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On War: The Classic Book Of Military Strategy



Synopsis

Carl Philipp Gottlieb von Clausewitz (1780-1831) was a Prussian soldier, military historian and military theorist. He is most famous for his military treatise *Vom Kriege*, translated into English as *On War*. This volume has been translated from the original German by Colonel J.J. Graham.

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Customer Reviews

Review of: "On War Paperback [Amazon.com](#) - [Amazon.com](#) January 21, 2012," by Carl von Clausewitz (Author). *On War* (*Vom Kriege*) is a book on war and military strategy by Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), written mostly after the Napoleonic wars, between 1816 and 1830, and published posthumously by his wife Marie von Clausewitz in 1832. It has been translated into English several times as *On War*. *On War* is actually an unfinished work; Clausewitz had set about revising his accumulated manuscripts in 1827, but did not live to finish the task. His wife edited his collected works and published them between 1832 and 1835. His 10-volume collected works contain most of his larger historical and theoretical writings, though not his shorter articles and papers or his extensive correspondence with important political, military, intellectual and

cultural leaders in the Prussian state. *On War* is formed by the first three volumes and represents his theoretical explorations. It is one of the most important treatises on political-military analysis and strategy ever written, and remains both controversial and an influence on strategic thinking. The edition currently under review, although three books, is condensed from those volumes. The book contains a wealth of historical examples used to illustrate its various concepts. Frederick II of Prussia (the Great) figures prominently for having made very efficient use of the limited forces at his disposal, though Napoleon is perhaps the central figure. According to some strategists, the "general message" of the book was that "the conduct of war could not be reduced to universal principles." Among many strands of thought, three stand out as essential to Clausewitz's concept: 1. War must never be seen as having any purpose in itself, but should be seen as an instrument of *Politik* - a German word that conflates the meanings of the English words policy and politics: "War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means." 2. The military objectives in war that support one's political objectives fall into two broad types: "war to achieve limited aims" and war to "disarm" the enemy: "to render [him] politically helpless or militarily impotent." 3. All else being equal, the course of war will tend to favor the party with the stronger emotional and political motivations, but especially the defender. The text under review is 161 pages and set in size 8 or so font. This should not, however, detract from the buyer's interest. This text is packed with the essentials of von Clausewitz's works and for the price is a very good deal. Well done at five stars.

The holistic interaction of diverse factors that make-up the continuum of politics and war. A realist approach to politics and war it is as valid today as it was when his wife Marie edited the final version in 1834. Unlike the "cookbook" approach of Joemini that was revised many times, Clausewitz's ideas are general theories that apply to the ages.

Like Homer and Cicero, the classics never go out of style! A must-read for any serious student of the interrelationship of the military and state policy, and an affirmation that, sadly, Douglas MacArthur may have been right vis a vis the correct strategy to use in Korea but when he publicly defied his Commander in Chief, he stepped over the line. In keeping up with the evening news, it's glaringly obvious that those responsible for formulating our foreign and military policy have never read Clausewitz! And if they don't do it soon, this country is in deep kimchee! The greatest tragedy is that General von Clausewitz never got to finish it to his satisfaction. Imagine if the entire work was as easily read as the first chapter of the first book!

A classic for war theorists or political scientists, but it's not the easiest to read. Very dense, written by a soldier, not a writer. And Clausewitz famously died before completing, so certain claims/arguments seem under explained and underdeveloped. Other reviews are correct that it's basically a text file pasted into a book as well. Makes it hard to get through at times. That said, it's a fascinating take on war and war theory and, as I said above, a classic that anyone interested in the topic MUST read at some point.

This particular edition benefits from the great scholarship and well written introductory (and explanatory!) essays of Peter Paret, Bernard Brodie, and Michael Howard. *On War* is required reading for mid-grade US military officers and a common reference and discussion point for operational and strategic analysis. This is the essential book, and this translation makes it lucid and comprehensible. von Clausewitz wrestles with many discreet topics of interest to students and practitioners of military affairs. In doing so, however, he approaches war in a very special way: he seeks to understand and describe the fundamental nature of war. This is timeless. Significant portions of the book could be read as a study of the relationship of war to societies and to the human condition. The greatest value-add point of the book is that, in contrast to the offerings of many other writers, Clausewitz asserts that there are no checklists or programs to guarantee success in war. Instead, the student of warfare, and the General in command, both must study history, study human nature, and apply critical thinking to develop good judgement concerning the conduct of war. For a society and military establishment that tend always to train for, and to fight, the last war rather than the next one, this is big wisdom. The downside, and one reason *On War* was not initially as popular as works by competitors who experienced the same Napoleonic revolution in warfare, is that von Clausewitz still requires military leaders to think. The true nature of war is complex, contextual, and chaotic. Among those who demand clear answers and black-and-white rules, who want a book to tell them the what to do rather than push them to develop wisdom concerning war, von Clausewitz's message is not generally well received. Those other works, however, have fallen progressively out of favor except as excerpts for students in military colleges to contrast against *On War*. This is largely because their authors tried to write programs to victory. As history has moved on, so has their relevance. For example, what constituted hot, leading edge commentary on how many muskets to deploy with your pikemen in 1815 is, today, well... The weakness of *On War*, aside from it being unfinished and far short of what von Clausewitz and his wife would have produced had sickness not claimed him early, is that it is bound up in the context of

European land war. This impacts areas such as his nascent discussion of limited war and causes him substantially to skip the maritime dimension. Julian Corbett's *Principals of Maritime Strategy* bridges this gap admirably and, in my opinion, should be read next after *On War*. Overall, *On War* is what you think it is: the foundation of much modern military thinking and essential to any sophisticated understanding of war in the international security environment.

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