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OFTEN QUOTED BUT SELDOM UNDERSTOOD – THE RELEVANCE OF CLAUSEWITZ'S PARADOXICAL TRINITY TO PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION IN THE CANADIAN FORCES

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ABSTRACT

Planning operations based on interpretations of superficial characteristics of a conflict can lead to disastrous consequences or prolonged engagement as observed by the United States' participation in the conflicts in Vietnam and Iraq. Understanding the dynamic nature of war is pivotal to ensuring military actions are properly tailored to the fundamental influences of the conflict.

This paper argues that Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity composed of passion, chance and reason remains a valid framework to foster understanding of the nature of war through applied study at the Joint Command and Staff Programme at Canadian Forces College. The discussion includes an analysis of the trinity's relevance to current operating conditions by considering the influences inherent to the current operating environment and by refuting the claims of Clausewitz's most prominent critics.

Based on the trinity's continuing relevance to current operating conditions, the paper recommends that Canadian Forces College should incorporate instruction on the paradoxical trinity in the curriculum of the Joint Command and Staff Programme to better align with Canada's allies and ensure graduates are better prepared to contribute to operational and strategic planning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

It was my ambition to write a book that would not be forgotten after two or three years, and that possibly might be picked up more than once by those who are interested in the subject.
                                        — Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

Clausewitz's capstone theory of *On War* referred to as the "paradoxical trinity" remains a valid concept for describing the nature of war and it persists as a fundamental component of instruction at many allied command and staff courses. In contrast, Canadian Forces College has all but abandoned the Prussian and does not instruct students on the enduring nature of war described by the paradoxical trinity as part of the current curriculum of the Joint Command and Staff Programme.

Few unfinished works have had the enduring quality of Clausewitz's *On War*. Out of the eight books contained within this work, Clausewitz considered only the first chapter of Book One containing the concept of his paradoxical trinity that described the nature of war as complete.[1] Unfortunately he died from cholera before he was able to expand and refine the theories presented in the remainder of his manuscript. Clausewitz would be astonished to find that his paradoxical trinity spurs debate among academics and military practitioners nearly 200 years after his wife published *On War* on his behalf.[2]

Although *On War* contains timeless concepts that have endured the test of time, Clausewitz's influence has vastly exceeded his readership. He wrote *On War* in a style

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[1]Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 70.
[2]Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 430.

that fosters misinterpretation for those students of theory who choose not to read all 563 pages. Clausewitz's writing style features numerous sharp, seemingly self-contained narratives designed to grab the reader's attention prior to further explanation in subsequent portions of the volume. Many theorists have simply stripped Clausewitz's words from these brief narratives without the context of follow-on sections and this has led to frequent contradiction with Clausewitz's original intent.[3] Combined with the fact that many of his ideas have not been accurately represented in some of the English translations of his work have led some theorists to claim that his theories have lost relevancy.[4] The paradoxical trinity is one of the most debated concepts that the Prussian developed.

Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity is a set of theories that describe the enduring nature of war that is composed of the dynamic forces of passion, chance and reason. It provides a basis for study that one can employ as a framework for understanding the fundamental nature of a particular conflict. The trinity is easily misinterpreted by the hasty student of theory as it is described briefly in Chapter One of Book One and amplified with context in later portions of the volume. When read with a holistic perspective intent on grasping the trinity in its entirety, one can quickly comprehend the true value of Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war. This paper will argue that Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity is a valid framework to understand the true character of a conflict within the current operating environment. In addition, the Canadian Forces

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[3]Eric Alterman, "The Uses and Abuses of Clausewitz," *US Army Parameters Journal*, vol. 17 (Summer 1987): 18, http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/ArticleIndex.cfm.
[4]Clausewitz, *On War*, xi.

should better incorporate the trinity as a fundamental component of advanced officer

professional military education as part of the Joint Command and Staff Programme at

Canadian Forces College.[5]

The paper builds from historical and theoretical foundations prior to transitioning

into sections focused on analysis. This commences with a brief description of

Clausewitz's life that provides context for his theories and transitions into a detailed

description of the concepts that underpin Clausewitz's trinity. With the foundation set,

the paper shifts to proving the trinity's relevance to current operations by considering the

complexities of the current operating environment as well as addressing the claims of

some of Clausewitz's most prominent critics. The paper concludes by demonstrating how

the trinity is relevant to professional military education and how it needs to be further

incorporated as part of instruction in the Joint Command and Staff Programme at

Canadian Forces College.

CHAPTER 1 – UNDERSTANDING THE MAN BEHIND THE TRINITY

To properly comprehend Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity and relate it to

contemporary conflict, it is vital that one understands the context of Clausewitz's life and

what conditions influenced his development of this complex concept. Since *On War* was

published, many theorists have misinterpreted the trinity due to a failure to grasp the

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[5]Canada. Canadian Defence Academy. "Officer Developmental Periods." Last accessed 1 February 2013. http://www.cda.forces.gc.ca/cfpds-sppfc/english/officer-development/officer-dev-periods.htm.

context from which it was developed.[6] This chapter describes Clausewitz's life with a focus on those events and experiences that had greatest influence on his development of the paradoxical trinity.

Carl Phillip Gottlieb von Clausewitz was born in June 1780 in a small rural town southwest of Berlin. His father was a retired lieutenant from the Seven Years War who maintained close ties with his peers remaining in the officer corps during Clausewitz's youth. Living in this military influenced environment, it is no surprise that Clausewitz was accepted into the 34th Infantry Regiment in 1792 just prior to his twelfth birthday as per the established military tradition of that time.[7]

France declared war against Prussia's ally Austria that same year. Within months Clausewitz enthusiastically received his first taste of war at the rank of lance corporal when his regiment was deployed to take control of the Rhine from French revolutionary forces in early 1793. He served on both the regimental line of battle and within detached sections on task, where he repeatedly experienced the brutal violence inherent to war.[8] When hostilities ceased in 1795 with the Peace of Basel, the Prussians had defeated the French repeatedly and taken thousands of prisoners, however these gains were not accompanied by political achievements. These lacklustre results contrasted strongly with the number of Prussian casualties. This experience set him on a course to recognize that

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[6]Christopher Bassford, "John Keegan and the Grand Tradition of Trashing Clausewitz: a Polemic," *War in History Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3 (November 1994): 319-320, http://wih.sagepub.com/content/1/3/319.citation.

[7]Thomas Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity" (PhD thesis, Warwick University, 2009), 11-12, http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap/2048.

[8]Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 33.

strategic issues could not be solved purely through military means and that war was a political phenomenon.[9]

Clausewitz spent the period from 1795 to 1801 garrisoned in the peaceful town of Neuruppin. The regimental commander Freidrich von Tschammer focused this period on practicing and improving established battlefield drills which provided Clausewitz ample exposure to Prussian military society and institutions. Unfortunately the rigid, ceremonial character of the training conducted during this period was ill suited for the fluid nature of battle Clausewitz had just experienced.[10] Clausewitz noted specifically that, "even a modicum of reflection on these exercises…was bound to lead at once to the realization that none of this had taken place in the war that we had fought."[11] This was a major influence on Clausewitz's belief that there was no formula to warfare and that although the core nature of war remained the same, its character was fluid.

Clausewitz attended the Berlin Institute for Young Officers from 1801 to 1804 and graduated at the head of his class. It was here that Clausewitz was influenced by the Counter-Enlightenment movement through some of the school's academics. Clausewitz was shown how the Enlightenment's sole focus on the power of reason was unrealistic given the passions and emotions that were common to all human activities.[12] This

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[9]Clausewitz, *On War*, 5-7.
[10]Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 11-13.
[11]Paret, *Clausewitz and the State,* 45.
[12]Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace and the Reinvention of War* (London: Profile Books, 2001), 112.

perspective would remain with Clausewitz and affect his interpretation of the world around him and his development of the paradoxical trinity.

The head instructor of the Berlin Institute, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, saw world affairs as a process of progressive change, where both contemporary and historical methods deserved respect. He emphasized the development of his students' intellect and focused on the powers of judgement and independence of thought regarding war theory. Scharnhorst was like a second father to Clausewitz and profoundly impacted Clausewitz's views regarding the relationship between theory and practice as well as the importance of historical study in any analysis of war.[13] These fundamentals would form the basis for much of Clausewitz's later studies.[14]

Following Napoleon's dazzling victory against the much larger combined armies of Austria and Russia at Austerlitz in 1805, many European theorists were mesmerized by Napoleonic strategy and tactics.[15] Many viewed these techniques as an enduring standard of excellence for past, present or future conflicts rather than a historical occurrence inevitably subject to change. Prussian theorist Heinrich von Bülow employed Napoleonic techniques to develop a strategic system of calculated geometric patterns of points of domination and angles of approach with a view to rationalizing war to make it more predictable. Clausewitz published his first work on this subject, promoting concepts that would later form the core of his own theories on war by arguing that Bülow's method

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[13]Thomas Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 13.
[14]Clausewitz, *On War*, 8.
[15]Chris Butler, "FC106A: The Rise of Napoleon (1795-1808)," last accessed 29 January 2013, http://www.flowofhistory.com/readings-flowcharts/the-early-modern-era/the-age-revolutions/fc106a.

of analysis was flawed as war was affected by irrational and non-rational forces that could not be subdued by mathematical analysis.[16] Clausewitz also stressed the fact that the principles Bülow had developed were invalid due to their focus on the contemporary technology of the cannon rather than more fundamental concepts that would better stand the test of time.[17]

Prussia's defeat by Napoleon in 1806 had a profound effect on Clausewitz's view of war. Serving in a grenadier battalion that was forced to surrender, it was evident to him that the weak leadership of the Prussian Monarchy during the previous decade had set the military institution up for failure against the new forms of fighting employed by France.[18] Napoleon's success ignited Clausewitz's pursuit for greater understanding of his political and military environment including its past, the changes that were occurring, and its constants.[19] He was interned in France for ten months as a prisoner of war until the Treaty of Tilsit in July 1807 enabled his repatriation to Germany where he was employed by his former teacher Scharnhorst. He worked passionately to help modernize Prussian military strategy until 1812. It was during this employment that Clausewitz truly realized that politics was as much a part of war as military action and he began to consolidate his thoughts on the value of military theory.[20] In this respect Clausewitz published an essay entitled "Art and Theory of Art" that demonstrated that theory was not designed to tell someone how to act but rather develop his judgement to deal with uncertainty.[21] This was

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[16]Clausewitz, *On War*, 10.
[17]Paret, *Clausewitz and the State,* 92.
[18]*Ibid.*, 110.
[19]*Ibid.*, 35.
[20]Clausewitz, *On War*, 13.
[21]*Ibid.*, 14-15.

further echoed by his writings in 1808 that attacked Jomini's theories on the basis that his rival had failed to properly consider the unchanging quality of war and was disregarding historical studies. He was insistent that the present could claim no final superiority over the past and that theory had to be universally valid to be valid at all.[22] These perspectives on war theory would later form the foundation of his paradoxical trinity.

In 1812 Clausewitz was so outraged by Prussia's submission to Napoleon's desire for alliance against Russia that he resigned his commission so he could serve with the Russian army. In this capacity he participated in the Russian retreat including the battles of Smolensk, Borodino and the fall of Moscow. His influence on these battles was limited as he was not a fluent Russian speaker. As Russia's fortunes improved and Napoleon commenced his retreat over the winter, Clausewitz performed a diplomatic role in coordinating the defection of Prussian forces that had been aligned with Napoleon. Although Prussia declared war on France in March 1813, the King refused to readmit Clausewitz into the Prussian Army and he resorted to assisting his countrymen in a Russian uniform until he received his commission again in April 1814.[23]

Following the end of the war in 1815 until 1830, Clausewitz was employed in various administrative posts that permitted him to focus his spare time on intensive research. It was during this period that he worked to refine the content of *On War,* specifically with respect to the nature of real war and how war is simply the continuation of policy with other means. Unfortunately Clausewitz contracted cholera and died on

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[22]*Ibid.*, 11.
[23]Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 15.

November 16th, 1831 at the age of 51 before he could finish this task. Clausewitz's wife

Marie, assisted by her husband's associates, published *On War* between 1832 and1836.[24]

Fortunately, Clausewitz described his paradoxical trinity with sufficient clarity and depth

in *On War* to enable military theorists and practitioners to leverage this concept for

contemporary employment.[25]

CHAPTER 2 – THE TRINITY EXPLAINED

Clausewitz's years of experience in warfare and thorough historical study of

conflict allowed him to distil the unchanging nature of war. He found that although

characteristics of warfare were continually evolving due to new technologies and changes

to societal trends, the nature of warfare had endured throughout history due its

fundamental human component.[26,27] Clausewitz describes this using a metaphor in his

statement that war was "more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics

to the given case."[28] The chameleon adjusts its appearance to its surroundings; however

its internal organs remain the same in spite of the change in colour.[29] Clausewitz refers to

war as "more than a true chameleon" because war's objective nature changes in intensity,

proportion, and relative role in response to transformations in technology, social trends or

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[24]Paret, *Clausewitz and the State,* 430.
[25]Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 17.
[26]*Ibid.*, 17-18.
[27]David Lonsdale, "Clausewitz and Information Warfare," in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, 233-234 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[28]Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.
[29]Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 114.

other subjective characteristics of warfare. Under Clausewitz's system, the nature of war

cannot be separated from the means and the actors involved in its conduct.[30]

According to Clausewitz, the nature of warfare is dominated by a paradoxical

trinity composed of "primordial violence, hatred and enmity" as well as "the play of

chance and probability" and war's "element of subordination as an instrument of policy."

This chapter commences by describing each of these components of the trinity and how

they relate to one another. With this basis established, the chapter concludes with an

explanation of how Clausewitz designed the trinity for use as a tool to better understand

the political-military environment.

Clausewitz understood what motivated men to fight based on his years of leading

soldiers in conflict and contending with the political aspects of warfare in his later years.

His own enduring hatred of the French that reached its peak following Prussia's

humiliating defeat by Napoleon in 1806 only amplified this comprehension. Although

Clausewitz states "primordial violence, hatred and enmity," he is not referring to simply

the physical aspect of violence, but the motivating forces of passion.[31] Rooted in emotion

and psychological pressures, he considered these forces as the irrational component of the

trinity that are innate to human beings, as described in his statement that they "are to be

regarded as blind natural forces."[32, 33] This irrational component of war is best described

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[30]Antulio, J. Echevarria, "Globalization and the Nature of War" (Monograph for the Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2003), 8, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub215.pdf.

[31]Christopher Bassford, "The Strange Persistence of Trinitarian Warfare," last modified 2 October 2012, http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Trinity/Trinity8.htm#1.

[32]Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

by one of Clausewitz's most strident critics, Martin van Creveld, who stated, "Nothing is more likely than the terror of war to cause rationality to go by the board, nor is anything more conducive to make even the most even-minded start behaving somewhat strangely."[34] Passion in warfare is not restricted to combatants however, as governing bodies can mobilize the hostile feelings of their followers/citizens as part of making war or these feelings may simply be provoked by accident towards unpredictable ends.[35] Clausewitz considered passion a fundamental component of the nature of warfare as he found that the results of war could not be explained through a purely rational approach, but must account for the irrational factors of emotion, culture and individual psychological considerations that can challenge the constraints of reason.[36]

The component of the trinity described by Clausewitz as "the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam" focuses on the uncertainties that are inherent to war. All actors must deal with uncertainty in any conflict and Clausewitz explained that commanders should not look for options to best minimize uncertainty but rather to leverage it to their own advantage.[37] Commanders should aim to mitigate its worst effects on friendly forces through inspired leadership and new technologies while employing surprise and deception to aggravate these effects on the enemy.[38] In line with this concept, Clausewitz felt strongly that mathematically based theories of warfare such as the analysis introduced by Bülow based on Napoleonic tactics

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[33]Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 22.
[34]Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 89.
[35]Antulio J Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 72.
[36]Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 282-283.
[37]Clausewitz, *On War*, 167.
[38]Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 343.

were invalid as they could not contend with nor exploit the innate uncertainty of war.[39] In this respect, Clausewitz would likely have agreed with the adage attributed to Murphy's Law, "If anything can go wrong, it will."[40]

To describe the key factors of uncertainty in war "that distinguish real war from war on paper," Clausewitz employed the term "general friction" in *On War*.[41] General friction is the combined effects of danger, physical exertion, intelligence and incidental friction that create countless unexpected problems that wear down effectiveness and threaten mission success.[42] Danger and physical exertion both impact on individuals' abilities to think and act effectively. Intelligence, which naturally contains a level of uncertainty and imperfections, is a fundamental source of general friction as it forms the basis for all actions in war. [43] Incidental friction results from the fact that no element in war is a single homogenous piece, but rather composed of a group of individuals who each retain their individual potential for unforeseen "countless minor incidents."[44] Clausewitz captures the impact of general friction on war in his statement, "Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult."[45]

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[39]*Ibid.*, 213.

[40]Raanan Avidor,"Murphy's Laws Site – All the Laws of Murphy in One Place," last accessed 29 January 2013, http://www.murphys-laws.com/murphy/murphy-true.html.

[41]Clausewitz, *On War*, 122.

[42]*Ibid.*, 119-122.

[43]Barry D. Watts, *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War - Revised Edition*, McNair Paper 68 (Washington D.C: Institute for National Strategic Studies at National Defence University, 2004), 18, http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Watts-Friction3.pdf.

[44]Clausewitz, *On War*, 119.

[45]*Ibid.*, 119-120.

The final component of the trinity is defined by Clausewitz as war's "element of subordination, as an instrument of [policy and politics], which makes it subject to [pure reason]."[46] The words in brackets address two issues of translation in this statement. First, although Paret uses the word "policy" in his translation of *On War*, the original German text uses the word "politik" which represents both "policy" and "politics". "Policy and politics" is used here to reflect Clausewitz's original intent. Second, the sentence reads "reason alone" versus "pure reason" in the Paret translation, however Christopher Bassford asserts that this sentence should read "pure reason" rather than "reason alone" to reflect proper translation. In addition, "reason alone" does not fit the overall context of the statement as there are two other dimensions of war in the trinity. [47] This component of the trinity component represents the influence of the forces of reason on war and stems directly from Clausewitz's assertion that that "war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means."[48] Understanding how war behaves as an instrument of policy and politics is key to this concept.

Both policy and politics are concerned with the pursuit of power, be it material as in the case of economic resources or psychological such as legal or religious authority. While the triggers of war are often unique, war as a phenomenon is concerned primarily with the distribution and redistribution of power.[49] Policy is a unilateral approach similar to strategy in that it represents a directed effort by one entity to obtain a power related

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[46]*Ibid.*, 89.

[47]Christopher Bassford, "The Primacy of Policy and the 'Trinity' in Clausewitz's Mature Thought," in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, 77 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[48]Clausewitz, *On War*, 605.

[49]Secretary of the Navy, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-1 : Strategy* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 10. http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/mcdp1_1.pdf.

objective. Clausewitz associated reason with policy as he considered it "the original

motive" for war that establishes the objectives of an entity and determines if force will be

employed to pursue those objectives.[50] Politics is the emotionally charged and inherently

unpredictable process in which different entities conflict to distribute power internal to or

between societies based on their respective policies.

War is an instrument of policy and politics as it enables the reconciliation of

clashes in policy as part of the larger context of politics. This instrument is naturally

unstable as the rational influences of policy continually contend with the irrational forces

associated with the powerful emotions of politics. For this reason Clausewitz viewed war

as a phenomenon guided rather than controlled by reason.[51] Regardless of this instability,

this aspect of the trinity remains the sole source of war's purpose be it rational or

irrational.[52]

Although the characteristics of each component of the trinity are important, it is

the dynamic relationship between them that allows the trinity to effectively capture the

essence of war. Clausewitz emphasizes this by noting that "a theory that ignores any one

of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with

reality." He described war using the analogy that it was "like an object suspended

between three magnets," with each magnet representing a component of the trinity.[53] This

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[50]Clausewitz, *On War*, 90.
[51]Christopher Bassford, "The Strange Persistence of Trinitarian Warfare," last modified 2 October 2012, http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Trinity/Trinity8.htm#1.
[52]Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War,* 73-74.
[53]Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

description refers to the fact that such a pendulum, once set swinging among three centers

of attraction, establishes an irregular and non-repeating pattern. The path of the

suspended object is never determined by one force alone but by the interaction between

them, which never stops changing.[54] In practical terms, this means that while war is an

instrument of reason for the purpose of achieving political goals, its influence is reduced

or amplified by the play of chance and passion. Each force varies from war to war and

nothing limits them from changing during a conflict.[55] This interaction between passion,

chance and reason determines what ends that war can achieve as well as the extent to

which it can attain them.[56]

Clausewitz designed the trinity to describe war from the perspective of one actor

within the context of interaction with other actors in violent conflict.[57] Not fond of

checklists or Bülow-inspired mathematical equations for military action, he intended the

trinity to serve as an enduring basis for study. He believed that greater understanding of

war's essential dynamics would enable more thorough analysis of contemporary political-

military realities.[58] Understanding the nature of the war at hand prompts questions that

enable a comprehension of the strengths and weakness of a particular form of war.[59]

Clausewitz viewed this comprehension as key to ensuring strategy is always based on an

[54]Edward J Villacres and Christopher Bassford, "Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity," US Army Parameters Journal, vol. 25 (Autumn 1995): 15-16, http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/ArticleIndex.cfm.
[55]Michael W. Johnson, "Clausewitz on Kosovo," (a monograph for the School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2000), 19, http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA390468.
[56]Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War,* 73-74.
[57]Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 340.
[58]Villacres, "Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity," 18.
[59]Antulio J Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War,* 77.

accurate understanding of the character of the conflict. Such analysis may not separate "method from the madness" of war; however it sheds light on the "continuity behind the confusion" which can easily be lost in the chaos of conflict.[60] He was adamant that any strategy based from inaccurate perceptions of the political-military environment would be doomed for failure.[61]

CHAPTER 3 - THE TRINITY'S CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The world has undergone enormous changes since Clausewitz developed his concept of the paradoxical trinity in the early 19th century. Scientific and technological improvements have altered nearly every aspect of human existence, specifically with respect to the conduct of warfare. While geography, time, and space were major environmental constraints on strategy during the time of Clausewitz, inventions such as the radio, aircraft and ballistic missiles have mitigated these constraints to a large extent today.[62] In addition, recent advances in electronics, communications and information technology have produced weapon systems of unprecedented range, precision and lethality. These capabilities have transformed how war is fought and organized in dramatic fashion.[63] Fortunately, Clausewitz had learned from over 30 years of experience in conflict that methods in warfare continually evolve. He ensured that his paradoxical trinity considered this factor by tethering it to the dynamics that were common to all wars

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[60]Waldman, "War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity," 366.

[61]Clausewitz, 177.

[62]Michael I. Handel, "Clausewitz in the Age of Technology," in *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*, ed. Michael I. Handel, 54 (Totowa: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1986).

[63]Hugh Smith, *On Clausewitz: a Study of Military and Political Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 260.

throughout history.[64] This chapter will argue that although the character of warfare has changed, the fundamental composition of its nature has not and by extension the paradoxical trinity is a valid basis for analysis of the dynamics of war in the current operating environment.

Changes in technology have been a significant contributing factor to the evolution of political, ideological and societal characteristics of modern conflict. This discussion will be comprised of three sections, commencing first with a focus on how changes in the technology employed in warfare changes war's characteristics but not its nature. This establishes the foundation for the second section that shows how each domain of the trinity, including passion, chance and reason, is reflected within the context of the current operating environment. The chapter concludes by describing the trinity's relevance in analyzing the dynamics of contemporary conflict which sets the stage for discussions of the trinity's linkage to professional military education later in the paper.

Michael Handel was a professor of strategy at the United States Naval War College who believed that Clausewitz "could not have foreseen and therefore could not take into account" the dramatic impact that technological innovations have had and continues to have on warfare.[65] He was passionate that every technological change in warfare has such a wide ranging impact on not only technological, but also "social, political, bureaucratic, managerial, and psychological" aspects of war and that there is

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[64]R.D. Hooker, "Beyond Vom Kriege: The Character and Conduct of Modern War." *US Army Parameters Journal*, vol. 36 (Summer 2005): 7, http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/ArticleIndex.cfm.
    [65]Handel, "Clausewitz in the Age of Technology," 53.

simply no means to accurately predict the shape of future warfare.[66] As part of this assertion, he claims that Clausewitz "assumed a static world and ignored the possibility" that technological changes could impact the nature of warfare.[67]

Handel agreed that passion, chance and reason remained valid concepts for describing elements of war's nature, however he believed that these three elements of the paradoxical trinity did not properly describe the dynamic nature of war. Although technology has retained in its basic purpose since the beginning of warfare, it was Handel's view that modern militaries have become so psychologically bound to technology that they employ it as a cure-all to deal with problems previously resolved through non-technological means. He states as part of this argument that technology "has acquired a momentum, an importance of its own, which explains the changing nature of modern warfare."[68] Handel further stressed that if Clausewitz were alive today, the Prussian would add technological considerations as a fourth variable to his analytical framework to better account for war's changing nature.[69]

If he was alive today, Clausewitz would undoubtedly have a lot to say about contemporary operating conditions. However, it is highly unlikely that he would amend his trinity to account for technological changes as its original design already accounts for the constantly changing subjective characteristics of war. As described in Chapter Two, Clausewitz saw war as "more than a true chameleon" composed of both objective and

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[66]*Ibid.*, 54-55.
[67]*Ibid.*, 58.
[68]*Ibid.*, 60.
[69]*Ibid.*, 59.

subjective elements. While the objective elements of passion, chance and reason

represent the fundamental components of any war, the subjective elements of war's

means such as weaponry, doctrine and tactics vary according to time and place and make

each war unique.[70] Even the same conflict can change its characteristics as different

combatants enter or leave the fight, or when combatants employ new weapons and tactics

during battle as was seen during the Thirty Years' War.[71] Clausewitz was adamant that

"all wars are things of the same nature" as the objective components, although

continually interacting with and shaped by the subjective elements, are always present in

varying degrees in any conflict.[72] As an example of this interaction, nonlethal weapons or

precision munitions employed with strict rules of engagement can reduce the amount of

violence. Likewise, the use of advanced information technologies can decrease some

forms of uncertainty. However, such objective characteristics can never be eliminated

completely as they are as enduring as reality itself.[73]

Clausewitz did not neglect the impact of technological changes on the nature of

war, but rather included these considerations as part of the constantly evolving subjective

characteristics that continually interact with war's fundamental nature. His reasoning for

this was based on his belief that war is an inherently human activity as seen by his

statement that "very few of the new manifestations in war can be ascribed to new

inventions or new departures in ideas" and that these changes stem *"from the*

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[70]Antulio J. Echevarria, "War and Politics: The Revolution in Military Affairs and the Continued Relevance of Clausewitz," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Winter 1995-1996): 79, http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/jfq-10/JFQ-10.pdf.

[71]Antulio J. Echevarria, "Globalization and the Nature of War," 7-8.

[72]Clausewitz, *On War*, 606.

[73]Antulio J. Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 76.

transformation of society and new social conditions."[74] Or as clearly described by Colin

Gray, "Communities do not fight because they are armed; they are armed because they

wish to fight."[75] As such, there is no need to expand Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity to

account for technology because it is already accounted for.

Passion, chance and reason remain fundamental components of the nature of war

as they are driven by the human related aspects of warfare that technology can never

eliminate.[76] These components constantly interact with each other as well as with the

subjective characteristics of war to produce its continually evolving features. This section

will describe each of these elements in turn with a focus on how these dynamics are

demonstrated in the current operating environment.

Clausewitz believed that passion is a human characteristic that will always have

an impact on the character of warfare. This section argues that this theory remains valid

and that technological improvements have drastically amplified the influence of passion

on war. As mentioned briefly in the first chapter, Clausewitz viewed the civilian populace

as a powerful force if it could be leveraged in support of the war effort. This is shown in

On War through his observations of Napoleon's failure to defeat Russia in 1812. In this

context he states that "the Russians showed us that one often attains one's greatest

strength in the heart of one's own country." This assessment stems from the resilience

and support of the Russian people during this conflict that represented the "enormous

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[74]Clausewitz, *On War*, 515.
[75]Colin Gray, *Clausewitz, History and the Future Strategic World*, Occasional Paper No 47 (Shrivenham: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 2004), 17.
[76]*Ibid.*

contribution the heart and temper of a nation can make to the sum total of its politics, war

potential, and fighting strength."[77] What Clausewitz couldn't have anticipated was how

much the influence of the passions of the people would increase with advanced

technologies like the ones employed as part of mass media.

The civilian populace remains an important source of passion to be leveraged by

any war effort. Although the average civilian during Clausewitz's time was likely

ignorant of most activities that were not directly affecting them, most people in today's

world are inundated with information about wars and events from remote reaches of the

world.[78] Journalists embedded with combat troops, immediate update of information

through the internet and 24/7 news channels enable mass media outlets to stream content

to millions of people no matter where they are. Any broadcasted media content cannot be

considered neutral in nature as it is often incomplete and packaged with a political

intent.[79] Media messaging is frequently tailored by politically charged organizations such

as western media conglomerates and this content can shape people's opinions and focus

their passions toward political aims in the interests of the originator.[80] The public may not

accept everything the media tells them at face value, but what the media chooses to

present to them still shapes their opinion. In this fashion the media can be used as a

means of fostering charitable responses to a humanitarian crisis or by governments

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[77]Clausewitz, *On War*, 220.
[78]Thomas Waldman, "British 'Post-Conflict' Operations in Iraq: Into the Heart of Strategic Darkness," Civil Wars Journal, vol. 9, no. 1 (March 2007): 77, http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fciv20.
[79]*Ibid*., 78.
[80]Tina S. Kracke, "Mass Media: The Ether Pervading the Clausewitzian Trinity" (Monograph for the School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2004), 15. http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA429316.

seeking to generate passionate support on the road to war.[81] It is important to note however that this use of mass media to shape the opinions and leverage the passions of the people is not limited to western culture.

Al-Qaeda is one of the best examples of how mass media can focus and channel citizens' passions towards an established policy objective. This trans-national terrorist organization has established itself as a "virtual state that communicates with its citizens" and attracts an even larger audience through employment of internet based media.[82] Al-Qaeda has dedicated their efforts to generating public support and "gaining grassroots legitimacy among Muslims."[83] Their messaging has been targeted to enhance the perception that Islamic society's political and economic woes stem from the West's self-serving decadence.[84]

Acknowledging that "even a flawed argument has appeal [when it stands] in an intellectual vacuum," Al-Qaeda has targeted poor and disadvantaged Islamic populations who have minimal access to other more moderate media influences.[85] This approach has allowed them to sway the opinions of entire populations and seamlessly integrate into many Islamic societies and infiltrate Islamic nongovernmental organizations. Inciting the passions of these societies against the decadent perceptions of the West has provided

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[81]Waldman, "British 'Post-Conflict' Operations in Iraq…," 77-78.
[82]Phillip J.D. Seib, "The Al-Qaeda Media Machine," *Military Review*, vol. 88, no. 3 (May-June 2008): 74, http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p124201coll1/id/238/rec/4.
[83]Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2006), 44.
[84]Echevarria, "Globalization and the Nature of War," 14.
[85]Seib, "The Al-Qaeda Media Machine," 75.

Al-Qaeda with endless political capital to recruit new followers that are willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the organization's objectives.[86]

The Prussian Monarchy did not allow citizens to participate in legislation during Clausewitz's time.[87] This did not eliminate passion from policy development as it was still created by human hands; however this contrasts sharply with the level of influence citizens have on policy creation in most present day democracies. Legitimate democracies allow citizens to influence the policies that their government representatives develop through direct access as well as indirect means such as opinion polls.[88] The effects of mass media broaden and politicize citizens' awareness of current events that can galvanize or disintegrate their will to fight or pursue other objectives. This creates an environment where policy is often heavily influenced by the channeled passions of the people as policy makers often become more concerned about what the citizens desire in order to remain in office rather than what makes logical sense.[89,90]

Clausewitz, in describing war, stated that "no other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance" as the "art of war deals with living and with moral forces" and therefore "cannot attain the absolute or certainty."[91] This

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[86]Echevarria, "Globalization and the Nature of War," 14.

[87]World Security Network Foundation, "The Democratic Warrior: Clausewitz in 2011," last modified 8 January 2011, http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Other/Herberg-Rothe-Andreas/The-Democratic-Warrior-Clausewitz-in-2011.

[88]James J. Montano and Dennis H. Long, "Clausewitz's Advice to the New US President," *US Army Parameters Journal*, vol. 18 (December 1988): 34-35, http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA528276.

[89]Waldman, "British 'Post-Conflict' Operations in Iraq…," 78.

[90]Montano, "Clausewitz's Advice to the New US President," 34-35.

[91]Clausewitz, 85-86.

description remains true today as although the technology of war has changed, warfare still involves a clash of opposing human wills that can never be completely predicted. This section shows how uncertainty remains prevalent in current operations and the enduring importance of the commander's role in leveraging success from this uncertainty.

Western society has become obsessed with technology and its ability to streamline everyday activities. By extension, some proponents of technology have claimed that if employed properly, current command and control capabilities as well as advanced weapon systems can reduce uncertainty to the point where war should be "a controlled and measured affair."[92] For example, they claim that the latest information system technologies have enabled unprecedented collection of information that, once analyzed, can be combined with precision long range strike capabilities to seize and maintain the initiative in any conflict.[93]

Unfortunately for western militaries, uncertainty in war "will remain as resistant to technological fixes as the common cold has to the march of modern medicine."[94] General friction, as described in Chapter Two, is a driving force behind this uncertainty as a result of intrinsic human limitations. Improved training techniques, better education and selection criteria can reduce but not eliminate the impact of uniquely human characteristics on the operating environment. Even in perfect conditions, all people have

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[92]Bart Schuurman, "Clausewitz and the New Wars Scholars," *US Army Parameters Journal*, vol. 40 (Spring 2010), 98, http://www.carlisle.army.mil/USAWC/Parameters/ArticleIndex.cfm#index1988.
        [93]Echevarria, "War and Politics…," 7.
        [94]Palmer, Michael A. "Lord Nelson: Master of Command." *Naval War College Review*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 114.
http://www.usnwc.edu/NavalWarCollegeReviewArchives/1980s/1988%20Winter.pdf.

a limit to how much information they can receive, process and act upon.[95] This capacity is further restricted when considered in conjunction with the mental and physical exertion imposed by the conditions of conflict. As seen with military aviators, combat conditions can rapidly limit sensory input such as hearing and progressively degrade one's cognitive ability to grasp a changing tactical situation.[96]

It is this limit to human cognitive capacity that has prevented current technology enabled data collection from eliminating the uncertain nature of war. Regardless of how much information is collected on potential targets, it can seldom be leveraged without the analysis and synthesis of uniquely human critical thinking. It is this process that filters out irrelevant portions and transforms what is relevant into intelligence.[97] This limitation was illustrated by Al-Qaeda's ability to coordinate the 9/11 terrorist attacks despite the United States' elaborate intelligence network and its use of world leading information technologies.[98] More recently, the wide array of information collection technologies employed by coalition forces in Afghanistan has been unable to distinguish friend from foe or locate countless improvised explosive devices before they kill.[99] Even the most

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[95]Ralph Hertwig and Peter M. Todd, "More is Not Always Better: The Benefits of Cognitive Limits," in *Thinking: Psychological Perspectives on Reasoning, Judgment and Decision Making*, ed. David Hardman and Laura Macchi, 213-214 (New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2003).

[96]Barry D. Watts, *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War - Revised Edition*, McNair Paper 68 (Washington D.C: Institute for National Strategic Studies at National Defence University, 2004), 52, http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Watts-Friction3.pdf.

[97]NATO Standardization Agency, AAP-6, *Glossary of Terms and Definitions* (Brussels: NATO Standardization Agency, 2008), 2-I-6, http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/other/nato2008.pdf.

[98]Senate Armed Services Committee, *Global Threats and Challenges - Director Defense Intelligence Agency's Statement for the Record* (Washington, D.C: United States Senate, 2002), 2, http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2002_hr/031902wilson.pdf.

[99]Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 75.

advanced precision guided weapon systems cannot strike a target when there is insufficient accurate and timely intelligence to locate it.[100]

Clausewitz believed that talented commanders possessing the essence of "military genius" could leverage uncertainty in war to their advantage in a similar manner as in a game of cards.[101] This analogy combines the calculation of probabilities with the ability to "read" the other players and to take risks when the time is right.[102] In relation to this concept, Clausewitz employed the term "coup d'oeil" to refer to the unique ability of effective commanders to quickly "[recognize] a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection."[103] Although the scope of the contemporary battlefield is well beyond the context that Clausewitz employed to develop this theory, a commander's coup d'oeil remains critical in today's environment. With a nearly limitless capability for data collection, "it is not sufficient, or even necessary, for the battle commander to know everything in battle – just the right thing at the right time."[104] A successful commander in the current operating environment will accept that technology cannot deliver an unencumbered path to victory and continually look for opportunities to take advantage of his coup d'oeil amidst the uncertainty that pervades conflict.[105]

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[100]Echevarria, "War and Politics…," 7.

[101]Clausewitz, *On War*, 86 and 100.

[102]Alan D. Beyerchen, "*Clausewitz, Nonlinearity and the Unpredictability of War," International Security*, vol. 17, no. 3, (Winter 1992): 77, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/international_security/summary/v017/17.3.beyerchen.html.

[103] Clausewitz, *On War*, 102.

[104]Samuel A. Guthrie, "Innovation in the 21st Century: Reconciling Technological Expertise with Military Genius" (Monograph for the School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1995), 44, http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA293499.

[105]Echevarria, "Globalization and the Nature of War," 16.

Although the contemporary environment differs in so many ways from the state centric political climate of Clausewitz, policy remains the rational driving force behind war's purpose. The tension between the often irrational passions of politics and the rational objectives of policy continue to make war an unstable instrument. The evolving process of democratization combined with the influences of mass media has empowered formerly powerless elements of international society and transformed the political and cultural contexts within which wars occur.[106]

Some academics claim that the international political and cultural environment has evolved to the extent that warfare is no longer viewed as acceptable behaviour by default. By extension, they claim that Clausewitz's concept that war is an instrument of policy and politics is no longer relevant as cultural norms and expectations drive if and how war will be waged.[107] This argument focuses on the assertion that war based on policy objectives has ceased to fulfill a useful purpose in modern society. The huge costs of economic losses and physical destruction grossly outweigh objectives oriented towards the pursuit of power that are intangible to the majority of citizens.[108] Mass media has contributed significantly to this atmosphere as it provides average citizens with convenient and direct access to the ugliness of war.[109] Citizens no longer view war "as a natural, virtuous and beneficial activity" and simply will not support wars for policy

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[106]Waldman, "British 'Post-Conflict' Operations in Iraq…," 75-76.
[107]Jeremy Black, *War and the New Disorder in the 21st Century (*New York: Continuum Books, 2004), 120.
[108]Michael Mandelbaum, "Is Major War Obsolete?" *Survival*, vol. 40, no. 4 (Winter 1998-1999): 21-22, http://www.pols.boun.edu.tr/uploads%5Cfiles%5C1099.pdf.
[109]Waldman, "British 'Post-Conflict' Operations in Iraq…," 78.

objectives that don't match culturally acceptable criteria such as in the case of desperate self-defense.[110] It is this basis that some critics use to support claims that war is now an instrument of culture rather than policy and politics.

Culture and politics are inextricably linked, however this relationship has not evolved to the point where war is no longer an instrument of secular policy within the context of politics. For example, the global war on terror between the West and Al-Qaeda involves two adversaries employing armed force to pursue secular policy objectives within a context of cultural friction.[111] The West has made great efforts to frame the conflict as a war against terrorism instead of a war against Islam in order to avoid escalating the conflict along cultural lines and disrupting its foothold of influence in the Middle East.[112] Al-Qaeda's objectives are "not religiously inspired mass murder" but rather the power oriented pursuit to establish a Palestinian state and eliminate western influences from Muslim lands.[113] The terrorist attacks of September 11th were an example of this pursuit as this was Al-Qaeda's deliberate effort to provoke a massive retaliation from the United States. Al-Qaeda's leadership hoped that it could portray this retaliation as an attack on Islam to inspire the entire Muslim world in a jihad against the West.[114]

Conflicts featuring secular policy objectives intertwined with cultural or religious contexts are not unique to the current operating environment. The Thirty Years War,

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[110]*Ibid.*, 78-79.
[111]Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 75.
[112]Echevarria, "Globalization and the Nature of War," 13.
[113]Schuurman, "Clausewitz and the New Wars Scholars," 92.
[114]Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 74.

which took place from 1618 to 1648, was a religious conflict between Protestants and

Catholics driven by underlying political objectives oriented towards altering the balance

of power in Europe. At its peak, this war had transitioned into a broader conflict focused

on political motivations that involved most of the major powers of the era.[115] The

character of this conflict has a lot in common with many wars today in the manner that

policy objectives of warfare are often obscured by the cultural context in which they are

fought. To believe that war is not an instrument of policy and politics is to believe that

men no longer thirst for power.

In spite of enormous leaps forward in technology that have drastically

changed the characteristics of warfare since Clausewitz's era, the paradoxical trinity

remains a valid theoretical tool for understanding the true nature of any war. Core to this

analysis is recognizing the dynamic relationship within the trinity between the objective

components of passion, chance and reason combined with the influence of the subjective

characteristics of war.[116] Just as the characteristics of state-focused conflict and cannons

shaped the objective nature of war during Clausewitz's time, so too will non-state actors

and information technology influence the current operating environment. Clausewitz

stated that judging the dynamics of a war was crucial to mission success to avoid

"mistaking it for, [or] trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature."[117] This

section describes how the paradoxical trinity can be employed as a tool to better

understand the dynamics of a particular conflict by examining how misreading the

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[115]History Learning Site. "The Thirty Years War 1621 to 1626." Last accessed 16 February 2013. http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/30YW_1621-1626.htm.
[116]Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 74.
[117]Clausewitz, *On War*, 88-89.

dynamics of conflict caused difficulties for the United States in both the Vietnam War

and the War in Iraq.

The United States' participation in the Vietnam War was part of a larger Cold

War strategy of containment intended to keep South Vietnam out of communist control.

Although American participation was initially limited to equipping and training South

Vietnamese forces in 1950, this would escalate to the deployment of combat units in

1965. The United States' total contribution of personnel to the war would peak at over

500,000 before the United States Congress bowed to anti-war sentiment from the

electorate and ceased American military operations in Vietnam in 1973. South

Vietnamese forces crumbled following the American withdrawal, enabling communist

forces to seize South Vietnam and reunite the country by 1976.[118]

Over 50,000 American service personnel perished during the Vietnam War and

many consider this conflict a strategic failure for the United States.[119] The American

senior leadership failed to comprehend the complex dynamics of this war and committed

to a conflict that they couldn't win. Analysts simply underestimated how passionate the

North Vietnamese were in support of the war effort and how much this strengthened their

will to fight. The cost in blood and treasure to win a war against such passion was clearly

not palatable for an American populace that was not prepared to support a far off war

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[118]Swarthmore College Peace Collection. "Brief Overview of Vietnam War." Last modified November 2007.
http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/conscientiousobjection/OverviewVietnamWar.htm.
[119]Robert S. McNamara, In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lesson of Vietnam (New York: Random House, 1995), 190-191.

with minimal tangible domestic gain. Instead, the United States fought an "ignorant war" aimed at securing a negotiated peace when the political objective for the North Vietnamese was so important that peace from an American perspective could only be dictated by force. Proper analysis of the nature of this war would have allowed the Americans to understand that their people were not passionate enough about such a distant conflict to support the immense costs of breaking the will of the North Vietnamese.[120]

The American led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was initially designed as a conventional conflict of short duration that would leverage technological superiority to seamlessly impose regime change.[121] Unfortunately this plan assumed that the Iraqi people would be united in pursuit of freedom and democracy once Saddam Hussein was removed from power. This assumption neglected to consider how Hussein's draconian policies restrained the divergent and conflicting passions of the Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish populations within Iraq. Supporters and former members of the Ba'ath Party Regime, an organization dominated by Sunnis, were willing to use any means necessary to retain their position of power within the state. In contrast, the Shiite and Kurd populations had both been oppressed by the Sunni Regime for many years and were determined to increase their own share of power as well as even the score with the Sunnis.[122]

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[120]Michael W. Johnson, "Clausewitz on Kosovo" (Monograph for the School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2000), 18, http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA390468.

[121]Belinda Heerwagen, "Carl Von Clausewitz and his relevance as a Contemporary Theorist" (US Army War College Research Project, US Army War College, 2007), 3, http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA468496.

[122]Schwartz, Michael. "The Failings of the Army You Have." *Asia Times Online*. Last modified 10 March 2005. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/GC10Ak01.html.

When American led forces brought down Hussein's dictatorship and replaced it with a coalition sponsored transitional government, this removed the relative stability that the Ba'ath Party's oppressive methods had brought to the turbulent Iraqi socio-political landscape. As a result, coalition forces struggled in vain to establish stability amidst an active insurgency driven by mainly Sunni supporters of the former regime and an escalating atmosphere of Sunni-Shiite-Kurdish tensions.[123] Failure to understand the passions and political dynamics of Iraq has cost the United States and coalition partners thousands of casualties and left an Iraqi state that still runs the risk of descending into chaos.[124]

Western militaries often employ a checklist type approach to simplify many activities ranging from individual soldier skills to the operational planning process.[125] It could be argued that because the paradoxical trinity does not enable such a simplified approach to assessing the dynamics of war that it is not reasonable to expect modern militaries to use it. Clausewitz never intended his trinity to be "scaffolding on which the commander can rely for support at any time" as he was adamant that theory was not a guide for action but rather a guide for study to develop one's judgement.[126] Through

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[123]Cordesman, Anthony H. and Sara Bjerg Moller. "Iraq's Evolving Insurgency" (Report for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005), 87, 141, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/051209_iraqiinsurg.pdf.

[124]Duraid, Adnan. "At Least 26 Killed in Bombings Across Iraq." The New York February 8, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/09/world/middleeast/iraq-bombings-political-turmoil.html?_r=0.

[125]Foreign Policy Group. "Can an Army of Checklists Really Handle Implementing Mission Command?" Last modified 18 September 2012. http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/09/18/can_an_army_of_checklists_really_handle_implementing_mission_command?wp_login_redirect=0.

[126] Clausewitz, On War, 140.

study of the concepts inherent to his trinity, students deepen their comprehension of the

fundamental forces of war that allows them to better harness their experience during the

planning and conduct of operations.[127] By understanding the nature of a conflict, one can

better understand which approaches will work, and more importantly, ones that won't.

Since the dawn of civilization, advances in technology have forced the evolution

of nearly every aspect of human activity. Wholesale shifts in social and political

behaviors have altered the current operating environment to the point where it would

appear that Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity is no longer relevant. As was shown in this

chapter, it is the trinity's link with the human nature of warfare that enables its

endurance. Passion has an amplified role in contemporary conflict through the influences

of streaming combat video feeds from mass media combined with increased influence of

citizens on policy provided by democratization. The influence of chance has not been

eliminated through technological improvements as even the most complicated systems

are limited by the natural human cognitive capacity. The "genius" of command remains a

critical concept in war as so many contemporary systems rely on a commander's ability

to take decisive actions while being inundated with data from battlefield information

systems. War remains an instrument of policy in spite of often being concealed by the

cultural context in which they are fought. This stems from the fact that all wars are the

extension of political processes driven by the pursuit of power related to economic

resources or legal or religious authority.

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[127]The Clausewitz Homepage, "Clausewitz and His Works," last modified 23 September 2012, http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Cworks/Works.htm.

Clausewitz did not design his paradoxical trinity theory to serve as a checklist to be carried in a junior officer's field aide-memoire. He intended it as a guide for students of military theory to use in order to enhance their understanding of the nature of war. Students can couple this deeper understanding of the objective and subjective forces influencing conflict with their operational experience to gain a better appreciation of specific wars. The United States suffered strategic level failures in both the wars in Vietnam and Iraq as a result of failing to analyze the nature of these wars using the framework that the trinity provides. To properly employ the trinity concept requires dedicated study through incorporation into a force's professional military education program. This will be further explored in Chapter Five following a discussion of the greatest threat to Clausewitz's theories – misinterpretation.

CHAPTER 4 – THE CHALLENGES OF MISINTERPRETATION

The English translation of *On War* is an intimidating volume for many military practitioners who are not prepared to read over 500 pages of military theory based on a late 18th/early 19th Century context. This intimidation drives many readers interested in saving time to seek the guidance of Clausewitz from shorter secondary and tertiary works from popular contemporary authors such as Martin van Creveld and John Keegan. Unfortunately, the works of these authors are based off of misinterpretations of Clausewitz's *On War*.[128] The popularity of these misinterpretations has led advocates of Clausewitz's theories to claim that he "is often more quoted than read."[129]

Many of the assertions that Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity is not relevant to the current operating environment stem from misinterpretations of Clausewitz's writings. The unfinished state of *On War* clearly fosters this confusion, however the works of van Creveld and Keegan make incorrect interpretations based primarily on the concepts outlined in Chapter One of Book One; the lone chapter Clausewitz considered complete. Given how popular the works of these authors are, it is important to refute their claims that Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war are no longer relevant using Clausewitz's own text as a basis. This chapter begins by describing a common misinterpretation of Clausewitz's theories, referred to as the "Summersian Trinity," which has led many authors to criticize Clausewitz's relevance to the current operating environment. The subsequent section discusses the state focused criticisms of Martin van Creveld and refutes them using the concepts affiliated with the paradoxical trinity. The Chapter concludes by refuting John Keegan's claim that culture is the determining factor with respect to the nature of war.

Many of Clausewitz's critics believe that his theories regarding the nature of war are anchored on Napoleonic style warfare between states. This is understandable given the fact that four of the eight books in *On War* are dedicated to state oriented tactics in the context of 19th Century warfare.[130] As a result, many critics simply fail to acknowledge Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity that describes the objective characteristics

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[128]Bassford, "John Keegan…," 321.
[129]Christopher Daase, "Clausewitz and Small Wars," in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, 182 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[130]Clausewitz, *On War,* vii–x.

of war. The rise of the non-state actor has caused these same critics to claim that Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war are no longer relevant to the current operating environment due to this perceived focus on warfare solely between states. This section will describe the source of this misinterpretation.

The perception that Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war are only suited for wars between states is based on a misunderstanding of one of the passages of *On War* combined with a lack of comprehension of the greater context of the paradoxical trinity. The misunderstanding stems from Clausewitz's description that for passion, chance and reason, "the first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government."[131] Clausewitz used this example to better describe his trinity in the context of his era and employed the term "mainly" to emphasize that the three components of this example are each influenced by passion, chance and reason.[132] Many authors do not read the subsequent amplification Clausewitz provides in Books Two, Three and Eight of *On War* regarding the enduring objective components of his trinity.[133] Instead, they consider Clausewitz's example of the people, the army, and the government as his basis for analyzing the nature of war rather than his true paradoxical trinity of passion, chance and reason.

Edward Villacres refers to the people, the army and the government concept as the "Summersian Trinity" due to the fact that Colonel Harry Summers employed this relationship as a basis for analysis in two widely read studies of the Vietnam War and the

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[131]*Ibid*., 89.
[132]Villacres, "Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity," 11.
[133]Clausewitz, *On War*, 133-148, 184-187, 582-585, 605-608.

Gulf War.[134] The fundamental difference between this concept and the paradoxical trinity is that the Summersian Trinity is ordered into an established hierarchical structure rather than the continuously changing relationship that Clausewitz describes between passion, chance and reason in the paradoxical trinity.[135] This hierarchical structure is a functional basis for analyzing conflicts between states as seen by the popularity of Summers' works, however it lacks the flexibility to contend with a conflict whose nature does not follow this hierarchical order such as wars involving non-state actors.

Although Summers was a staunch advocate of Clausewitz's theories, the Summersian Trinity has become a very popular misinterpretation of the Prussian's concepts regarding the dynamic nature of war. This has led many authors to quote the people, the army and the government as Clausewitz's theory on the nature of conflict and never refer to his paradoxical trinity of passion, chance and reason.[136] With the increasing role of non-state in contemporary conflicts, many of these same authors incorrectly claim that Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war are no longer relevant based on the inflexibility of the Summersian Trinity. Some of these authors have published highly revered and influential texts that have shaped many students' attitudes against Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war. Martin van Creveld is one of these authors.

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[134]Villacres, "Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity," 10.

[135]Andreas Herberg-Rothe, "Clausewitz's Wondrous Trinity as a Coordinate System of War and Violent Conflict," *International Journal of Violence and Conflict*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2009): 208. http://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/issue/view/1.

[136]*Ibid*., 206.

Martin van Creveld is a military historian and theorist who is one of the most vocal critics of Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war. Although he recognizes that Clausewitz's *On War* is the "cornerstone of modern strategic thought," he also asserts that the Prussian's theories on the nature of war are obsolete.[137] The emergence of low intensity conflict forms the basis for this assertion as he claims that Clausewitz was so focused on the war between states that his theories cannot contend with wars involving non-state actors such as insurgencies and civil wars. He states that Clausewitz's theories concerning the nature of war do not encompass "War with a capital W but merely one of the many forms that war has assumed."[138] To bolster this argument he draws on historical examples of non-state wars that pre-date Clausewitz such as the 16th Century German Peasants' War of serfs against barons to show how his allegations against the Prussian's theories are not unique to the contemporary environment.[139]

Van Creveld further claims that Clausewitz's assertion that war is the continuation of policy by other means is similarly limited to wars between states.[140,141] He bases this claim on his interpretation that Clausewitz's theory considers war as the rational extension of the will of the state. Van Creveld employs this interpretation to describe how Clausewitz's basis for the nature of war cannot account for the irrational motives that ignite and sustain it. He asserts that Clausewitz's state focused theory describes what the nature of war should be and not what it is in reality.[142] In supporting

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[137]Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 34-35.
[138]*Ibid*., 57-59.
[139]*Ibid*., 49-56.
[140]Clausewitz, *On War*, 605.
[141]Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 124.

this argument, Van Creveld uses the Israeli perspective of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War as an example of how emotions of fear and desperation can overtake the state's rational control over war. He argues that in this case war was not the rational extension of the will of the state but a nation's collective desperation for existence.[143]

For readers unfamiliar with Clausewitz's *On War* and his concept of the *paradoxical trinity,* Van Creveld's assertions described above can be very convincing. Unfortunately, his arguments are built on the false foundation of the Summersian Trinity as shown by his reference to "the Clausewitzian trinity consisting of the people, the army, and the government."[144] Clausewitz was by no means fixated on warfare between states as he studied examples of guerilla warfare under his former instructor Scharnhorst following his repatriation from France. Conflicts included as part of these studies was the Vendée Rebellion that occurred during the years of 1793 to 1796 and the Tyrolean Rebellion of 1809.[145] This exposure to wars involving non-state actors drove Clausewitz to base his theory on the nature of war on the core elements of conflict that influenced all aspects of warfare and not simply the players involved. [146] He viewed the human elements of war reflected by the dynamic relationship between passion, chance and reason within the paradoxical trinity as critical to this. As an example, the paradoxical trinity captures the core elements of the German Peasants' War cited by Van Creveld as

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[142]Martin van Creveld, "The Transformation of War Revisited," Small Wars and Insurgencies, vol.13, no. 2, (Summer 2002): 12-13. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592310208559177.
[143]Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 144-145.
[144]*Ibid*., 40.
[145]Daase, "Clausewitz and Small Wars," 183.
[146]*Ibid*., 182.

this conflict arose from the peasants' struggle to wrestle political power from the ruling

aristocracy and was fueled by the passions of protestant-catholic rivalry.[147]

Clausewitz did insist that there was a rational component of conflict represented

by the element of reason in the paradoxical trinity. However in contrast to van Creveld's

assertions, Clausewitz's theories did not describe war as under absolute control of the

rational will of the state. In fact, van Creveld's example of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War

supports rather than refutes Clausewitz's concept. As described in Chapter Two, the

Prussian saw war as an unstable instrument guided rather than controlled by the rational

elements of policy due to the influence of irrational elements inherent to the emotions of

politics.[148] This dynamic relationship has its roots in the paradoxical trinity where war's

objective characteristics of passion, chance and reason are in a state of constant

interaction both with each other and the subjective characteristics of context dependant

elements of culture, technology, etc. Clausewitz's exposure to the French Revolution

made him no stranger to conflict driven by passion and his theories account for conflicts

that are guided almost completely by this influence as was the case for Israel in 1967.

Martin van Creveld attempts to refute Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war

without truly understanding them. This is evident by his use of the Summersian Trinity

instead of the paradoxical trinity as his basis for argument and his adamant assertion that

Clausewitz was solely focused on warfare between states. In spite of this fundamental

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[147]Korean Minjok Leadership Academy, "German Peasants War : Alsace 1525," last modified on 17 November 2004, http://www.zum.de/whkmla/military/16cen/alsace1525.html.

[148]Christopher Bassford, "The Strange Persistent of Trinitarian Warfare," last modified 2 October 2012, http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Trinity/Trinity8.htm#1.

flaw, van Creveld remains a popular theorist as his arguments are well organized and

supported by tangible historical examples that tend to be very convincing for those

readers that have not read *On War*. It is ironic that one of the most vocal critics of

Clausewitz would misunderstand the Prussian's theories by such a wide margin, however

at least van Creveld acknowledges some of Clausewitz's contributions to modern war.

Unfortunately John Keegan did not understand nor value the majority of Clausewitz's

contributions.

John Keegan was an internationally recognized military historian who shared

similar views with van Creveld that Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war were

invalid based on his perceived focus on interstate conflicts.[149] Unlike van Creveld, who

recognized the value of Clausewitz's contribution to modern war theory, Keegan had a

vendetta against the Prussian. He used his book "History of Warfare" to blame

Clausewitz for setting the ideological conditions for the chaos and suffering that has

resulted from modern warfare.[150] A self-described "95 per cent pacifist," Keegan

believed that culture, not politics, drives humans to war.[151,152] This section will describe

this assertion and refute it using concepts from Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity.

John Keegan considered Clausewitz's view of war as defective because it did not

consider the cultural influences on war. He asserts that Clausewitz's regimental

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[149]Brion McClanahan, "Review: John Keegan – A History of Warfare," last modified 25 October 2008, http://www.brionmcclanahan.com/blog/review-john-keegan-a-history-of-warfare.

[150]John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1993), 20-21.

[151]Telegraph Media Group, "Obituary – Sir John Keegan," last modified 2 August 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/books-obituaries/9447744/Sir-John-Keegan.html.

[152]Keegan, *A History of Warfare,* 386-387.

influences and state affiliation prevented him from understanding how war's nature

differs in societies without these institutional constructs.[153] Keegan states that war "is

always an expression of culture, often a determinant of cultural forms" and that war is not

the continuation of policy and politics.[154] He explains that war is unlike politics because

the main participants are not politicians or diplomats and that most wars have been

products of symbolic ritual without political purpose as means of cultural expression.[155]

Keegan states that culture is "a prime determinant of the nature of warfare."[156] He

attempts to substantiate this theme throughout his book by describing the transition of

culture's influence on war throughout history. Keegan describes how the Polynesian

people of Easter Island transitioned from a peaceful culture of farmers to warrior oriented

tribes focused on warfare as the population on the island began to outstrip available

resources.[157] He emphasizes in this example how the changing nature of tribal culture

fostered conflict rather than political related pursuits of resource based power. In

describing the cultural linkage to modern warfare, Keegan states that "Politics played no

part in the conduct of the First World War worth mentioning."[158] He supports this

assertion by explaining that the regimental system that emerged in Europe during the 19th

Century had militarized societies by creating conditions where military service was seen

as a cultural rite of passage for males. Keegan argues that by the turn of the 20th Century

most European countries were warrior oriented states that were unrestrained by politics

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[153]*Ibid.,* 23.
[154]*Ibid., 12.*
[155]Bassford, "John Keegan…," 323.
[156]Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, 387.
[157]*Ibid*., 25-26.
[158]*Ibid*., 21.

and prepared to fight "war for war's sake." By extension, he claims that this orientation set the conditions for the sustained human misery of the First World War rather than any politically oriented struggle for power.[159]

Culture does have an influence on war, however this was not an influence that Clausewitz forgot to consider as part of his paradoxical trinity. In the "History of Warfare," Keegan offers a vague description of Clausewitz's theories that makes no mention of the paradoxical trinity but instead focuses on the Prussian's perceived obsession with war's role as a continuation of rational state policy.[160] He demonstrates his lack of understanding of Clausewitz's thoughts on the nature of war as he employs "policy" and "politics" interchangeably and emphasizes how Clausewitz did not consider the overwhelming influence that culture can have on the rational control of war.[161]

The dynamic nature of the paradoxical trinity based on its foundations in human nature provides a flexible basis for analysis that Keegan's narrow focus on cultural influences simply cannot match. Clausewitz recognized that the objective characteristics of passion, chance and reason would always be in dynamic tension and heavily influenced by the subjective characteristics of culture, technology and other era focused factors. He acknowledged that there will be wars, such as Keegan's Easter Island example, where rational control is almost completely dominated by forces of passion. Conversely, he also recognized that the constantly variable characteristics of war would

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[159]*Ibid*., 20-21.
[160]*Ibid*., 18-27.
[161]Bassford, "John Keegan…," 327.

foster conditions for conflict where the opposite could be true.[162] Keegan's cultural

theory focused only on how culture overwhelms rational control in determining the

nature of war and did not consider that the inverse could occur such as was the case in

19th Century Prussia in response to the threat posed by Napoleon. In this case, Prussia

cast aside years of cultural influences and made drastic and rapid changes to its

orientation to war based on rational reforms initiated by Clausewitz's mentor

Scharnhorst. These initiatives were derived from research rather than cultural trends or

influences.[163]

Keegan claims that the First World War was not politically oriented by choosing

to ignore the historical evidence pertaining to this conflict. This conflict was oriented

around the struggle for power in Europe that was simmering since the turn of the 20th

Century and was triggered by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, the heir to the

Austro-Hungarian throne, in June of 1914 by Serbian nationalists. The Austro-

Hungarians took advantage of the perceived legitimacy of retaliation to attack Serbia in

order to increase their influence in the Balkans. Although the Austro-Hungarians had

hoped for a quick war of limited scope, they failed to consider the treaties of alliances

that formed a complicated web across Europe and western Asia. Launch of hostilities

split Europe along the lines of these alliances and expanded the political scope of the

conflict as alliance-tethered countries entered the war with their own nationalist focused

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[162]Clausewitz, *On War,* 86-87.
[163]Bassford, "John Keegan…," 333.

objectives. The scope of the conflict grew to the point where determining who held the balance of power in Europe became the overarching purpose of the war.[164]

One of the themes that permeates "The History of Warfare" is that Clausewitz's theories have never been relevant because he failed to consider the cultural influence on warfare. Although Keegan doesn't directly apply the Summersian Trinity as is the case for van Creveld, he still bases his entire argument on the misinterpretation that Clausewitz believed war was rational. His provocative and poorly supported allegation that the First World War was culturally and not politically motivated only contributes to proving that Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity remains relevant.

In conclusion of this chapter, the metaphors and complex back-and-forth writing style Clausewitz employs in *On War* discourages many readers from taking the time to comprehend Clausewitz's theories from a primary reference source. Many readers turn to more concise interpretations to save time, putting faith in the belief that popularity automatically reflects accuracy. This is the reason that the Summersian Trinity achieved such broad influence without tangible foundation in Clausewitz's theories. This concept had merit when Summers employed it in select contexts such as for Vietnam and the Gulf War, however it also set the conditions for critiques against Clausewitz based on related misinterpretations by authors such as Martin van Creveld and John Keegan.

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[164]Michael Duffy, "A Multimedia History of World War One," last modified 22 August 2009, http://www.firstworldwar.com/origins/causes.htm.

Martin van Creveld's "Transformation of War" fails to refute Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war as it focuses on the Summersian Trinity rather than the paradoxical trinity. His text is well organized and contains detailed tangible examples, however he bases his assertions on the inaccurate perception that Clausewitz was exclusively focused on warfare between states. Van Creveld fails to consider that low intensity conflict is not a new form of war and his central argument is crippled by the weakness of its foundation.

The cultural focus of John Keegan's work is fundamentally flawed due to the fact that he employs a similar state focused interpretation of Clausewitz as van Creveld. What separates him from van Creveld and further weakens his argument is that he fabricates the concept that Clausewitz considered warfare an entirely rational act and did not consider the cultural influences on war. Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity easily refutes Keegan's claims as culture is considered among the many subjective characteristics of war's context that constantly interacts with the objective characteristics of passion, chance and reason. Clausewitz's theory on the nature of war can accommodate Keegan's narrow view of culture's influence on war, however the inverse is not true.

As seen in this chapter, misinterpretation of Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war has led to influential critiques that are based on flawed assertions. It is important when considering the relevance of Clausewitz to understand his theories as he intended them rather than employing the interpretations of a secondary or tertiary source. Only by

understanding the paradoxical trinity from its basic components of passion, chance and reason can its application to professional military education be considered.

CHAPTER 5 – THE TRINITY'S ROLE IN
PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

As discussed in Chapter Two and amplified in Chapter Three, Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity provides the basis of study that experienced military practitioners can leverage to better understand the nature of war. The trinity is not a cookbook or set of easily memorized principles, but rather a group of related theories that one benefits from through study and focused thought.[165] In light of the chaos that has accompanied the rise of the non-state actor on the world stage, understanding the fundamental influences that contribute to the characteristics of a particular conflict have never been more important.

This chapter argues that the paradoxical trinity is a valuable tool for professional military education as part of the Canadian Forces Joint Command and Staff Programme as it provides a means for officers to better understand and adapt to the non-linear nature of war. It commences by describing how the paradoxical trinity can be used as part of intermediate level professional military education in a command and staff course context. The subsequent section describes how the trinity is employed in the curriculums of intermediate level command and staff courses in a variety of allied countries including the United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, the United States Army

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[165]Christopher Bassford, "Clausewitz and His Works," last modified 18 March 2013, http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Cworks/Works.htm.

Command and General Staff School, the United Kingdom Advanced Command and Staff Course and the Australian Command and Staff Course (Joint). The chapter concludes by describing how the Canadian Forces College Joint Command and Staff Programme currently employs the paradoxical trinity and recommends how the programme can further incorporate this concept to better prepare majors/lieutenant-colonels to contend with the challenges of the current operating environment.

The majority of western military intermediate level (major/lieutenant-colonel) command and staff courses focus on developing students' abilities to think critically and contribute to operational and strategic level planning.[166] Students must make the difficult transition from the linear approach of checklist focused thinking based on their tactical experience to the non-linear and often abstract analysis inherent to the operational and strategic level.[167] Understanding the fundamental characteristics of a particular war is crucial to ensuring analysis beyond the tactical level focuses on the true forces influencing the conflict. As stated by Clausewitz, "the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish… the kind of war on which they are embarking."[168] This section describes the role of the paradoxical trinity in intermediate level professional military education.

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[166]Small Wars Journal, "Thoughts on Professional Military Education: After 9-11, Iraq, and Afghanistan in the Era of Fiscal Austerity," last modified 1 January 2012, http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/thoughts-on-professional-military-education-after-9-11-iraq-and-afghanistan-in-the-era-of-f.

[167]Vexen Crabtree, "Military Drill: It's Theory and Purpose," last modified 18 June 2004, http://www.vexen.co.uk/military/drill.html#Politics.

[168]Clausewitz, *On War*, 88.

Employing the concepts associated with the paradoxical trinity is crucial to grasping the fundamental influences of war that form the basis for operational and strategic level planning.[169] According to military theorist Antulio Echevarria, "Our understanding of war's nature . . . influences how we approach the conduct of war – how we develop military strategy, doctrine and concepts, and train and equip combat forces."[170] Clausewitz never intended his trinity to be some sort of template to be employed for analyzing war based on the elements of passion, chance and reason but rather an enduring basis for study that could be coupled with a student's experience. Clausewitz states that his trinity is a means to "guide [the Commander] in his self-education, not to accompany him to the battlefield; just as a wise teacher guides and stimulates a young man's intellectual development, but is careful not to lead him by the hand for the rest of his life."[171] By considering that human nature drives warfare, the trinity enables military practitioners to determine the fundamental influences of a particular war and tailor preparations accordingly. In addition, the trinity concept forces students to acknowledge the unpredictability of war in spite of dramatic improvements in technology and this better prepares them for the effects of this fluid environment.[172] Failure to understand the dynamics of a particular conflict often doom a force to mission failure as illustrated by the examples of the United States' experiences in Vietnam and Iraq Wars that were described in Chapter 3.

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[169]John Stone, "Clausewitz's Trinity and Contemporary Conflict," *Civil Wars Journal*, vol. 9, no. 3 (September 2007): 285. http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fciv20.
    [170]Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 58.
[171]Clausewitz, *On War*, 141.
    [172]National Review Online. "We Could All Use a Little Clausewitz Lesson," last modified 28 March 2003, http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/206377/main-thing/mackubin-thomas-owens.

Clausewitz's *On War* is an intimidating volume for many military practitioners due to its length and 19th Century context. In addition, there is a common perception that Clausewitz's theories are only useful to historians and other academics due to the requirement to sift through all eight books contained in *On War* to truly understand the Prussian's concepts. Although the concepts affiliated with the paradoxical trinity are discussed in different sections throughout *On War,* this does not make Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war impregnable to the average student at a command and staff college.[173] As an example, one way of fostering student comprehension is through employment of select readings of *On War* that are tailored to focused instruction composed of Clausewitz's historical context described in Chapter One and the fundamentals of his ideas on the nature of war described in Chapter Two.[174] Providing students with this baseline of understanding allows them to employ the trinity framework as a tool to better understand the nature of a particular conflict as part of operational or strategic planning.

It is important to incorporate instruction on the paradoxical trinity at the intermediate level of professional military education as students at this juncture can view the trinity concepts through the lens of their own practical experience. Only through this practical experience and first hand understanding of the current operating environment can officers properly adapt the trinity construct to contemporary conditions. Understanding the dynamic relationship between the enduring objective characteristics

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[173]Clausewitz, *On War*, 641.

[174]Christopher Bassford, "Clausewitz Seminars I & II," last modified January 2013, http://www.clausewitz.com/opencourseware/Clausewitz-2seminars.htm#fw.

and time/place dependent subjective characteristics of a particular war is the linchpin of the trinity framework of analysis.[175] In addition, understanding the nature of warfare at this level enables officers to avoid viewing operational or strategic issues as linear problems that are merely the sum of their parts.[176]

It could be argued that Clausewitz's trinity should be incorporated earlier in an officer's professional military education at the undergraduate level to allow a greater understanding of the nature of war earlier at an earlier stage in their career. Although the value of considering the nature of war at the tactical level cannot be discounted, the paradoxical trinity is only effective when considered as a framework composed of both the enduring objective characteristics and situation dependent subjective characteristics. Undergraduate level officers normally lack the practical experience necessary to tangibly consider the situation dependent variables of conflict.

This section has explained the role of the paradoxical trinity in enabling students to better understand the characteristics of conflict. Considering both the enduring objective and time dependent subjective elements of a particular conflict contributes directly to more accurate analysis as part of operational and strategic planning. The discussion will now transition to a comparative description of how the trinity is currently

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[175]Nikolas Gardner, "Resurrecting the "Icon" - The Enduring Relevance of Clausewitz's On War," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, (Spring 2009): 129, http://www.au.af.mil/au/ssq/2009/Spring/gardner.pdf.
   [176]Small Wars Journal, "A Critical Perspective on Operational Art and Design Theory." Last modified 30 April 2012. http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/a-critical-perspective-on-operational-art-and-design-theory.

employed as a tool for professional military education in the command and staff colleges of allied nations.

For those that do not understand Clausewitz's theories, it could be considered counterintuitive to incorporate theories developed in the era of cavalry and cannon into the curriculum of command and staff colleges preparing officers for conflict in the information age. This is one of the reasons that Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity is not instructed to the same depth or treated with the same level of importance in the intermediate level programs of modern military command and staff colleges. Before analyzing the Canadian Forces College's approach to Clausewitz's theories on the nature of war, there is a requirement to examine how some of Canada's allies approach the Prussian's theories. This section will examine how the trinity is employed in the various programs of intermediate level professional military education including the United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, the United States Army Command and General Staff School, the Advanced Command and Staff Course at the United Kingdom Joint Services Command and Staff College and the Australian Command and Staff Course (Joint) at the Australian Command and Staff College.

The United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College prepares field grade officers "to function in command and staff assignments with joint, combined service and other high level military organizations."[177] This institution covers Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity in depth as part an entire lesson devoted to *On War* within the context

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[177]United States Marine Corps, "About Command and Staff College," last accessed 26 March 2013, https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/csc/SitePages/About.aspx.

of the operational art. This instruction features preparation focused on readings of select elements of *On War*, combined with a classroom discussion aimed at amplifying the application of the trinity framework to understanding the nature of conflict.[178] This instruction establishes the theme that "the character of war changes over time but the nature of war is constant and enduring" which influences instruction throughout the remainder of the program.[179]

Instruction at the United States Army Command and General Staff School is intended to "prepare all field grade officers with a warrior ethos and war fighting focus for leadership positions in Army, Joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multi-national organizations executing full spectrum operations."[180] Clausewitz's theories are instructed as part of the course block entitled "The Rise of the Western Way of War" which contrasts the theories of Clausewitz and Jomini to set the stage for descriptions of their contemporary application.[181] The paradoxical trinity is taught as the capstone concept of *On War* in a dedicated lecture focused on emphasizing the dynamic nature of war. Selected elements of *On War* are assigned as required reading following the lecture and students employ the trinity framework as part of describing the operational environment during planning exercises conducted later in the course.[182]

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[178]United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, "Clausewitz, On War" (Command and Staff College Operational Art Course Syllabus Card for lesson 5014, 2013).

[179]United States Marine Corps, "Recurring Themes for 2012/2013," last accessed 1 March 2013, https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/CSC%20Documents/CSC%20Recurring%20Themes%20AY%202012-2013.pdf.

[180]United States Army Command and General Staff College, "College Catalogue," last accessed 26 March 2013, http://www.cgsc.edu/repository/350-1.pdf.

[181]*Ibid.*

[182]United States Army Command and General Staff School, "Explaining the Revolution: Clausewitz" (Course H100: Rise of the Western Way of War Advance Sheet for Lesson H106, 2013).

The Advanced Command and Staff Course at the United Kingdom Joint Services

Command and Staff College prepares selected officers for senior appointments at the

Lieutenant-Colonel/Colonel level in a joint environment by developing their command,

analytical and communication skills.[183] The course module entitled "Conflict and the

International System: Strategy" includes detailed descriptions of the core concepts of

classical theorists such as Thucydides, Sun Tzu and Clausewitz.[184] The paradoxical

trinity is discussed in detail as part of this instruction through assigned readings of *On

War*, academic lecture and student lead discussion.[185] It is amplified in the subsequent

module pertaining to contemporary strategy and national policy.[186]

The aim of the Australian Command and Staff Course (Joint) at the Australian

Command and Staff College is "to prepare selected career officers for command and staff

appointments at the [colonel/captain (navy)] level in single-Service, joint and integrated

environments."[187] The course module on strategy includes a student led discussion period

dedicated to Clausewitz's theories that is designed to ensure students understand both the

value of Clausewitz's theories to the study of war and how to employ them as a

framework to understand contemporary conflict. Students are assigned selected readings

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[183]Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, "Advanced Command and Staff Course Brochure," last modified November 2012. http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/jscsc/acsc.

[184]United Kingdom Advanced Command and Staff Course, "Strategy" (Course Package for Conflict and the International System Course, 2012).

[185]*Ibid*.

[186]United Kingdom Advanced Command and Staff Course, "National Security Strategy, Foreign & Defence Policy" (Course Package for Conflict and the International System Course, 2012).

[187]Australian Defence College, "Australian Command and Staff Course Handbook 2012," last accessed 26 March 2013, http://www.defence.gov.au/adc/docs/ACSC2011/ACSC_111020_Handbook_2012.pdf.

in *On War* and are encouraged to employ Clausewitz's theories associated with paradoxical trinity to understand the nature of simulated conflict scenarios as part of planning sessions conducted during the subsequent modules of the course.[188]

The colleges described above each have a different approach to instructing the paradoxical trinity at their respective command and staff course. One characteristic that they share in common is that they all employ the trinity framework as a basis for teaching students how to understand the nature of war. This is important to consider for the next section that analyzes the Canadian Forces College's approach to Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity.

According to the syllabus of the 39th serial of the Joint Command and Staff College Programme conducted at the Canadian Forces College, the programme is intended to "educate and prepare military officers and other national security leaders to be effective in leadership and staff positions in complex joint, interagency, and multinational settings across the full spectrum of conflict."[189] The course dedicated to examining the practice of warfare as a society, entitled "DS 543 – War and Society," focuses on "the impact of social, political and technological shifts on the theory and practice of war." In contrast to the curriculum content of the allied schools described above, instruction features lectures and discussions focused on a historical overview of how armed conflict has evolved over the span of human history rather than explaining the

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[188]Australian Command and Staff Course, "The Influence of Clausewitz" (Syndicate Discussion Description - Strategy Course, 2013).
[189]Canadian Forces College, "Joint Command and Staff Programme Residential and Distance Learning Syllabus," last accessed 26 March 2013, http://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/118/129/cfc300-39-eng.pdf.

nature of war.[190] This review emphasizes the relationship between society, technology, and doctrine in the context of conflict and describes the dominant military theories of each era, but does not discuss their contemporary relevance or application. As such, Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity is mentioned in passing as part of the instruction on "Industrialism" without any explanation of the relationship between passion, chance and reason. In addition, no portions of *On War* are identified on the list of required readings for the course.[191]

 The Canadian programme instructs students on the character of war using a foundation of subjective elements such as technology and culture that are tethered to time and place rather than the enduring components of the nature of war described by the paradoxical trinity. By neglecting the fundamental nature of war, students are discouraged from assessing the character of a conflict beyond face value as part of operational planning. This methodology contrasts strongly with the approach of the allied colleges and risks producing graduates unable to tailor operational and strategic planning efforts to the true nature of a conflict. Plans ill-suited to the nature of a war can lead to unnecessary challenges as was shown by the United States' experiences in Vietnam and Iraq described in Chapter Three.

 Amending the curriculum of the Joint Command and Staff Programme to better incorporate instruction on the nature rather than simply the character of war will produce

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[190]Canadian Forces College, "Joint Command and Staff Programme Residential and Distance Learning Syllabus," last accessed 26 March 2013, http://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/118/129/cfc300-39-eng.pdf.
[191]Canadian Forces College, "Industrialism" (Joint Command and Staff Programme Lecture Discussion DS543/WAS/LD-2, 2012).

graduates better capable of contributing to operational and strategic level planning

efforts. Drawing from the approaches of the other colleges described earlier in this

section, the Canadian programme should expand the focus of the War and Society

module to include instruction and discussion about the enduring nature of war.[192]

Recognizing the compressed nature of the existing curriculum based on the requirement

to accommodate both student and instructor preparation time, this amendment would not

require wholesale change to the structure of the war and society module. Instruction on

the paradoxical trinity, in conjunction with or in contrast to the theories of Sun Tzu or

Jomini, can be accomplished in one standard Canadian Forces College lecture-discussion

block with minimal disruption to the module. This block would comprise 60 minutes of

lecture, 90 minutes of syndicate based discussion and conclude with a 30 minute plenary

session.[193] Selected elements of *On War* would be incorporated as required reading to

complement the instruction and provide a basis for discussion. This period of instruction

is by no means sufficient to make students masters of Clausewitz's theories, however it

provides the basis for them to better analyze the roots of a particular conflict using the

framework provided by the paradoxical trinity. By acknowledging the dynamic nature of

war, students can ensure operational and strategic plans consider the true character of a

particular conflict.

The existing structure of the War and Society module contains nearly 80 hours of

student preparation time associated with mandatory readings and the completion of a

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[192]Canadian Forces College, "Joint Command and Staff Programme Residential and Distance Learning Syllabus," last accessed 26 March 2013, http://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/118/129/cfc300-39-eng.pdf.
[193]*Ibid.*

2500 word persuasive paper. It could be argued that it is not feasible to teach students about the enduring nature of war as part of this module due to the existing load of preparation requirements. The 80 hours of existing preparation time not only occupies assigned preparation time during working hours, but also student individual preparation time that includes three hours each weekday evening and six hours on weekends.[194] Instruction on the paradoxical trinity can be incorporated into this module by reducing the preparation time affiliated with periods that do not contribute to critical thinking such as the instruction on the history of the operational art. The importance of understanding the tactics of ancient Egypt pales in comparison to comprehending the enduring nature of war through the paradoxical trinity.

To conclude this chapter, the paradoxical trinity is a framework for understanding the nature of war that is currently not employed in the Joint Command and Staff Programme at the Canadian Forces College. Comprehending the concepts associated with the trinity provide students with a framework through which they can better understand the dynamic nature of a particular conflict and ensure plans are not based on superficial factors associated with war's changing character. Although the paradoxical trinity remains a fundamental component of the American, British and Australian command and staff colleges, the Canadian Forces College has diverged from this path. By focusing on war's changing character through historical study, the War and Society module of the Joint Command and Staff Programme provides students with an understanding of the historical context of war without a comprehension of war's enduring nature.

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[194]*Ibid.*

Failure to understand war's enduring nature can lead to plans that are poorly tailored to the root causes of the conflict. Correcting this curriculum shortfall does not require significant changes as the War and Society module only needs to be expanded in scope from a purely historical study towards instruction focused on enhancing students' ability to think critically during planning.

CONCLUSION

Clausewitz developed his theories on the nature of war to provide students with a basis for "how to think about war and conflict and not what to think."[195] It is this approach that has allowed the paradoxical trinity to remain relevant to contemporary professional military education. Discarding the paradoxical trinity because it doesn't provide a checklist-style solution to analyzing current conflicts is similar to discarding Einstein's theory of relativity if it cannot tell people how to return the space shuttle to earth.[196]

As described in Chapter One, Clausewitz developed his paradoxical trinity at the peak of his experience and study near the end of his lifetime. His vast experiences in war

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[195]Bill Bentley, *...like a beam of light from the past... Clausewitz and On War* (Kingston: Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2008) , 16.

[196]Janeen Klinger, "The Social Science of Carl von Clausewitz," *US Army Parameters Journal*, vol. 36 (Spring 2006): 85, http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/ArticleIndex.cfm.

ranged from the Prussian regimental line of battle to strategic level liaison as part of the

Russian Army. These experiences formed the foundation for the paradoxical trinity as

they showed him the close relationship between policy, politics and war as well as the

violent and chaotic nature of war that could consistently foil any tactics based on rigid

calculation. When not at war, Clausewitz focused his studies on historical conflicts to

determine what enduring traits were common to any armed conflict. It was through this

academic analysis that Clausewitz developed his paradoxical trinity of passion, chance

and reason based on the foundations of his own experiences in war.

The concept of the paradoxical trinity is intertwined throughout Clausewitz's *On

War* as it was intended as the foundation for analyzing the nature of war. General George

S. Patton described *On War* as "about as hard reading as any thing can well be and is as

full of notes of equal abstruseness as a dog is of fleas."[197] Chapter Two provided a

detailed description of the components of the paradoxical trinity including passion,

chance and reason and explained how understanding the dynamic relationship between

these components can be employed as a framework to analyze the nature of a particular

war. This set the stage for describing the trinity's relevance to current operations.

The world has witnessed enormous technological changes since Clausewitz

developed his theories on the nature of war. Chapter Three demonstrated how the

paradoxical trinity remains valid for the current operating environment due its focus on

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[197]Carlo D'Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 120.

the influence of human nature on conflict. Clausewitz considered technology one of the many evolving subjective elements of war that vary according to time and/or place. These subjective elements continually interact with the enduring objective elements of passion, chance and reason which often produces rapid and frequent changes in the character of a particular war. Clausewitz assured the continued relevance of his theories on the nature of war by basing the foundations of the paradoxical trinity on the human centric elements of passion and reason and the unavoidable element of chance.

Many critics that claim Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity is not relevant to the current operating environment base these accusations on incorrect interpretations of the Prussian's theories. Chapter Four refuted the arguments of two of Clausewitz's most influential critics including Martin van Creveld and John Keegan with a view to reinforcing the first portion of the paper's thesis regarding the current relevance of the paradoxical trinity. Van Creveld's arguments are logical, however they are focused on the state-centric Summersian Trinity and not the paradoxical trinity. Keegan's assertion that culture and not policy/politics drives war is fundamentally flawed and reflects a lack of comprehension of Clausewitz's theories. Clausewitz considered culture as simply another subjective element of war that continually interacts with the paradoxical trinity and changes with time/place. Popularity of these misinterpretations has polarized much of the academic community regarding the relevance of Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity which is one of the reasons this concept has received such a varied reception among allied command and staff programs.

Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity provides a basis for study that allows military

planners to understand the root causes of conflict rather than simply the superficial

characteristics such as technological and cultural influences that are often a function of

time and place. Building on the foundation established in the preceding portions of the

paper, Chapter Five focused on addressing the final portion of the paper's thesis by

arguing why and how Canadian Forces College should better incorporate instruction on

the paradoxical trinity into the Joint Command and Staff Programme. This chapter

commenced by demonstrating why the paradoxical trinity is a fundamental element of

intermediate level professional military education by illustrating its value as a framework

for understanding the nature of war. This was followed by a comparison between the

approach of Canadian Forces College and the approaches of selected allied colleges' to

employing the paradoxical trinity as a framework to understanding the nature of war.

Results of this comparison clearly showcased how the Canadian Joint Command and

Staff Programme, in contrast to all of the other allied courses examined, currently pays

lip service to the enduring nature of war described by the paradoxical trinity and focuses

instead on the subjective elements of conflict that vary with time and place. This chapter

concluded by providing recommendations on how to incorporate instruction on

Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity into the curriculum of the Joint Command and Staff

Programme while accommodating both student and instructor preparation time

requirements. This minor amendment would ensure future graduates are provided with

the skills necessary to ensure future mission planning is based on an analysis of the root and not the superficial exterior of a particular conflict.

To conclude, Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity remains a valid framework for analyzing the nature of conflict nearly 200 years after it was first published in *On War*. This longevity results from the fundamental nature of Clausewitz's concepts rather than the Prussian's ability to predict the future. The paradoxical trinity does not provide detailed step-by-step instructions on how to win wars and cannot be easily distilled into a wallet sized card of principles, however it does provide a basis for study that allows students to enhance their understanding of the nature of war. Excluding it from formal instruction as part of the Joint Command and Staff Programme in favor of a focus on the changing character of war not only differs significantly from other allied nations but also inhibits students' abilities to contribute to operational and strategic planning following graduation.

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