevancy of Clausewitz's justification that political goals possess the power to limit wars.

The trinitarian conception is arguably another Clausewitzian theoretical framework useful to grasp the nature of war. Clausewitz believes that the dominant elements of the war form a wonderful Trinity. Simplistically put, the constituting key elements of this 'Paradoxical Trinity' are violence, chance, and rational reason, concepts that are timeless principles of war (Schuurman,2010). In particular, the first tendency is composed of the 'original violence, hatred and animosity' (Clausewitz, 2008:49). Here, violence can be interpreted not as physical violence per se, but as a violent emotion, a human motive force (Bassford, 2007:82). The specific tendency occupies the People. The second element is fate and specifically refers to the 'play of probabilities and chance' of the military commanders and the Army (Clausewitz, 2008:49). The third tendency is composed of the element of subordination, as an instrument of policy which makes it subject to the Government and the political goals of a war (Bassford, 2007:77).

The concept of Clausewitz was largely applied to the Bush Doctrine and the inauguration of the global war on terrorism operation, (GWOT) declared after the epoch-defining September 11 attacks. The forces of hate and enmity, probability and chance, and political policy were much reflected in the US political agenda that was set up to fight the terrorist network of Al-Qaeda. The first principle of the Trinity is the People, without whose support it is impossible for a state to resort to war. According to Clausewitz, in order to secure the support of the people in the war, they should be possessed by strong

feelings of hatred and hostility towards the opponent. If these feelings begin to subside, so does the support for the cause of war. In other words, for Clausewitz war constructs the nation through uniting the trinity, mobilizing people behind a common cause based on a reason (Kaldor 2010).Thinking towards the above direction, American President George W.Bush seemingly did not underestimate the will and the power of the American people. The terrorist attacks of 2001 not only generated a massive wave of American patriotism and national unity but also increased the public's trust in the Bush government and the political leaders (Rosentiel, 2006). George W.Bush on these grounds employed a unifying campaign, speaking right to the heart of the American citizens stating among others that 'America is successful because of the hard work and creativity and enterprise of our people. These were the true strengths before Sept. 11, and they are our strengths today" (2001).

The second element of the Trinity, the Army, was reflected in the role of the U.S. military "to carry out policy by other means". Only nine days after the deadliest terrorist attacks in U.S. history, President Bush sent an important message to America's military; he called the Armed Forces to "be ready", highlighting that the hour that America would act is coming (2001). The US military launched a very well-guided war campaign however there were not clear geographical boundaries and specific time frames. Terrorism could be anywhere, the instructions though were rather vague and left room for different interpretations. As Bush stated "war on terror will be much broader than the battlefields and beachheads of the past. The war will be fought wherever terrorists hide or run, or plan" (2001). Moreover, he added that "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated" (2001). As it becomes evident the war-against-terrorism strategic doctrine was marked by a major shift in US foreign policy towards full-scale militarization and unilateralism. The reality of a broad, generalized, and potentially unbounded war against terrorists concords perfectly with the idea of chance and luck. The US forces, even though sufficient in terms of combat power, were called to participate in a well-structured game of fate and opportunity.

Lastly, the role of the Government in the equation of the Iraq invasion is more than perceptible. Resort to war is a decision that must be taken from the perspective of the political leadership and this principle permeates all of Clausewitz's work. The supremacy of the political leadership, however, does not stop at decision-making. War is a state affair, in which the Army plays a dominant role, but the participation of the other elements of state power is never nullified. In our case, the relationship between the political and the military aspect was pronounced. The political purpose of the war, as crystal clearly defined by the US government, was to "disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's

support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people" (Bush,2001). Bush administration had a very solid impact at every level of the armed invasion of Iraq establishing this way the political aspect of the Trinity. As per the Clausewitzian Trinity concept, a clear and straight political objective ensures that the fight is not abandoned even after the emotional fuel is spent (Glavy, 2002).

   To conclude, although many of the concepts that Clausewitz discusses in his work *On War* seem obsolete due mainly to the rapid technological developments, the specific essay supports that the Trinity theory and the Clausewitzian stance on the relationship between war and politics are timeless and can be applied in the contemporary context. Clausewitz's theories even though incepted almost 200 years ago have withstood the test of the time and serve as a theoretical basis for the study and analysis of the armed conflict, regardless of the context in which it takes place.

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