

PREPARED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
THE CENTER OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ

ON WAR

Edited and Translated by
MICHAEL HOWARD *and* PETER PARET

Introductory Essays by PETER PARET,
MICHAEL HOWARD, *and* BERNARD BRODIE;
with a Commentary by BERNARD BRODIE

Index by ROSALIE WEST

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

What Is War?

1. INTRODUCTION

I propose to consider first the various *elements* of the subject, next its *various parts* or *sections*, and finally *the whole* in its internal structure. In other words, I shall proceed from the simple to the complex. But in war more than in any other subject we must begin by looking at the nature of the whole; for here more than elsewhere the part and the whole must always be thought of together.

2. DEFINITION

I shall not begin by expounding a pedantic, literary definition of war, but go straight to the heart of the matter, to the duel. War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his *immediate* aim is to *throw* his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance.

War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.

Force, to counter opposing force, equips itself with the inventions of art and science. Attached to force are certain self-imposed, imperceptible limitations hardly worth mentioning, known as international law and custom, but they scarcely weaken it. Force—that is, physical force, for moral force has no existence save as expressed in the state and the law—is thus the *means* of war; to impose our will on the enemy is its *object*. To secure that object we must render the enemy powerless; and that, in theory, is the true aim of warfare. That aim takes the place of the object, discarding it as something not actually part of war itself.

3. THE MAXIMUM USE OF FORCE

Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat an enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst. The maximum use of force is in no way incompatible with the simultaneous use of the intellect. If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it

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involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand. That side will force the other to follow suit; each will drive its opponent toward extremes, and the only limiting factors are the counterpoises inherent in war.

This is how the matter must be seen. It would be futile—even wrong—to try and shut one's eyes to what war really is from sheer distress at its brutality.

If wars between civilized nations are far less cruel and destructive than wars between savages, the reason lies in the social conditions of the states themselves and in their relationships to one another. These are the forces that give rise to war; the same forces circumscribe and moderate it. They themselves however are not part of war; they already exist before fighting starts. To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would always lead to logical absurdity.

Two different motives make men fight one another: *hostile feelings* and *hostile intentions*. Our definition is based on the latter, since it is the universal element. Even the most savage, almost instinctive, passion of hatred cannot be conceived as existing without hostile intent; but hostile intentions are often unaccompanied by any sort of hostile feelings—at least by none that predominate. Savage peoples are ruled by passion, civilized peoples by the mind. The difference, however, lies not in the respective natures of savagery and civilization, but in their attendant circumstances, institutions, and so forth. The difference, therefore, does not operate in every case, but it does in most of them. Even the most civilized of peoples, in short, can be fired with passionate hatred for each other.

Consequently, it would be an obvious fallacy to imagine war between civilized peoples as resulting merely from a rational act on the part of their governments and to conceive of war as gradually ridding itself of passion, so that in the end one would never really need to use the physical impact of the fighting forces—comparative figures of their strength would be enough. That would be a kind of war by algebra.

Theorists were already beginning to think along such lines when the recent wars taught them a lesson. If war is an act of force, the emotions cannot fail to be involved. War may not spring from them, but they will still affect it to some degree, and the extent to which they do so will depend not on the level of civilization but on how important the conflicting interests are and on how long their conflict lasts.

If, then, civilized nations do not put their prisoners to death or devastate cities and countries, it is because intelligence plays a larger part in their methods of warfare and has taught them more effective ways of using force than the crude expression of instinct.

The invention of gunpowder and the constant improvement of firearms are enough in themselves to show that the advance of civilization has done nothing practical to alter or deflect the impulse to destroy the enemy, which is central to the very idea of war.

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The thesis, then, must be repeated: war is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes. This is the *first case of interaction and the first "extreme"* we meet with.

4. THE AIM IS TO DISARM THE ENEMY

I have already said that the aim of warfare is to disarm the enemy and it is time to show that, at least in theory, this is bound to be so. If the enemy is to be coerced you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make. The hardships of that situation must not of course be merely transient—at least not in appearance. Otherwise the enemy would not give in but would wait for things to improve. Any change that might be brought about by continuing hostilities must then, at least in theory, be of a kind to bring the enemy still greater disadvantages. The worst of all conditions in which a belligerent can find himself is to be utterly defenseless. Consequently, if you are to force the enemy, by making war on him, to do your bidding, you must either make him literally defenseless or at least put him in a position that makes this danger probable. It follows, then, that to overcome the enemy, or disarm him—call it what you will—must always be the aim of warfare.

War, however, is not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass (total nonresistance would be no war at all) but always the collision of two living forces. The ultimate aim of waging war, as formulated here, must be taken as applying to both sides. Once again, there is interaction. So long as I have not overthrown my opponent I am bound to fear he may overthrow me. Thus I am not in control: he dictates to me as much as I dictate to him. This is the *second case of interaction and it leads to the second "extreme."*

5. THE MAXIMUM EXERTION OF STRENGTH

If you want to overcome your enemy you must match your effort against his power of resistance, which can be expressed as the product of two inseparable factors, viz. *the total means at his disposal and the strength of his will*. The extent of the means at his disposal is a matter—though not exclusively—of figures, and should be measurable. But the strength of his will is much less easy to determine and can only be gauged approximately by the strength of the motive animating it. Assuming you arrive in this way at a reasonably accurate estimate of the enemy's power of resistance, you can adjust your own efforts accordingly; that is, you can either increase them until they surpass the enemy's or, if this is beyond your means, you can make your efforts as great as possible. But the enemy will do the same; competition will again result and, in pure theory, it must again force you both to extremes. This is the *third case of interaction and the third "extreme."*

6. MODIFICATIONS IN PRACTICE

Thus in the field of abstract thought the inquiring mind can never rest until it reaches the extreme, for here it is dealing with an extreme: a clash of forces freely operating and obedient to no law but their own. From a pure concept of war you might try to deduce absolute terms for the objective you should aim at and for the means of achieving it; but if you did so the continuous interaction would land you in extremes that represented nothing but a play of the imagination issuing from an almost invisible sequence of logical subtleties. If we were to think purely in absolute terms, we could avoid every difficulty by a stroke of the pen and proclaim with inflexible logic that, since the extreme must always be the goal, the greatest effort must always be exerted. Any such pronouncement would be an abstraction and would leave the real world quite unaffected.

Even assuming this extreme effort to be an absolute quantity that could easily be calculated, one must admit that the human mind is unlikely to consent to being ruled by such a logical fantasy. It would often result in strength being wasted, which is contrary to other principles of statecraft. An effort of will out of all proportion to the object in view would be needed but would not in fact be realized, since subtleties of logic do not motivate the human will.

But move from the abstract to the real world, and the whole thing looks quite different. In the abstract world, optimism was all-powerful and forced us to assume that both parties to the conflict not only sought perfection but attained it. Would this ever be the case in practice? Yes, it would if: (a) war were a wholly isolated act, occurring suddenly and not produced by previous events in the political world; (b) it consisted of a single decisive act or a set of simultaneous ones; (c) the decision achieved was complete and perfect in itself, uninfluenced by any previous estimate of the political situation it would bring about.

7. WAR IS NEVER AN ISOLATED ACT

As to the first of these conditions, it must be remembered that neither opponent is an abstract person to the other, not even to the extent of that factor in the power of resistance, namely the will, which is dependent on externals. The will is not a wholly unknown factor; we can base a forecast of its state tomorrow on what it is today. War never breaks out wholly unexpectedly, nor can it be spread instantaneously. Each side can therefore gauge the other to a large extent by what he is and does, instead of judging him by what he, strictly speaking, ought to be or do. Man and his affairs, however, are always something short of perfect and will never quite achieve the absolute best. Such shortcomings affect both sides alike and therefore constitute a moderating force.

8. WAR DOES NOT CONSIST OF A SINGLE SHORT BLOW

The second condition calls for the following remarks:

If war consisted of one decisive act, or of a set of simultaneous decisions, preparations would tend toward totality, for no omission could ever be rectified. The sole criterion for preparations which the world of reality could provide would be the measures taken by the adversary—so far as they are known; the rest would once more be reduced to abstract calculations. But if the decision in war consists of several successive acts, then each of them, seen in context, will provide a gauge for those that follow. Here again, the abstract world is ousted by the real one and the trend to the extreme is thereby moderated.

But, of course, if all the means available were, or could be, simultaneously employed, all wars would automatically be confined to a single decisive act or a set of simultaneous ones—the reason being that any *adverse* decision must reduce the sum of the means available, and if *all* had been committed in the first act there could really be no question of a second. Any subsequent military operation would virtually be part of the first—in other words, merely an extension of it.

Yet, as I showed above, as soon as preparations for a war begin, the world of reality takes over from the world of abstract thought; material calculations take the place of hypothetical extremes and, if for no other reason, the interaction of the two sides tends to fall short of maximum effort. Their full resources will therefore not be mobilized immediately.

Besides, the very nature of those resources and of their employment means they cannot all be deployed at the same moment. The resources in question are *the fighting forces proper, the country*, with its physical features and population, and its *allies*.

The country—its physical features and population—is more than just the source of all armed forces proper; it is in itself an integral element among the factors at work in war—though only that part which is the actual theater of operations or has a notable influence on it.

It is possible, no doubt, to use all mobile fighting forces simultaneously; but with fortresses, rivers, mountains, inhabitants, and so forth, that cannot be done; not, in short, with the country as a whole, unless it is so small that the opening action of the war completely engulfs it. Furthermore, allies do not cooperate at the mere desire of those who are actively engaged in fighting; international relations being what they are, such cooperation is often furnished only at some later stage or increased only when a balance has been disturbed and needs correction.

In many cases, the proportion of the means of resistance that cannot immediately be brought to bear is much higher than might at first be thought. Even when great strength has been expended on the first decision and the balance has been badly upset, equilibrium can be restored. The point will be more fully treated in due course. At this stage it is enough to

show that the very nature of war impedes the *simultaneous concentration of all forces*. To be sure, that fact in itself cannot be grounds for making any but a maximum effort to obtain the first decision, for a defeat is always a disadvantage no one would deliberately risk. And even if the first clash is not the only one, the influence it has on subsequent actions will be on a scale proportionate to its own. But it is contrary to human nature to make an extreme effort, and the tendency therefore is always to plead that a decision may be possible later on. As a result, for the first decision, effort and concentration of forces are not all they might be. Anything omitted out of weakness by one side becomes a real, *objective* reason for the other to reduce its efforts, and the tendency toward extremes is once again reduced by this interaction.

9. IN WAR THE RESULT IS NEVER FINAL

Lastly, even the ultimate outcome of a war is not always to be regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date. It is obvious how this, too, can slacken tension and reduce the vigor of the effort.

10. THE PROBABILITIES OF REAL LIFE REPLACE THE EXTREME AND THE ABSOLUTE REQUIRED BY THEORY

Warfare thus eludes the strict theoretical requirement that extremes of force be applied. Once the extreme is no longer feared or aimed at, it becomes a matter of judgment what degree of effort should be made; and this can only be based on the phenomena of the real world and the *laws of probability*. Once the antagonists have ceased to be mere figments of a theory and become actual states and governments, when war is no longer a theoretical affair but a series of actions obeying its own peculiar laws, reality supplies the data from which we can deduce the unknown that lies ahead.

From the enemy's character, from his institutions, the state of his affair and his general situation, each side, using the *laws of probability*, forms an estimate of its opponent's likely course and acts accordingly.

11. THE POLITICAL OBJECT NOW COMES TO THE FORE AGAIN

A subject which we last considered in Section 2 now forces itself on us again, namely the *political object of the war*. Hitherto it had been rather overshadowed by the law of extremes, the will to overcome the enemy and make him powerless. But as this law begins to lose its force and as this determination wanes, the political aim will reassert itself. If it is all a calculation of probabilities based on given individuals and conditions, the *political object*, which was the *original motive*, must become an essential factor in the equa-

tion. The smaller the penalty you demand from your opponent, the less you can expect him to try and deny it to you; the smaller the effort he makes, the less you need make yourself. Moreover, the more modest your own political aim, the less importance you attach to it and the less reluctantly you will abandon it if you must. *This is another reason why your effort will be modified.*

The political object—the original motive for the war—will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires. The political object cannot, however, *in itself* provide the standard of measurement. Since we are dealing with realities, not with abstractions, it can do so only in the context of the two states at war. The same political object can elicit *differing* reactions from different peoples, and even from the same people at different times. We can therefore take the political object as a standard only if we think of *the influence it can exert upon the forces it is meant to move*. The nature of those forces therefore calls for study. Depending on whether their characteristics increase or diminish the drive toward a particular action, the outcome will vary. Between two peoples and two states there can be such tensions, such a mass of inflammable material, that the slightest quarrel can produce a wholly disproportionate effect—a real explosion.

This is equally true of the efforts a political object is expected to arouse in either state, and of the military objectives which their policies require. Sometimes the *political and military objective is the same*—for example, the conquest of a province. In other cases the political object will not provide a suitable military objective. In that event, another military objective must be adopted that will serve the political purpose and symbolize it in the peace negotiations. But here, too, attention must be paid to the character of each state involved. There are times when, if the political object is to be achieved, the substitute must be a good deal more important. The less involved the population and the less serious the strains within states and between them, the more political requirements in themselves will dominate and tend to be decisive. Situations can thus exist in which the political object will almost be the sole determinant.

Generally speaking, a military objective that matches the political object in scale will, if the latter is reduced, be reduced in proportion; this will be all the more so as the political object increases its predominance. Thus it follows that without any inconsistency wars can have all degrees of importance and intensity, ranging from a war of extermination down to simple armed observation. This brings us to a different question, which now needs to be analyzed and answered.

12. AN INTERRUPTION OF MILITARY ACTIVITY IS NOT EXPLAINED BY ANYTHING YET SAID

However modest the political demands may be on either side, however small the means employed, however limited the military objective, can the process

of war ever be interrupted, even for a moment? The question reaches deep into the heart of the matter.

Every action needs a certain time to be completed. That period is called its duration, and its length will depend on the speed with which the person acting works. We need not concern ourselves with the difference here. Everyone performs a task in his own way; a slow man, however, does not do it more slowly because he wants to spend more time over it, but because his nature causes him to need more time. If he made more haste he would do the job less well. His speed, then, is determined by subjective causes and is a factor in the actual duration of the task.

Now if every action in war is allowed its appropriate duration, we would agree that, at least at first sight, any additional expenditure of time—any suspension of military action—seems absurd. In this connection it must be remembered that what we are talking about is not the progress made by one side or the other but the progress of military interaction as a whole.

13. ONLY ONE CONSIDERATION CAN SUSPEND MILITARY ACTION, AND IT SEEMS THAT IT CAN NEVER BE PRESENT ON MORE THAN ONE SIDE

If two parties have prepared for war, some motive of hostility must have brought them to that point. Moreover so long as they remain under arms (do not negotiate a settlement) that motive of hostility must still be active. Only one consideration can restrain it: *a desire to wait for a better moment before acting*. At first sight one would think this desire could never operate on more than one side since its opposite must automatically be working on the other. If action would bring an advantage to one side, the other's interest must be to wait.

But an absolute balance of forces cannot bring about a standstill, for if such a balance should exist the initiative would necessarily belong to the side with the positive purpose—the attacker.

One could, however, conceive of a state of balance in which the side with the positive aim (the side with the stronger grounds for action) was the one that had the weaker forces. The balance would then result from the combined effects of aim and strength. Were that the case, one would have to say that unless some shift in the balance were in prospect the two sides should make peace. If, however, some alteration were to be foreseen, only one side could expect to gain by it—a fact which ought to stimulate the other into action. Inaction clearly cannot be explained by the concept of balance. The only explanation is that both are waiting for a better time to act. Let us suppose, therefore, that one of the two states has a positive aim—say, the conquest of a part of the other's territory, to use for bargaining at the peace table. Once the prize is in its hands, the political object has been achieved; there is no need to do more, and it can let matters rest. If the other state is ready to accept the situation, it should sue for peace. If not, it must do something; and if it thinks it will be better organized for action

in four weeks' time it clearly has an adequate reason for not taking action at once.

But from that moment on, logic would seem to call for action by the other side—the object being to deny the enemy the time he needs for getting ready. Throughout all this I have assumed, of course, that both sides understand the situation perfectly.

14. CONTINUITY WOULD THUS BE BROUGHT ABOUT IN MILITARY ACTION AND WOULD AGAIN INTENSIFY EVERYTHING

If this continuity were really to exist in the campaign its effect would again be to drive everything to extremes. Not only would such ceaseless activity arouse men's feelings and inject them with more passion and elemental strength, but events would follow more closely on each other and be governed by a stricter causal chain. Each individual action would be more important, and consequently more dangerous.

But war, of course, seldom if ever shows such continuity. In numerous conflicts only a very small part of the time is occupied by action, while the rest is spent in inactivity. This cannot always be an anomaly. Suspension of action in war must be possible; in other words, it is not a contradiction in terms. Let me demonstrate this point, and explain the reasons for it.

15. HERE A PRINCIPLE OF POLARITY IS PROPOSED

By thinking that the interests of the two commanders are opposed in equal measure to each other, we have assumed a genuine *polarity*. A whole chapter will be devoted to the subject further on, but the following must be said about it here.

The principle of polarity is valid only in relation to one and the same object, in which positive and negative interests exactly cancel one another out. In a battle each side aims at victory; that is a case of true polarity, since the victory of one side excludes the victory of the other. When, however, we are dealing with two different things that have a common relation external to themselves, the polarity lies not in the *things* but in their relationship.

16. ATTACK AND DEFENSE BEING THINGS DIFFERENT IN KIND AND UNEQUAL IN STRENGTH, POLARITY CANNOT BE APPLIED TO THEM

If war assumed only a single form, namely, attacking the enemy, and defense were nonexistent; or, to put it in another way, if the only differences between attack and defense lay in the fact that attack has a positive aim whereas defense has not, and the forms of fighting were identical; then every advantage gained by one side would be a precisely equal disadvantage to the other—true polarity would exist.

But there are two distinct forms of action in war: attack and defense. As will be shown in detail later, the two are very different and unequal in strength. Polarity, then, does not lie in attack or defense, but in the object both seek to achieve: the decision. If one commander wants to postpone the decision, the other must want to hasten it, always assuming that both are engaged in the same kind of fighting. If it is in A's interest not to attack B now but to attack him in four weeks, then it is in B's interest not to be attacked in four weeks' time, but now. This is an immediate and direct conflict of interest; but it does not follow from this that it would also be to B's advantage to make an immediate attack on A. That would obviously be quite another matter.

17. THE SUPERIORITY OF DEFENSE OVER ATTACK OFTEN DESTROYS THE EFFECT OF POLARITY, AND THIS EXPLAINS THE SUSPENSION OF MILITARY ACTION

As we shall show, defense is a stronger form of fighting than attack. Consequently we must ask whether the advantage of *postponing a decision* is as great for one side as the advantage of *defense* is for the other. Whenever it is not, it cannot balance the advantage of defense and in this way influence the progress of the war. It is clear, then, that the impulse created by the polarity of interests may be exhausted in the difference between the strength of attack and defense, and may thus become inoperative.

Consequently, if the side favored by present conditions is not sufficiently strong to do without the added advantages of the defense, it will have to accept the prospect of acting under unfavorable conditions in the future. To fight a defensive battle under these less favorable conditions may still be better than to attack immediately or to make peace. I am convinced that the superiority of the defensive (if rightly understood) is very great, far greater than appears at first sight. It is this which explains without any inconsistency most periods of inaction that occur in war. The weaker the motives for action, the more will they be overlaid and neutralized by this disparity between attack and defense, and the more frequently will action be suspended—as indeed experience shows.

18. A SECOND CAUSE IS IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE SITUATION

There is still another factor that can bring military action to a standstill: imperfect knowledge of the situation. The only situation a commander can know fully is his own; his opponent's he can know only from unreliable intelligence. His evaluation, therefore, may be mistaken and can lead him to suppose that the initiative lies with the enemy when in fact it remains with him. Of course such faulty appreciation is as likely to lead to ill-timed action as to ill-timed inaction, and is no more conducive to slowing down operations than it is to speeding them up. Nevertheless, it must rank among

the natural causes which, *without entailing inconsistency, can bring military activity to a halt*. Men are always more inclined to pitch their estimate of the enemy's strength too high than too low, such is human nature. Bearing this in mind, one must admit that partial ignorance of the situation is, generally speaking, a major factor in delaying the progress of military action and in moderating the principle that underlies it.

The possibility of inaction has a further moderating effect on the progress of the war by diluting it, so to speak, in time by delaying danger, and by increasing the means of restoring a balance between the two sides. The greater the tensions that have led to war, and the greater the consequent war effort, the shorter these periods of inaction. Inversely, the weaker the motive for conflict, the longer the intervals between actions. For the stronger motive increases willpower, and willpower, as we know, is always both an element in and the product of strength.

19. FREQUENT PERIODS OF INACTION REMOVE WAR STILL FURTHER FROM THE REALM OF THE ABSOLUTE AND MAKE IT EVEN MORE A MATTER OF ASSESSING PROBABILITIES

The slower the progress and the more frequent the interruptions of military action the easier it is to retrieve a mistake, the bolder will be the general's assessments, and the more likely he will be to avoid theoretical extremes and to base his plans on probability and inference. Any given situation requires that probabilities be calculated in the light of circumstances, and the amount of time available for such calculation will depend on the pace with which operations are taking place.

20. THEREFORE ONLY THE ELEMENT OF CHANCE IS NEEDED TO MAKE WAR A GAMBLE, AND THAT ELEMENT IS NEVER ABSENT

It is now quite clear how greatly the objective nature of war makes it a matter of assessing probabilities. Only one more element is needed to make war a gamble—chance: the very last thing that war lacks. No other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance. And through the element of chance, guesswork and luck come to play a great part in war.

21. NOT ONLY ITS OBJECTIVE BUT ALSO ITS SUBJECTIVE NATURE MAKES WAR A GAMBLE

If we now consider briefly the *subjective nature* of war—the means by which war has to be fought—it will look more than ever like a gamble. The element in which war exists is danger. The highest of all moral qualities in time of danger is certainly *courage*. Now courage is perfectly compatible with prudent calculation but the two differ nonetheless, and pertain to different

psychological forces. Daring, on the other hand, boldness, rashness, trusting in luck are only variants of courage, and all these traits of character seek their proper element—chance.

In short, absolute, so-called mathematical, factors never find a firm basis in military calculations. From the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry. In the whole range of human activities, war most closely resembles a game of cards.

22. HOW IN GENERAL THIS BEST SUITS HUMAN NATURE

Although our intellect always longs for clarity and certainty, our nature often finds uncertainty fascinating. It prefers to day-dream in the realms of chance and luck rather than accompany the intellect on its narrow and tortuous path of philosophical enquiry and logical deduction only to arrive—hardly knowing how—in unfamiliar surroundings where all the usual landmarks seem to have disappeared. Unconfined by narrow necessity, it can revel in a wealth of possibilities; which inspire courage to take wing and dive into the element of daring and danger like a fearless swimmer into the current.

Should theory leave us here, and cheerfully go on elaborating absolute conclusions and prescriptions? Then it would be no use at all in real life. No, it must also take the human factor into account, and find room for courage, boldness, even foolhardiness. The art of war deals with living and with moral forces. Consequently, it cannot attain the absolute, or certainty; it must always leave a margin for uncertainty, in the greatest things as much as in the smallest. With uncertainty in one scale, courage and self-confidence must be thrown into the other to correct the balance. The greater they are, the greater the margin that can be left for accidents. Thus courage and self-confidence are essential in war, and theory should propose only rules that give ample scope to these finest and least dispensable of military virtues, in all their degrees and variations. Even in daring there can be method and caution; but here they are measured by a different standard.

23. BUT WAR IS NONETHELESS A SERIOUS MEANS TO A SERIOUS END: A MORE PRECISE DEFINITION OF WAR

Such is war, such is the commander who directs it, and such the theory that governs it. War is no pastime; it is no mere joy in daring and winning, no place for irresponsible enthusiasts. It is a serious means to a serious end, and all its colorful resemblance to a game of chance, all the vicissitudes of passion, courage, imagination, and enthusiasm it includes are merely its special characteristics.

When whole communities go to war—whole peoples, and especially civilized peoples—the reason always lies in some political situation, and the

occasion is always due to some political object. War, therefore, is an act of policy. Were it a complete, untrammelled, absolute manifestation of violence (as the pure concept would require), war would of its own independent will usurp the place of policy the moment policy had brought it into being; it would then drive policy out of office and rule by the laws of its own nature, very much like a mine that can explode only in the manner or direction predetermined by the setting. This, in fact, is the view that has been taken of the matter whenever some discord between policy and the conduct of war has stimulated theoretical distinctions of this kind. But in reality things are different, and this view is thoroughly mistaken. In reality war, as has been shown, is not like that. Its violence is not of the kind that explodes in a single discharge, but is the effect of forces that do not always develop in exactly the same manner or to the same degree. At times they will expand sufficiently to overcome the resistance of inertia or friction; at others they are too weak to have any effect. War is a pulsation of violence, variable in strength and therefore variable in the speed with which it explodes and discharges its energy. War moves on its goal with varying speeds; but it always lasts long enough for influence to be exerted on the goal and for its own course to be changed in one way or another—long enough, in other words, to remain subject to the action of a superior intelligence. If we keep in mind that war springs from some political purpose, it is natural that the prime cause of its existence will remain the supreme consideration in conducting it. That, however, does not imply that the political aim is a tyrant. It must adapt itself to its chosen means, a process which can radically change it; yet the political aim remains the first consideration. Policy, then, will permeate all military operations, and, in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them.

24. WAR IS MERELY THE CONTINUATION OF POLICY BY OTHER MEANS

We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means. What remains peculiar to war is simply the peculiar nature of its means. War in general, and the commander in any specific instance, is entitled to require that the trend and designs of policy shall not be inconsistent with these means. That, of course, is no small demand; but however much it may affect political aims in a given case, it will never do more than modify them. The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.

25. THE DIVERSE NATURE OF WAR

The more powerful and inspiring the motives for war, the more they affect the belligerent nations and the fiercer the tensions that precede the out-

break, the closer will war approach its abstract concept, the more important will be the destruction of the enemy, the more closely will the military aims and the political objects of war coincide, and the more military and less political will war appear to be. On the other hand, the less intense the motives, the less will the military element's natural tendency to violence coincide with political directives. As a result, war will be driven further from its natural course, the political object will be more and more at variance with the aim of ideal war, and the conflict will seem increasingly *political* in character.

At this point, to prevent the reader from going astray, it must be observed that the phrase, the *natural tendency* of war, is used in its philosophical, strictly *logical* sense alone and does not refer to the tendencies of the forces that are actually engaged in fighting—including, for instance, the morale and emotions of the combatants. At times, it is true, these might be so aroused that the political factor would be hard put to control them. Yet such a conflict will not occur very often, for if the motivations are so powerful there must be a policy of proportionate magnitude. On the other hand, if policy is directed only toward minor objectives, the emotions of the masses will be little stirred and they will have to be stimulated rather than held back.

26. ALL WARS CAN BE CONSIDERED ACTS OF POLICY

It is time to return to the main theme and observe that while policy is apparently effaced in the one kind of war and yet is strongly evident in the other, both kinds are equally political. If the state is thought of as a person, and policy as the product of its brain, then among the contingencies for which the state must be prepared is a war in which every element calls for policy to be eclipsed by violence. Only if politics is regarded not as resulting from a just appreciation of affairs, but—as it conventionally is—as cautious, devious, even dishonest, shying away from force, could the second type of war appear to be more “political” than the first.

27. THE EFFECTS OF THIS POINT OF VIEW ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF MILITARY HISTORY AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF THEORY

First, therefore, it is clear that war should never be thought of as *something autonomous* but always as an *instrument of policy*; otherwise the entire history of war would contradict us. Only this approach will enable us to penetrate the problem intelligently. *Second*, this way of looking at it will show us how wars must vary with the nature of their motives and of the situations which give rise to them.

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all

strategic questions and the most comprehensive. It will be given detailed study later, in the chapter on war plans.

It is enough, for the moment, to have reached this stage and to have established the cardinal point of view from which war and the theory of war have to be examined.

28. THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THEORY

War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.

The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government. The passions that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people; the scope which the play of courage and talent will enjoy in the realm of probability and chance depends on the particular character of the commander and the army; but the political aims are the business of government alone.

These three tendencies are like three different codes of law, deep-rooted in their subject and yet variable in their relationship to one another. A theory that ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless.

Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets.

What lines might best be followed to achieve this difficult task will be explored in the book on the theory of war [Book Two]. At any rate, the preliminary concept of war which we have formulated casts a first ray of light on the basic structure of theory, and enables us to make an initial differentiation and identification of its major components.

Purpose and Means in War

The preceding chapter showed that the nature of war is complex and changeable. I now propose to inquire how its nature influences its purpose and its means.

If for a start we inquire into the objective of any particular war, which must guide military action if the political purpose is to be properly served, we find that the object of any war can vary just as much as its political purpose and its actual circumstances.

If for the moment we consider the pure concept of war, we should have to say that the political purpose of war had no connection with war itself, for if war is an act of violence meant to force the enemy to do our will its aim would have *always* and *solely* to be to overcome the enemy and disarm him. That aim is derived from the theoretical concept of war; but since many wars do actually come very close to fulfilling it, let us examine this kind of war first of all.

Later, when we are dealing with the subject of war plans, we shall investigate in greater detail what is meant by *disarming* a country. But we should at once distinguish between three things, three broad objectives, which between them cover everything: the *armed forces*, the *country*, and the *enemy's will*.

The fighting forces must be *destroyed*: that is, they must be *put in such a condition that they can no longer carry on the fight*. Whenever we use the phrase "destruction of the enemy's forces" this alone is what we mean.

The country must be occupied; otherwise the enemy could raise fresh military forces.

Yet both these things may be done and the war, that is the animosity and the reciprocal effects of hostile elements, cannot be considered to have ended so long as the enemy's *will* has not been broken: in other words, so long as the enemy government and its allies have not been driven to ask for peace, or the population made to submit.

We may occupy a country completely, but hostilities can be renewed again in the interior, or perhaps with allied help. This of course can also happen *after* the peace treaty, but this only shows that not every war necessarily leads to a final decision and settlement. But even if hostilities should occur again, a peace treaty will always extinguish a mass of sparks that might have gone on quietly smoldering. Further, tensions are slackened, for lovers of peace (and they abound among every people under all circumstances) will then abandon any thought of further action. Be that as it may, we must

always consider that with the conclusion of peace the purpose of the war has been achieved and its business is at an end.

Since of the three objectives named, it is the fighting forces that assure the safety of the country, the natural sequence would be to destroy them first, and then subdue the country. Having achieved these two goals and exploiting our own position of strength, we can bring the enemy to the peace table. As a rule, destroying the enemy's forces tends to be a gradual process, as does the ensuing subjugation of the country. Normally the one reacts on the other, in that loss of territory weakens the fighting forces; but that particular sequence of events is not essential and therefore does not always take place. Before they suffer seriously, the enemy's forces may retire to remote areas, or even withdraw to other countries. In that event, of course, most or all of the country will be occupied.

But the aim of *disarming the enemy* (the object of war in the abstract, the ultimate means of accomplishing the war's political purpose, which should incorporate all the rest) is in fact not always encountered in reality, and need not be fully achieved as a condition of peace. On no account should theory raise it to the level of a law. Many treaties have been concluded before one of the antagonists could be called powerless—even before the balance of power had been seriously altered. What is more, a review of actual cases shows a whole category of wars in which the very idea of *defeating the enemy* is unreal: those in which the enemy is substantially the stronger power.

The reason why the object of war that emerges in theory is sometimes inappropriate to actual conflict is that war can be of two very different kinds, a point we discussed in the first chapter. If war were what pure theory postulates, a war between states of markedly unequal strength would be absurd, and so impossible. At most, material disparity could not go beyond the amount that moral factors could replace; and social conditions being what they are in Europe today, moral forces would not go far. But wars have in fact been fought between states of *very unequal strength*, for *actual war is often far removed from the pure concept postulated by theory*. Inability to carry on the struggle can, in practice, be replaced by two other grounds for making peace: the first is the improbability of victory; the second is its unacceptable cost.

As we saw in the first chapter, war, if taken as a whole, is bound to move from the strict law of inherent necessity toward probabilities. The more the circumstances that gave rise to the conflict cause it to do so, the slighter will be its motives and the tensions which it occasions. And this makes it understandable how an analysis of probabilities may lead to peace itself. Not every war need be fought until one side collapses. When the motives and tensions of war are slight we can imagine that the very faintest prospect of defeat might be enough to cause one side to yield. If from the very start the other side feels that this is probable, it will obviously concentrate on bringing about *this probability* rather than take the long way round and totally defeat the enemy.

Of even greater influence on the decision to make peace is the consciousness of all the effort that has already been made and of the efforts yet to come. Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in *magnitude* and also in *duration*. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow.

We see then that if one side cannot completely disarm the other, the desire for peace on either side will rise and fall with the probability of further successes and the amount of effort these would require. If such incentives were of equal strength on both sides, the two would resolve their political disputes by meeting half way. If the incentive grows on one side, it should diminish on the other. Peace will result so long as their sum total is sufficient—though the side that feels the lesser urge for peace will naturally get the better bargain.

One point is purposely ignored for the moment—the difference that the *positive* or *negative* character of the political ends is bound to produce in practice. As we shall see, the difference is important, but at this stage we must take a broader view because the original political objects can greatly alter during the course of the war and may finally change entirely *since they are influenced by events and their probable consequences*.

The question now arises how success can be made more likely. One way, of course, is to choose objectives that will incidentally bring about the enemy's collapse—the *destruction of his armed forces and the conquest of his territory*; but neither is quite what it would be if our real object were the total defeat of the enemy. When we attack the enemy, it is one thing if we mean our first operation to be followed by others until all resistance has been broken; it is quite another if our aim is only to obtain a single victory, in order to make the enemy insecure, to impress our greater strength upon him, and to give him doubts about his future. If that is the extent of our aim, we will employ no more strength than is absolutely necessary. In the same way, conquest of territory is a different matter if the enemy's collapse is not the object. If we wish to gain total victory, then the destruction of his armed forces is the most appropriate action and the occupation of his territory only a consequence. To occupy land before his armies are defeated should be considered at best a necessary evil. If on the other hand we do not aim at destroying the opposing army, and if we are convinced that the enemy does not seek a brutal decision, but rather *fears* it, then the seizure of a lightly held or undefended province is *an advantage in itself*; and should this advantage be enough to make the enemy fear for the final outcome, it can be considered as a short cut on the road to peace.

But there is another way. It is possible to increase the likelihood of success without defeating the enemy's forces. I refer to operations that have *direct political repercussions*, that are designed in the first place to disrupt the opposing alliance, or to paralyze it, that gain us new allies, favorably affect the political scene, etc. If such operations are possible it is obvious

that they can greatly improve our prospects and that they can form a much shorter route to the goal than the destruction of the opposing armies.

The second question is how to influence the enemy's expenditure of effort; in other words, how to make the war more costly to him.

The enemy's expenditure of effort consists in the *wastage of his forces*—our *destruction* of them; and in his *loss of territory*—our *conquest*.

Closer study will make it obvious that both of these factors can vary in their significance with the variation in objectives. As a rule the differences will be slight, but that should not mislead us, for in practice, when strong motives are not present, the slightest nuances often decide between the different uses of force. For the moment all that matters is to show that, given certain conditions, different ways of reaching the objective are *possible* and that they are neither *inconsistent*, *absurd*, nor even *mistaken*.

In addition, there are three other methods directly aimed at increasing the enemy's expenditure of effort. The first of these is *invasion*, that is *the seizure of enemy territory*; not with the object of retaining it but in order to exact financial contributions, or even to lay it waste. The immediate object here is neither to conquer the enemy country nor to destroy its army, but simply to *cause general damage*. The second method is to give priority to operations that will increase the enemy's suffering. It is easy to imagine two alternatives: one operation is far more advantageous if the purpose is to defeat the enemy; the other is more profitable if that cannot be done. The first tends to be described as the more military, the second the more political alternative. From the highest point of view, however, one is as military as the other, and neither is appropriate unless it suits the particular conditions. The third, and far the most important method, judging from the frequency of its use, is to *wear down* the enemy. That expression is more than a label; it describes the process precisely, and is not so metaphorical as it may seem at first. Wearing down the enemy in a conflict means using *the duration of the war to bring about a gradual exhaustion of his physical and moral resistance*.

If we intend to hold out longer than our opponent we must be content with the smallest possible objects, for obviously a major object requires more effort than a minor one. The minimum object is *pure self-defense*; in other words, fighting without a positive purpose. With such a policy our relative strength will be at its height, and thus the prospects for a favorable outcome will be greatest. But how far can this negativity be pushed? Obviously not to the point of absolute passivity, for sheer endurance would not be fighting at all. But resistance is a form of action, aimed at destroying enough of the enemy's power to force him to renounce his intentions. Every single act of our resistance is directed to that act alone, and that is what makes our policy negative.

Undoubtedly a single action, assuming it succeeds, would do less for a negative aim than it would for a positive one. But that is just the difference: the former is more likely to succeed and so to give you more security. What it lacks in immediate effectiveness it must make up for in its use of time,

that is by prolonging the war. Thus the negative aim, which lies at the heart of pure resistance, is also the natural formula for outlasting the enemy, for wearing him down.

Here lies the origin of the distinction that dominates the whole of war: the difference between *attack* and *defense*. We shall not pursue the matter now, but let us just say this: that from the negative purpose derive all the advantages, all the more effective forms, of fighting, and that in it is expressed the dynamic relationship between the magnitude and the likelihood of success. All this will be gone into later.

If a negative aim—that is, the use of every means available for pure resistance—gives an advantage in war, the advantage need only be enough to *balance* any superiority the opponent may possess: in the end his political object will not seem worth the effort it costs. He must then renounce his policy. It is evident that this method, wearing down the enemy, applies to the great number of cases where the weak endeavor to resist the strong.

Frederick the Great would never have been able to defeat Austria in the Seven Years War: and had he tried to fight in the manner of Charles XII he would unfailingly have been destroyed himself. But for seven years he skillfully husbanded his strength and finally convinced the allies that far greater efforts were needed than they had foreseen. Consequently they made peace.

We can now see that in war many roads lead to success, and that they do not all involve the opponent's outright defeat. They range from *the destruction of the enemy's forces, the conquest of his territory, to a temporary occupation or invasion, to projects with an immediate political purpose, and finally to passively awaiting the enemy's attacks*. Any one of these may be used to overcome the enemy's will: the choice depends on circumstances. One further kind of action, of shortcuts to the goal, needs mention: one could call them arguments *ad hominem*. Is there a field of human affairs where personal relations do not count, where the sparks they strike do not leap across all practical considerations? The personalities of statesmen and soldiers are such important factors that in war above all it is vital not to underrate them. It is enough to mention this point: it would be pedantic to attempt a systematic classification. It can be said, however, that these questions of personality and personal relations raise the number of possible ways of achieving the goal of policy to infinity.

To think of these shortcuts as rare exceptions, or to minimize the difference they can make to the conduct of war, would be to underrate them. To avoid that error we need only bear in mind how wide a range of political interests can lead to war, or think for a moment of the gulf that separates a war of annihilation, a struggle for political existence, from a war reluctantly declared in consequence of political pressure or of an alliance that no longer seems to reflect the state's true interests. Between these two extremes lie numerous gradations. If we reject a single one of them on theoretical grounds, we may as well reject them all, and lose contact with the real world.

So much then for the ends to be pursued in war; let us now turn to the means.

There is only one: *combat*. However many forms combat takes, however far it may be removed from the brute discharge of hatred and enmity of a physical encounter, however many forces may intrude which themselves are not part of fighting, it is inherent in the very concept of war that everything that occurs *must originally derive from combat*.

It is easy to show that this is always so, however many forms reality takes. Everything that occurs in war results from the existence of armed forces; *but whenever armed forces, that is armed individuals, are used, the idea of combat must be present*.

Warfare comprises everything related to the fighting forces—everything to do with their creation, maintenance, and use.

Creation and maintenance are obviously only means; their use constitutes the end.

Combat in war is not a contest between individuals. It is a whole made up of many parts, and in that whole two elements may be distinguished, one determined by the subject, the other by the objective. The mass of combatants in an army endlessly forms fresh elements, which themselves are parts of a greater structure. The fighting activity of each of these parts constitutes a more or less clearly defined element. Moreover, combat itself is made an element of war by its very purpose, by its *objective*.

Each of these elements which become distinct in the course of fighting is named an *engagement*.

If the idea of fighting underlies every use of the fighting forces, then their employment means simply the planning and organizing of a series of engagements.

The whole of military activity must therefore relate directly or indirectly to the engagement. The end for which a soldier is recruited, clothed, armed, and trained, the whole object of his sleeping, eating, drinking, and marching is *simply that he should fight at the right place and the right time*.

If all threads of military activity lead to the engagement, then if we control the engagement, we comprehend them all. Their results are produced by our orders and by the execution of these orders, never directly by other conditions. Since in the engagement everything is concentrated on the destruction of the enemy, or rather of *his armed forces*, which is inherent in its very concept, it follows that the destruction of the enemy's forces is always the means by which the purpose of the engagement is achieved.

The purpose in question may be the destruction of the enemy's forces, but not necessarily so; it may be quite different. As we have shown, the destruction of the enemy is not the only means of attaining the political object, when there are other objectives for which the war is waged. It follows that those other objectives can also become the purpose of particular military operations, and thus also the purpose of engagements.

Even when subordinate engagements are directly intended to destroy the

opposing forces, that destruction still need not be their first, immediate concern.

Bearing in mind the elaborate structure of an army, and the numerous factors that determine its employment, one can see that the fighting activity of such a force is also subject to complex organization, division of functions, and combinations. The separate units obviously must often be assigned tasks that are not in themselves concerned with the destruction of the enemy's forces, which may indeed increase their losses but do so only indirectly. If a battalion is ordered to drive the enemy from a hill, a bridge, etc., the true purpose is normally to occupy that point. Destruction of the enemy's force is only a means to an end, a secondary matter. If a mere demonstration is enough to cause the enemy to abandon his position, the objective has been achieved; but as a rule the hill or bridge is captured only so that even more damage can be inflicted on the enemy. If this is the case on the battlefield, it will be even more so in the theater of operations, where it is not merely two armies that are facing each other, but two states, two peoples, two nations. The range of possible circumstances, and therefore of options, is greatly increased, as is the variety of dispositions; and the gradation of objects at various levels of command will further separate the first means from the ultimate purpose.

Thus there are many reasons why the purpose of an engagement may not be the destruction of the enemy's forces, the forces immediately confronting us. Destruction may be merely a means to some other end. In such a case, total destruction has ceased to be the point; the engagement is nothing but a *trial of strength*. In itself it is of no value; its significance lies in the outcome of the trial.

When one force is a great deal stronger than the other, an estimate may be enough. There will be no fighting: the weaker side will yield at once.

The fact that engagements do not always aim at the destruction of the opposing forces, that their objectives can often be attained without any fighting at all but merely by an evaluation of the situation, explains why entire campaigns can be conducted with great energy even though actual fighting plays an unimportant part in them.

This is demonstrated by hundreds of examples in the history of war. Here we are only concerned to show that it is *possible*; we need not ask how often it was appropriate, in other words *consistent with the overall purpose*, to avoid the test of battle, or whether all the reputations made in such campaigns would stand the test of critical examination.

There is only one means in war: combat. But the multiplicity of forms that combat assumes leads us in as many different directions as are created by the multiplicity of aims, so that our analysis does not seem to have made any progress. But that is not so: the fact that only one means exists constitutes a strand that runs through the entire web of military activity and really holds it together.

We have shown that the destruction of the enemy's forces is one of the many objects that can be pursued in war, and we have left aside the ques-

tion of its importance relative to other purposes. In any given case the answer will depend on circumstances; its importance to war in general remains to be clarified. We shall now go into this question, and we shall see what value must necessarily be attributed to this object of destruction.

Combat is the only effective force in war; its aim is to destroy the enemy's forces as a means to a further end. That holds good even if no actual fighting occurs, because the outcome rests on the assumption that if it came to fighting, the enemy would be destroyed. It follows that the destruction of the enemy's force underlies all military actions; all plans are ultimately based on it, resting on it like an arch on its abutment. Consequently, all action is undertaken in the belief that if the ultimate test of arms should actually occur, the outcome would be *favorable*. The decision by arms is for all major and minor operations in war what cash payment is in commerce. Regardless how complex the relationship between the two parties, regardless how rarely settlements actually occur, they can never be entirely absent.

If a decision by fighting is the basis of all plans and operations, it follows that the enemy *can frustrate everything through a successful battle*. This occurs not only when the encounter affects an essential factor in our plans, but when any victory that is won is of sufficient scope. For every important victory—that is, destruction of opposing forces—reacts on all other possibilities. Like liquid, they will settle at a new level.

Thus it is evident that destruction of the enemy forces is always the superior, more effective means, with which others cannot compete.

But of course, we can only say destruction of the enemy is more effective if we can assume that all other conditions are equal. It would be a great mistake to deduce from this argument that a headlong rush must always triumph over skillful caution. Blind aggressiveness would destroy the attack itself, not the defense, and this is not what we are talking about. Greater effectiveness relates not to the *means* but to the *end*; we are simply comparing the effect of different outcomes.

When we speak of destroying the enemy's forces we must emphasize that nothing obliges us to limit this idea to physical forces: the moral element must also be considered. The two interact throughout: they are inseparable. We have just mentioned the effect that a great destructive act—a major victory—inevitably exerts on all other actions, and it is exactly at such times that the moral factor is, so to speak, the most fluid element of all, and therefore spreads most easily to affect everything else. The advantage that the destruction of the enemy possesses over all other means is balanced by its cost and danger; and it is only in order to avoid these risks that other policies are employed.

That the method of destruction cannot fail to be expensive is understandable; other things being equal, the more intent we are on destroying the enemy's forces, the greater our own efforts must be.

The danger of this method is that the greater the success we seek, the greater will be the damage if we fail.

Other methods, therefore, are less costly if they succeed and less damag-

ing if they fail, though this holds true only if both sides act identically, if the enemy pursues the same course as we do. If he were to seek the decision through a major battle, *his choice would force us against our will to do likewise*. Then the outcome of the battle would be decisive; but it is clear—other things again being equal—that we would be at an overall disadvantage, since our plans and resources had been in part intended to achieve other goals, whereas the enemy's were not. Two objectives, neither of which is part of the other, are mutually exclusive: one force cannot simultaneously be used for both. If, therefore, one of the two commanders is resolved to seek a decision through major battles, he will have an excellent chance of success if he is certain that his opponent is pursuing a different policy. Conversely, the commander who wishes to adopt different means can reasonably do so only if he assumes his opponent to be equally unwilling to resort to major battles.

What has been said about plans and forces being directed to other uses refers only to the *positive* purposes, other than the destruction of enemy forces, that can be pursued in war. It pertains *in no way to pure resistance*, which seeks to wear down the opponent's strength. Pure resistance has no *positive* intention; we can use our forces only to frustrate the enemy's intentions, and not divert them to other objectives.

Here we must consider the negative side of destroying the enemy's forces—that is, the preservation of our own. These two efforts always go together; they interact. They are integral parts of a single purpose, and we only need to consider the result if one or the other dominates. The effort to destroy the enemy's forces has a positive purpose and leads to positive results, whose final aim is the enemy's collapse. Preserving our own forces has a negative purpose; it frustrates the enemy's intentions—that is, it amounts to pure resistance, whose ultimate aim can only be to prolong the war until the enemy is exhausted.

The policy with a positive purpose calls the act of destruction into being; the policy with a negative purpose waits for it.

How far such a waiting attitude may or should be maintained is a question we shall study in connection with the theory of attack and defense, whose basic element is here involved. For the moment we need only say that a policy of waiting must never become passive endurance, that any action involved in it may just as well seek the destruction of the opposing forces as any other objective. It would be a fundamental error to imagine that a negative aim implies a preference for a bloodless decision over the destruction of the enemy. A preponderantly negative effort may of course lead to such a choice, but always at the risk that it is not the appropriate course: that depends on factors that are determined not by us but by the opponent. Avoidance of bloodshed, then, should not be taken as an act of policy if our main concern is to preserve our forces. On the contrary, if such a policy did not suit the particular situation it would lead our forces to disaster. A great many generals have failed through this mistaken assumption.

The one certain effect a preponderantly negative policy will have is to

retard the decision: in other words, action is transposed into waiting for the decisive moment. This usually means that *action is postponed* in time and space to the extent that space is relevant and circumstances permit. If the time arrives when further waiting would bring excessive disadvantages, then the benefit of the negative policy has been exhausted. The destruction of the enemy—an aim that has until then been postponed but not displaced by another consideration—now reemerges.

Our discussion has shown that while in war many different roads can lead to the goal, to the attainment of the political object, fighting is the only possible means. Everything is governed by a supreme law, the *decision by force of arms*. If the opponent does seek battle, this recourse can never be denied him. A commander who prefers another strategy must first be sure that his opponent either will not appeal to that supreme tribunal—force—or that he will lose the verdict if he does. To sum up: of all the possible aims in war, the destruction of the enemy's armed forces always appears as the highest.

At a later stage and by degrees we shall see what other kinds of strategies can achieve in war. All we need to do for the moment is to admit the general *possibility of their existence*, the possibility of deviating from the basic concept of war under the pressure of special circumstances. But even at this point we must not fail to emphasize that the *violent resolution of the crisis*, the wish to annihilate the enemy's forces, is the first-born son of war. If the political aims are small, the motives slight and tensions low, a prudent general may look for any way to avoid major crises and decisive actions, exploit any weaknesses in the opponent's military and political strategy, and finally reach a peaceful settlement. If his assumptions are sound and promise success we are not entitled to criticize him. But he must never forget that he is moving on devious paths where the god of war may catch him unawares. He must always keep an eye on his opponent so that he does not, if the latter has taken up a sharp sword, approach him armed only with an ornamental rapier.

These conclusions concerning the nature of war and the function of its purposes and means; the manner in which war in practice deviates in varying degrees from its basic, rigorous concept, taking this form or that, but always remaining subject to that basic concept, as to a supreme law; all these points must be kept in mind in our subsequent analyses if we are to perceive the real connections between all aspects of war, and the true significance of each; and if we wish to avoid constantly falling into the wildest inconsistencies with reality and even with our own arguments.

On Military Genius

Any complex activity, if it is to be carried on with any degree of virtuosity, calls for appropriate gifts of intellect and temperament. If they are outstanding and reveal themselves in exceptional achievements, their possessor is called a "genius."

We are aware that this word is used in many senses, differing both in degree and in kind. We also know that some of these meanings make it difficult to establish the essence of genius. But since we claim no special expertise in philosophy or grammar, we may be allowed to use the word in its ordinary meaning, in which "genius" refers to a very highly developed mental aptitude for a particular occupation.

Let us discuss this faculty, this distinction of mind for a moment, setting out its claims in greater detail, so as to gain a better understanding of the concept. But we cannot restrict our discussion to *genius* proper, as a superlative degree of talent, for this concept lacks measurable limits. What we must do is to survey all those gifts of mind and temperament that in combination bear on military activity. These, taken together, constitute the *essence of military genius*. We have said *in combination*, since it is precisely the essence of military genius that it does not consist in a single appropriate gift—courage, for example—while other qualities of mind or temperament are wanting or are not suited to war. Genius consists in a *harmonious combination of elements*, in which one or the other ability may predominate, but none may be in conflict with the rest.

If every soldier needed some degree of military genius our armies would be very weak, for the term refers to a special cast of mental or moral powers which can rarely occur in an army when a society has to employ its abilities in many different areas. The smaller the range of activities of a nation and the more the military factor dominates, the greater will be the incidence of military genius. This, however, is true only of its distribution, not of its quality. The latter depends on the *general intellectual development* of a given society. In any primitive, warlike race, the warrior spirit is far more common than among civilized peoples. It is possessed by almost every warrior: but in civilized societies only necessity will stimulate it in the people as a whole, since they lack the natural disposition for it. On the other hand, we will never find a savage who is a truly great commander, and very rarely one who would be considered a military genius, since this requires a degree of intellectual powers beyond anything that a primitive people can develop. Civilized societies, too, can obviously possess a warlike character to greater

or lesser degree, and the more they develop it, the greater will be the number of men with military spirit in their armies. Possession of military genius coincides with the higher degrees of civilization: the most highly developed societies produce the most brilliant soldiers, as the Romans and the French have shown us. With them, as with every people renowned in war, the greatest names do not appear before a high level of civilization has been reached.

We can already guess how great a role intellectual powers play in the higher forms of military genius. Let us now examine the matter more closely.

War is the realm of danger; therefore *courage* is the soldier's first requirement.

Courage is of two kinds: courage in the face of personal danger, and courage to accept responsibility, either before the tribunal of some outside power or before the court of one's own conscience. Only the first kind will be discussed here.

Courage in face of personal danger is also of two kinds. It may be indifference to danger, which could be due to the individual's constitution, or to his holding life cheap, or to habit. In any case, it must be regarded as a permanent *condition*. Alternatively, courage may result from such positive motives as ambition, patriotism, or enthusiasm of any kind. In that case courage is a feeling, an emotion, not a permanent state.

These two kinds of courage act in different ways. The first is the more dependable; having become second nature, it will never fail. The other will often achieve more. There is more reliability in the first kind, more boldness in the second. The first leaves the mind calmer; the second tends to stimulate, but it can also blind. *The highest kind of courage is a compound of both.*

War is the realm of physical exertion and suffering. These will destroy us unless we can make ourselves indifferent to them, and for this birth or training must provide us with a certain strength of body and soul. If we do possess those qualities, then even if we have nothing but common sense to guide them we shall be well equipped for war: it is exactly these qualities that primitive and semicivilized peoples usually possess.

If we pursue the demands that war makes on those who practice it, we come to the region dominated by the *powers of intellect*. War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty. A sensitive and discriminating judgment is called for; a skilled intelligence to scent out the truth.

Average intelligence may recognize the truth occasionally, and exceptional courage may now and then retrieve a blunder; but usually intellectual inadequacy will be shown up by indifferent achievement.

War is the realm of chance. No other human activity gives it greater scope: no other has such incessant and varied dealings with this intruder. Chance makes everything more uncertain and interferes with the whole course of events.

Since all information and assumptions are open to doubt, and with chance at work everywhere, the commander continually finds that things are not as he expected. This is bound to influence his plans, or at least the assumptions underlying them. If this influence is sufficiently powerful to cause a change in his plans, he must usually work out new ones; but for these the necessary information may not be immediately available. During an operation decisions have usually to be made at once: there may be no time to review the situation or even to think it through. Usually, of course, new information and reevaluation are not enough to make us give up our intentions: they only call them in question. We now know more, but this makes us more, not less uncertain. The latest reports do not arrive all at once: they merely trickle in. They continually impinge on our decisions, and our mind must be permanently armed, so to speak, to deal with them.

If the mind is to emerge unscathed from this relentless struggle with the unforeseen, two qualities are indispensable: *first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead.* The first of these qualities is described by the French term, *coup d'oeil*; the second is *determination*.

The aspect of war that has always attracted the greatest attention is the engagement. Because time and space are important elements of the engagement, and were particularly significant in the days when the cavalry attack was the decisive factor, the *idea of a rapid and accurate decision* was first based on an evaluation of time and space, and consequently received a name which refers to visual estimates only. Many theorists of war have employed the term in that limited sense. But soon it was also used of any sound decision taken in the midst of action—such as recognizing the right point to attack, etc. *Coup d'oeil* therefore refers not alone to the physical but, more commonly, to the inward eye. The expression, like the quality itself, has certainly always been more applicable to tactics, but it must also have its place in strategy, since here as well quick decisions are often needed. Stripped of metaphor and of the restrictions imposed on it by the phrase, the concept merely refers to the quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection.

Determination in a single instance is an expression of courage; if it becomes characteristic, a mental habit. But here we are referring not to physical courage but to the courage to accept responsibility, courage in the face of a moral danger. This has often been called *courage d'esprit*, because it is created by the intellect. That, however, does not make it an act of the intellect: it is an act of temperament. Intelligence alone is not courage; we often see that the most intelligent people are irresolute. Since in the rush of events a man is governed by feelings rather than by thought, the intellect needs to arouse the quality of courage, which then supports and sustains it in action.

Looked at in this way, the role of determination is to limit the agonies of

doubt and the perils of hesitation when the motives for action are inadequate. Colloquially, to be sure, the term "determination" also applies to a propensity for daring, pugnacity, boldness, or temerity. But when a man has adequate grounds for action—whether subjective or objective, valid or false—he cannot properly be called "determined." This would amount to putting oneself in his position and weighting the scale with a doubt that he never felt. In such a case it is only a question of strength or weakness. I am not such a pedant as to quarrel with common usage over a slight misuse of a word; the only purpose of these remarks is to preclude misunderstandings.

Determination, which dispells doubt, is a quality that can be aroused only by the intellect, and by a specific cast of mind at that. More is required to create determination than a mere conjunction of superior insight with the appropriate emotions. Some may bring the keenest brains to the most formidable problems, and may possess the courage to accept serious responsibilities; but when faced with a difficult situation they still find themselves unable to reach a decision. Their courage and their intellect work in separate compartments, not together; determination, therefore, does not result. It is engendered only by a *mental act*; the mind tells man that boldness is required, and thus gives direction to his will. This particular cast of mind, which employs the fear of *wavering* and *hesitating* to suppress all other fears, is the force that makes strong men determined. Men of low intelligence, therefore, cannot possess determination in the sense in which we use the word. They may act without hesitation in a crisis, but if they do, they act *without reflection*; and a man who acts without reflection cannot, of course, be torn by doubt. From time to time action of this type may even be appropriate; but, as I have said before, it is the *average result* that indicates the existence of military genius. The statement may surprise the reader who knows some determined cavalry officers who are little given to deep thought: but he must remember that we are talking about a special kind of intelligence, not about great powers of meditation.

In short, we believe that determination proceeds from a special type of mind, from a strong rather than a brilliant one. We can give further proof of this interpretation by pointing to the many examples of men who show great determination as junior officers, but lose it as they rise in rank. Conscious of the need to be decisive, they also recognize the risks entailed by a wrong decision; since they are unfamiliar with the problems now facing them, their mind loses its former incisiveness. The more used they had been to instant action, the more their timidity increases as they realize the dangers of the vacillation that ensnares them.

Having discussed *coup d'oeil* and determination it is natural to pass to a related subject: *presence of mind*. This must play a great role in war, the domain of the unexpected, since it is nothing but an increased capacity of dealing with the unexpected. We admire presence of mind in an apt reparator, as we admire quick thinking in the face of danger. Neither needs to be exceptional, so long as it meets the situation. A reaction following long and

deep reflection may seem quite commonplace; as an immediate response, it may give keen pleasure. The expression "presence of mind" precisely conveys the speed and immediacy of the help provided by the intellect.

Whether this splendid quality is due to a special cast of mind or to steady nerves depends on the nature of the incident, but neither can ever be entirely lacking. A quick retort shows wit; resourcefulness in sudden danger calls, above all, for steady nerve.

Four elements make up the climate of war: danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance. If we consider them together, it becomes evident how much fortitude of mind and character are needed to make progress in these impeding elements with safety and success. According to circumstance, reporters and historians of war use such terms as *energy*, *firmness*, *staunchness*, *emotional balance*, and *strength of character*. These products of a heroic nature could almost be treated as one and the same force—strength of will—which adjusts itself to circumstances; but though closely linked, they are not identical. A closer study of the interplay of psychological forces at work here may be worth while.

To begin with, clear thought demands that we keep one point in mind: of the weight, the burden, the resistance—call it what you like—that challenges the psychological strength of the soldier, only a small part is the *direct result of the enemy's activity, his resistance, or his operations*. The direct and primary impact of enemy activity falls, initially, on the soldier's person without affecting him in his capacity as commander. If, for example, the enemy resists four hours instead of two, the commander is in danger twice as long; but the higher an officer's rank, the less significant this factor becomes, and to the commander-in-chief it means nothing at all.

A second way in which the enemy's resistance *directly* affects the commander is the loss that is caused by prolonged resistance and the influence this exerts on his sense of responsibility. The deep anxiety which he must experience works on his strength of will and puts it to the test. Yet we believe that this is not by any means the heaviest burden he must bear, for he is answerable to himself alone. All other effects of enemy action, however, are felt by the men under his command, and *through them react on him*.

So long as a unit fights cheerfully, with spirit and clan, great strength of will is rarely needed; but once conditions become difficult, as they must when much is at stake, things no longer run like a well-oiled machine. The machine itself begins to resist, and the commander needs tremendous will-power to overcome this resistance. The machine's *resistance* need not consist of disobedience and argument, though this occurs often enough in individual soldiers. It is the impact of the ebbing of moral and physical strength, of the heart-rending spectacle of the dead and wounded, that the commander has to withstand—first in himself, and then in all those who, directly or indirectly, have entrusted him with their thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears. As each man's strength gives out, as it no longer responds to his will, the inertia of the whole gradually comes to rest on the commander's will alone. The ardor of his spirit must rekindle the flame of purpose in all others;

his inward fire must revive their hope. Only to the extent that he can do this will he retain his hold on his men and keep control. Once that hold is lost, once his own courage can no longer revive the courage of his men, the mass will drag him down to the brutish world where danger is shirked and shame is unknown. Such are the burdens in battle that the commander's courage and strength of will must overcome if he hopes to achieve outstanding success. The burdens increase with the number of men in his command, and therefore the higher his position, the greater the strength of character he needs to bear the mounting load.

Energy in action varies in proportion to the strength of its motive, whether the motive be the result of intellectual conviction or of emotion. Great strength, however, is not easily produced where there is no emotion.

Of all the passions that inspire man in battle, none, we have to admit, is so powerful and so constant as the longing for honor and renown. The German language unjustly tarnishes this by associating it with two ignoble meanings in the terms "greed for honor" (*Ehrgeiz*) and "hankering after glory" (*Ruhmsucht*). The abuse of these noble ambitions has certainly inflicted the most disgusting outrages on the human race; nevertheless their origins entitle them to be ranked among the most elevated in human nature. In war they act as the essential breath of life that animates the inert mass. Other emotions may be more common and more venerated—patriotism, idealism, vengeance, enthusiasm of every kind—but they are no substitute for a thirst for fame and honor. They may, indeed, rouse the mass to action and inspire it, but they cannot give the commander the ambition to strive higher than the rest, as he must if he is to distinguish himself. They cannot give him, as can ambition, a personal, almost proprietary interest in every aspect of fighting, so that he turns each opportunity to best advantage—plowing with vigor, sowing with care, in the hope of reaping with abundance. It is primarily this spirit of endeavor on the part of commanders at all levels, this inventiveness, energy, and competitive enthusiasm, which vitalizes an army and makes it victorious. And so far as the commander-in-chief is concerned, we may well ask whether history has ever known a great general who was not ambitious; whether, indeed, such a figure is conceivable.

Staunchness indicates the will's resistance to a single blow; *endurance* refers to prolonged resistance.

Though the two terms are similar and are often used interchangeably, the difference between them is significant and unmistakable. *Staunchness* in face of a single blow may result from strong emotion, whereas intelligence helps sustain endurance. The longer an action lasts, the more deliberate endurance becomes, and this is one of its sources of strength.

We now turn to *strength of mind*, or of *character*, and must first ask what we mean by these terms.

Not, obviously, vehement display of feeling, or passionate temperament: that would strain the meaning of the phrase. We mean the ability to keep one's head at times of exceptional stress and violent emotion. Could strength of intellect alone account for such a faculty? We doubt it. Of course the

opposite does not flow from the fact that some men of outstanding intellect do lose their self-control; it could be argued that a powerful rather than a capacious mind is what is needed. But it might be closer to the truth to assume that the faculty known as *self-control*—the gift of keeping calm even under the greatest stress—is rooted in temperament. It is itself an emotion which serves to balance the passionate feelings in strong characters without destroying them, and it is this balance alone that assures the dominance of the intellect. The counterweight we mean is simply the sense of human dignity, the noblest pride and deepest need of all: the urge to *act rationally at all times*. Therefore we would argue that a strong character is one that *will not be unbalanced by the most powerful emotions*.

If we consider how men differ in their emotional reactions, we first find a group with small capacity for being roused, usually known as "stolid" or "phlegmatic."

Second, there are men who are extremely active, but whose feelings never rise above a certain level, men whom we know to be sensitive but calm.

Third, there are men whose passions are easily inflamed, in whom excitement flares up suddenly but soon burns out, like gunpowder. And finally we come to those who do not react to minor matters, who will be moved only very gradually, not suddenly, but whose emotions attain great strength and durability. These are the men whose passions are strong, deep, and concealed.

These variants are probably related to the *physical forces* operating in the human being—they are part of that dual organism we call the nervous system, one side of which is physical, the other psychological. With our slight scientific knowledge we have no business to go farther into that obscure field; it is important nonetheless to note the ways in which these various psychological combinations can affect military activity, and to find out how far one can look for great strength of character among them.

Stolid men are hard to throw off balance, but total lack of vigor cannot really be interpreted as strength of character. It cannot be denied, however, that the imperturbability of such men gives them a certain narrow usefulness in war. They are seldom strongly motivated, lack initiative and consequently are not particularly active; on the other hand they seldom make a serious mistake.

The salient point about the second group is that trifles can suddenly stir them to act, whereas great issues are likely to overwhelm them. This kind of man will gladly help an individual in need, but the misfortune of an entire people will only sadden him; they will not stimulate him to action.

In war such men show no lack of energy or balance, but they are unlikely to achieve anything significant unless they possess a *very powerful intellect* to provide the needed stimulus. But it is rare to find this type of temperament combined with a strong and independent mind.

Inflammable emotions, feelings that are easily roused, are in general of little value in practical life, and therefore of little value in war. Their impulses are strong but brief. If the energy of such men is joined to courage and ambition they will often prove most useful at a modest level of com-

mand, simply because the action controlled by junior officers is of short duration. Often a single brave decision, a burst of emotional force, will be enough. A daring assault is the work of a few minutes, while a hard-fought battle may last a day, and a campaign an entire year.

Their volatile emotions make it doubly hard for such men to preserve their balance; they often lose their heads, and nothing is worse on active service. All the same, it would be untrue to say that highly excitable minds could never be strong—that is, could never keep their balance even under the greatest strain. Why should they not have a sense of their own dignity, since as a rule they are among the finer natures? In fact, they usually have such a sense, but there is not time for it to take effect. Once the crisis is past, they tend to be ashamed of their behavior. If training, self-awareness, and experience sooner or later teaches them how to be on guard against themselves, then in times of great excitement an internal counterweight will assert itself so that they too can draw on great strength of character.

Lastly, we come to men who are difficult to move but have strong feelings—men who are to the previous type like heat to a shower of sparks. These are the men who are best able to summon the titanic strength it takes to clear away the enormous burdens that obstruct activity in war. Their emotions move as great masses do—slowly but irresistibly.

These men are not swept away by their emotions so often as is the third group, but experience shows that they too can lose their balance and be overcome by blind passion. This can happen whenever they lack the noble pride of self-control, or whenever it is inadequate. We find this condition mostly among great men in primitive societies, where passion tends to rule for lack of intellectual discipline. Yet even among educated peoples and civilized societies men are often swept away by passion, just as in the Middle Ages poachers chained to stags were carried off into the forest.

We repeat again: strength of character does not consist solely in having powerful feelings, but in maintaining one's balance in spite of them. Even with the violence of emotion, judgment and principle must still function like a ship's compass, which records the slightest variations however rough the sea.

We say a man has strength of character, or simply has character, if he sticks to his convictions, whether these derive from his own opinions or someone else's, whether they represent principles, attitudes, sudden insights, or any other mental force. Such *firmness* cannot show itself, of course, if a man keeps changing his mind. This need not be the consequence of external influence; the cause may be the workings of his own intelligence, but this would suggest a peculiarly insecure mind. Obviously a man whose opinions are constantly changing, even though this is in response to his own reflections, would not be called a *man of character*. The term is applied only to men whose views are *stable and constant*. This may be because they are well thought-out, clear, and scarcely open to revision; or, in the case of indolent men, because such people are not in the habit of mental effort and therefore have no reason for altering their views; and finally, because a firm

decision, based on fundamental principle derived from reflection, is relatively immune to changes of opinion.

With its mass of vivid impressions and the doubts which characterize all information and opinion, there is no activity like war to rob men of confidence in themselves and in others, and to divert them from their original course of action.

In the dreadful presence of suffering and danger, emotion can easily overwhelm intellectual conviction, and in this psychological fog it is so hard to form clear and complete insights that changes of view become more understandable and excusable. Action can never be based on anything firmer than instinct, a sensing of the truth. Nowhere, in consequence, are differences of opinion so acute as in war, and fresh opinions never cease to batter at one's convictions. No degree of calm can provide enough protection: new impressions are too powerful, too vivid, and always assault the emotions as well as the intellect.

Only those general principles and attitudes that result from clear and deep understanding can provide a *comprehensive* guide to action. It is to these that opinions on specific problems should be anchored. The difficulty is to hold fast to these results of contemplation in the torrent of events and new opinions. Often there is a gap between principles and actual events that cannot always be bridged by a succession of logical deductions. Then a measure of self-confidence is needed, and a degree of skepticism is also salutary. Frequently nothing short of an imperative principle will suffice, which is not part of the immediate thought-process, but dominates it: that principle is in all doubtful cases *to stick to one's first opinion and to refuse to change unless forced to do so by a clear conviction*. A strong faith in the overriding truth of tested principles is needed; the *vividness* of transient impressions must not make us forget that such truth as they contain is of a lesser stamp. By giving precedence, in case of doubt, to our earlier convictions, by holding to them stubbornly, our actions acquire that quality of steadiness and consistency which is termed strength of character.

It is evident how greatly strength of character depends on balanced temperament; most men of emotional strength and stability are therefore men of powerful character as well.

Strength of character can degenerate into *obstinacy*. The line between them is often hard to draw in a specific case; but surely it is easy to distinguish them in theory.

Obstinacy is *not an intellectual defect*; it comes from reluctance to admit that one is wrong. To impute this to the mind would be illogical, for the mind is the seat of judgment. Obstinacy is *a fault of temperament*. Stubbornness and intolerance of contradiction result from a special kind of *egotism*, which elevates above everything else *the pleasure of its autonomous intellect, to which others must bow*. It might also be called vanity, if it were not something superior: vanity is content with the appearance alone; obstinacy demands the material reality.

We would therefore argue that strength of character turns to obstinacy

as soon as a man resists another point of view not from superior insight or attachment to some higher principle, but because he *objects instinctively*. Admittedly, this definition may not be of much practical use; but it will nevertheless help us avoid the interpretation that obstinacy is simply a more intense form of strong character. There is a basic difference between the two. They are closely related, but one is so far from being *a higher degree* of the other that we can even find extremely obstinate men who are too dense to have much strength of character.

So far our survey of the attributes that a great commander needs in war has been concerned with qualities in which mind and temperament work together. Now we must address ourselves to a special feature of military activity—possibly the most striking even though it is not the most important—which is not related to temperament, and involves merely the intellect. I mean the relationship between warfare and terrain.

This relationship, to begin with, is *a permanent factor*—so much so that one cannot conceive of a regular army operating except in a definite space. Second, its importance is *decisive in the highest degree*, for it affects the operations of all forces, and at times entirely alters them. Third, its influence may be felt in the *very smallest feature of the ground*, but it can also dominate *enormous areas*.

In these ways the relationship between warfare and terrain determines the peculiar character of military action. If we consider other activities connected with the soil—gardening, for example, farming, building, hydraulic engineering, mining, game-keeping, or forestry—none extends to more than a very limited area, and a working knowledge of that area is soon acquired. But a commander must submit his work to a partner, space, which he can never completely reconnoiter, and which because of the constant movement and change to which he is subject he can never really come to know. To be sure, the enemy is generally no better off; but the handicap, though shared, is still a handicap, and the man with enough talent and experience to overcome it will have a real advantage. Moreover it is only in a general sense that the difficulty is the same for both sides; in any particular case the defender usually knows the area far better than his opponent.

This problem is unique. To master it a special gift is needed, which is given the too restricted name of *a sense of locality*. It is the faculty of *quickly and accurately grasping the topography of any area* which enables a man to find his way about at any time. Obviously this is an act of the imagination. Things are perceived, of course, partly by the naked eye and partly by the mind, which fills the gaps with guesswork based on learning and experience, and thus constructs a whole out of the fragments that the eye can see; but if the whole is to be vividly present to the mind, imprinted like a picture, like a map, upon the brain, without fading or blurring in detail, *it can only be achieved by the mental gift that we call imagination*. A poet or painter may be shocked to find that his Muse dominates these activities as well: to him it might seem odd to say that a young gamekeeper needs an unusually powerful imagination in order to be competent. If so,

we gladly admit that this is to apply the concept narrowly and to a modest task. But however remote the connection, his skill must still derive from this natural gift, for if imagination is entirely lacking it would be difficult to combine details into a clear, coherent image. We also admit that a good memory can be a great help; but are we then to think of memory as a separate gift of the mind, or does imagination, after all, imprint those pictures in the memory more clearly? The question must be left unanswered, especially since it seems difficult even to conceive of these two forces as operating separately.

That practice and a trained mind have much to do with it is undeniable. Puységur, the celebrated quarter-master-general of Marshal Luxembourg, writes that at the beginning of his career he had little faith in his sense of locality; when he had to ride any distance at all to get the password, he invariably lost his way.

Scope for this talent naturally grows with increased authority. A hussar or scout leading a patrol must find his way easily among the roads and tracks. All he needs are a few landmarks and some modest powers of observation and imagination. A commander-in-chief, on the other hand, must aim at acquiring an overall knowledge of the configuration of a province, of an entire country. His mind must hold a vivid picture of the road-network, the river-lines and the mountain ranges, without ever losing a sense of his immediate surroundings. Of course he can draw general information from reports of all kinds, from maps, books, and memoirs. Details will be furnished by his staff. Nevertheless it is true that with a quick, unerring sense of locality his dispositions will be more rapid and assured; he will run less risk of a certain awkwardness in his concepts, and be less dependent on others.

We attribute this ability to the imagination; but that is about the only service that war can demand from this frivolous goddess, who in most military affairs is liable to do more harm than good.

With this, we believe, we have reached the end of our review of the intellectual and moral powers that human nature needs to draw upon in war. The vital contribution of intelligence is clear throughout. No wonder then, that war, though it may appear to be uncomplicated, cannot be waged with distinction except by men of outstanding intellect.

Once this view is adopted, there is no longer any need to think that it takes a great intellectual effort to outflank an enemy position (an obvious move, performed innumerable times) or to carry out a multitude of similar operations.

It is true that we normally regard the plain, efficient soldier as the very opposite of the contemplative scholar, or of the inventive intellectual with his dazzling range of knowledge. This antithesis is not entirely unrealistic; but it does not prove that courage alone will make an efficient soldier, or that having brains and using them is not a necessary part of being a good fighting man. Once again we must insist: no case is more common than that of the officer whose energy declines as he rises in rank and fills positions that are beyond his abilities. But we must also remind the reader

that outstanding effort, the kind that gives men a distinguished name, is what we have in mind. Every level of command has its own intellectual standards, its own prerequisites for fame and honor.

A major gulf exists between a commander-in-chief—a general who leads the army as a whole or commands in a theater of operations—and the senior generals immediately subordinate to him. The reason is simple: the second level is subjected to much closer control and supervision, and thus gives far less scope for independent thought. People therefore often think outstanding intellectual ability is called for only at the top, and that for all other duties common intelligence will suffice. A general of lesser responsibility, an officer grown gray in the service, his mind well-blinkered by long years of routine, may often be considered to have developed a certain stodginess; his gallantry is respected, but his simplemindedness makes us smile. We do not intend to champion and promote these good men; it would contribute nothing to their efficiency, and little to their happiness. We only wish to show things as they are, so that the reader should not think that a brave but brainless fighter can do anything of outstanding significance in war.

Since in our view even junior positions of command require outstanding intellectual qualities for outstanding achievement, and since the standard rises with every step, it follows that we recognize the abilities that are needed if the second positions in an army are to be filled with distinction. Such officers may appear to be rather simple compared to the polymath scholar, the far-ranging business executive, the statesman; but we should not dismiss the value of their practical intelligence. It sometimes happens of course that someone who made his reputation in one rank carries it with him when he is promoted, without really deserving to. If not much is demanded of him, and he can avoid exposing his incompetence, it is difficult to decide what reputation he really deserves. Such cases often cause one to hold in low estimate soldiers who in less responsible positions might do excellent work.

Appropriate talent is needed at all levels if distinguished service is to be performed. But history and posterity reserve the name of "genius" for those who have excelled in the highest positions—as commanders-in-chief—since here the demands for intellectual and moral powers are vastly greater.

To bring a war, or one of its campaigns, to a successful close requires a thorough grasp of national policy. On that level strategy and policy coalesce: the commander-in-chief is simultaneously a statesman.

Charles XII of Sweden is not thought of as a great genius, for he could never subordinate his military gifts to superior insights and wisdom, and could never achieve a great goal with them. Nor do we think of Henry IV of France in this manner: he was killed before his skill in war could affect the relations between states. Death denied him the chance to prove his talents in this higher sphere, where noble feelings and a generous disposition, which effectively appeased internal dissension, would have had to face a more intractable opponent.

The great range of business that a supreme commander must swiftly absorb and accurately evaluate has been indicated in the first chapter. We

argue that a commander-in-chief must also be a statesman, but he must not cease to be a general. On the one hand, he is aware of the entire political situation; on the other, he knows exactly how much he can achieve with the means at his disposal.

Circumstances vary so enormously in war, and are so indefinable, that a vast array of factors has to be appreciated—mostly in the light of probabilities alone. The man responsible for evaluating the whole must bring to his task the quality of intuition that perceives the truth at every point. Otherwise a chaos of opinions and considerations would arise, and fatally entangle judgment. Bonaparte rightly said in this connection that many of the decisions faced by the commander-in-chief resemble mathematical problems worthy of the gifts of a *Newton* or an *Euler*.

What this task requires in the way of higher intellectual gifts is a sense of unity and a power of judgment raised to a marvelous pitch of vision, which easily grasps and dismisses a thousand remote possibilities which an ordinary mind would labor to identify and wear itself out in so doing. Yet even that superb display of divination, the sovereign eye of genius itself, would still fall short of historical significance without the qualities of character and temperament we have described.

Truth in itself is rarely sufficient to make men act. Hence the step is always long from cognition to volition, from knowledge to ability. The most powerful springs of action in men lie in his emotions. He derives his most vigorous support, if we may use the term, from that blend of brains and temperament which we have learned to recognize in the qualities of determination, firmness, staunchness, and strength of character.

Naturally enough, if the commander's superior intellect and strength of character did not express themselves in the final success of his work, and were only taken on trust, they would rarely achieve historical importance.

What the layman gets to know of the course of military events is usually nondescript. One action resembles another, and from a mere recital of events it would be impossible to guess what obstacles were faced and overcome. Only now and then, in the memoirs of generals or of their confidants, or as the result of close historical study, are some of the countless threads of the tapestry revealed. Most of the arguments and clashes of opinion that precede a major operation are deliberately concealed because they touch political interests, or they are simply forgotten, being considered as scaffolding to be demolished when the building is complete.

Finally, and without wishing to risk a closer definition of the higher reaches of the spirit, let us assert that the human mind (in the normal meaning of the term) is far from uniform. If we then ask what sort of mind is likeliest to display the qualities of military genius, experience and observation will both tell us that it is the inquiring rather than the creative mind, the comprehensive rather than the specialized approach, the calm rather than the excitable head to which in war we would choose to entrust the fate of our brothers and children, and the safety and honor of our country.

On Danger in War

To someone who has never experienced danger, the idea is attractive rather than alarming. You charge the enemy, ignoring bullets and casualties, in a surge of excitement. Blindly you hurl yourself toward icy death, not knowing whether you or anyone else will escape him. Before you lies that golden prize, victory, the fruit that quenches the thirst of ambition. Can that be so difficult? No, and it will seem even less difficult than it is. But such moments are rare; and even they are not, as is commonly thought, brief like a heart-beat, but come rather like a medicine, in recurring doses, the taste diluted by time.

Let us accompany a novice to the battlefield. As we approach the rumble of guns grows louder and alternates with the whir of cannonballs, which begin to attract his attention. Shots begin to strike close around us. We hurry up the slope where the commanding general is stationed with his large staff. Here cannonballs and bursting shells are frequent, and life begins to seem more serious than the young man had imagined. Suddenly someone you know is wounded; then a shell falls among the staff. You notice that some of the officers act a little oddly; you yourself are not as steady and collected as you were: even the bravest can become slightly distracted. Now we enter the battle raging before us, still almost like a spectacle, and join the nearest divisional commander. Shot is falling like hail, and the thunder of our own guns adds to the din. Forward to the brigadier, a soldier of acknowledged bravery, but he is careful to take cover behind a rise, a house or a clump of trees. A noise is heard that is a certain indication of increasing danger—the rattling of grapeshot on roofs and on the ground. Cannonballs tear past, whizzing in all directions, and musketballs begin to whistle around us. A little further we reach the firing line, where the infantry endures the hammering for hours with incredible steadfastness. The air is filled with hissing bullets that sound like a sharp crack if they pass close to one's head. For a final shock, the sight of men being killed and mutilated moves our pounding hearts to awe and pity.

The novice cannot pass through these layers of increasing intensity of danger without sensing that here ideas are governed by other factors, that the light of reason is refracted in a manner quite different from that which is normal in academic speculation. It is an exceptional man who keeps his powers of quick decision intact if he has never been through this experience before. It is true that (with habit) as we become accustomed to it the impression soon wears off, and in half-an-hour we hardly notice our sur-

roundings any more; yet the ordinary man can never achieve a state of perfect unconcern in which his mind can work with normal flexibility. Here again we recognize that ordinary qualities are not enough; and the greater the area of responsibility, the truer this assertion becomes. Headlong, dogged, or innate courage, overmastering ambition, or long familiarity with danger—all must be present to a considerable degree if action in this debilitating element is not to fall short of achievements that in the study would appear as nothing out of the ordinary.

Danger is part of the friction of war. Without an accurate conception of danger we cannot understand war. That is why I have dealt with it here.

On Physical Effort in War

If no one had the right to give his views on military operations except when he is frozen, or faint from heat and thirst, or depressed from privation and fatigue, objective and accurate views would be even rarer than they are. But they would at least be subjectively valid, for the speaker's experience would precisely determine his judgment. This is clear enough when we observe in what a deprecatory, even mean and petty way men talk about the failure of some operation that they have witnessed, and even more if they actually took part. We consider that this indicates how much influence physical effort exerts, and shows how much allowance has to be made for it in all our assessments.

Among the many factors in war that cannot be measured, physical effort is the most important. Unless it is wasted, physical effort is a coefficient of all forces, and its exact limit cannot be determined. But it is significant that, just as it takes a powerful archer to bend the bow beyond the average, so it takes a powerful mind to drive his army to the limit. It is one thing for an army that has been badly defeated, is beset by danger on all sides, and is disintegrating like crumbling masonry, to seek its safety in utmost physical effort. It is altogether different when a victorious army, buoyed up by its own exhilaration, remains a willing instrument in the hands of its commander. The same effort, which in the former case can at most arouse sympathy, must be admired in the other, where it is much harder to maintain.

The inexperienced observer now comes to recognize one of the elements that seem to chain the spirit and secretly wear away men's energies.

Although we are dealing only with the efforts that a general can demand of his troops, a commander of his subordinates, in other words although we are concerned with the courage it takes to make the demand and the skill to keep up the response, we must not forget the physical exertion required of the commander himself. Since we have pursued our analysis of war conscientiously to this point, we must deal with this residue as well.

Our reason for dealing with physical effort here is that like danger it is one of the great sources of friction in war. Because its limits are uncertain, it resembles one of those substances whose elasticity makes the degree of its friction exceedingly hard to gauge.

To prevent these reflections, this assessment of the impeding conditions of war, from being misused, we have a natural guide in our sensibilities. No one can count on sympathy if he accepts an insult or mistreatment because he claims to be physically handicapped. But if he manages to defend or

revenge himself, a reference to his handicap will be to his advantage. In the same way, a general and an army cannot remove the stain of defeat by explaining the dangers, hardships, and exertions that were endured; but to depict them adds immensely to the credit of a victory. We are prevented from making an apparently justified statement by *our feelings*, which themselves act as a higher judgment.

Intelligence in War

By "intelligence" we mean every sort of information about the enemy and his country—the basis, in short, of our own plans and operations. If we consider the actual basis of this information, how unreliable and transient it is, we soon realize that war is a flimsy structure that can easily collapse and bury us in its ruins. The textbooks agree, of course, that we should only believe reliable intelligence, and should never cease to be suspicious, but what is the use of such feeble maxims? They belong to that wisdom which for want of anything better scribblers of systems and compendia resort to when they run out of ideas.

Many intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain. What one can reasonably ask of an officer is that he should possess a standard of judgment, which he can gain only from knowledge of men and affairs and from common sense. He should be guided by the laws of probability. These are difficult enough to apply when plans are drafted in an office, far from the sphere of action; the task becomes infinitely harder in the thick of fighting itself, with reports streaming in. At such times one is lucky if their contradictions cancel each other out, and leave a kind of balance to be critically assessed. It is much worse for the novice if chance does not help him in that way, and on the contrary one report tallies with another, confirms it, magnifies it, lends it color, till he has to make a quick decision—which is soon recognized to be mistaken, just as the reports turn out to be lies, exaggerations, errors, and so on. In short, most intelligence is false, and the effect of fear is to multiply lies and inaccuracies. As a rule most men would rather believe bad news than good, and rather tend to exaggerate the bad news. The dangers that are reported may soon, like waves, subside; but like waves they keep recurring, without apparent reason. The commander must trust his judgment and stand like a rock on which the waves break in vain. It is not an easy thing to do. If he does not have a buoyant disposition, if experience of war has not trained him and matured his judgment, he had better make it a rule to suppress his personal convictions, and give his hopes and not his fears the benefit of the doubt. Only thus can he preserve a proper balance.

This difficulty of *accurate recognition* constitutes one of the most serious sources of friction in war, by making things appear entirely different from what one had expected. The senses make a more vivid impression on the mind than systematic thought—so much so that I doubt if a commander ever launched an operation of any magnitude without being forced to repress

new misgivings from the start. Ordinary men, who normally follow the initiative of others, tend to lose self-confidence when they reach the scene of action: things are not what they expected, the more so as they still let others influence them. But even the man who planned the operation and now sees it being carried out may well lose confidence in his earlier judgment; whereas self-reliance is his best defense against the pressures of the moment. War has a way of masking the stage with scenery crudely daubed with fearsome apparitions. Once this is cleared away, and the horizon becomes unobstructed, developments will confirm his earlier convictions—this is one of the great chasms between *planning and execution*.

Friction in War

If one has never personally experienced war, one cannot understand in what the difficulties constantly mentioned really consist, nor why a commander should need any brilliance and exceptional ability. Everything looks simple; the knowledge required does not look remarkable, the strategic options are so obvious that by comparison the simplest problem of higher mathematics has an impressive scientific dignity. Once war has actually been seen the difficulties become clear; but it is still extremely hard to describe the unseen, all-pervading element that brings about this change of perspective.

Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war. Imagine a traveler who late in the day decides to cover two more stages before nightfall. Only four or five hours more, on a paved highway with relays of horses: it should be an easy trip. But at the next station he finds no fresh horses, or only poor ones; the country grows hilly, the road bad, night falls, and finally after many difficulties he is only too glad to reach a resting place with any kind of primitive accommodation. It is much the same in war. Countless minor incidents—the kind you can never really foresee—combine to lower the general level of performance, so that one always falls far short of the intended goal. Iron will-power can overcome this friction; it pulverizes every obstacle, but of course it wears down the machine as well. We shall often return to this point. The proud spirit's firm will dominates the art of war as an obelisk dominates the town square on which all roads converge.

Friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper. The military machine—the army and everything related to it—is basically very simple and therefore seems easy to manage. But we should bear in mind that none of its components is of one piece: each part is composed of individuals, every one of whom retains his potential of friction. In theory it sounds reasonable enough: a battalion commander's duty is to carry out his orders; discipline welds the battalion together, its commander must be a man of tested capacity, and so the great beam turns on its iron pivot with a minimum of friction. In fact, it is different, and every fault and exaggeration of the theory is instantly exposed in war. A battalion is made up of individuals, the least important of whom may chance to delay things or somehow make them go wrong. The dangers inseparable from war and the physical exertions war demands can aggravate the problem to such an extent that they must be ranked among its principal causes.

BOOK ONE

This tremendous friction, which cannot, as in mechanics, be reduced to a few points, is everywhere in contact with chance, and brings about effects that cannot be measured, just because they are largely due to chance. One, for example, is the weather. Fog can prevent the enemy from being seen in time, a gun from firing when it should, a report from reaching the commanding officer. Rain can prevent a battalion from arriving, make another late by keeping it not three but eight hours on the march, ruin a cavalry charge by bogging the horses down in mud, etc.

We give these examples simply for illustration, to help the reader follow the argument. It would take volumes to cover all difficulties. We could exhaust the reader with illustrations alone if we really tried to deal with the whole range of minor troubles that must be faced in war. The few we have given will be excused by those readers who have long since understood what we are after.

Action in war is like movement in a resistant element. Just as the simplest and most natural of movements, walking, cannot easily be performed in water, so in war it is difficult for normal efforts to achieve even moderate results. A genuine theorist is like a swimming teacher, who makes his pupils practice motions on land that are meant to be performed in water. To those who are not thinking of swimming the motions will appear grotesque and exaggerated. By the same token, theorists who have never swum, or who have not learned to generalize from experience, are impractical and even ridiculous: they teach only what is already common knowledge: how to walk.

Moreover, every war is rich in unique episodes. Each is an uncharted sea, full of reefs. The commander may suspect the reefs' existence without ever having seen them; now he has to steer past them in the dark. If a contrary wind springs up, if some major mischance appears, he will need the greatest skill and personal exertion, and the utmost presence of mind, though from a distance everything may seem to be proceeding automatically. An understanding of friction is a large part of that much-admired sense of warfare which a good general is supposed to possess. To be sure, the best general is not the one who is most familiar with the idea of friction, and who takes it most to heart (he belongs to the anxious type so common among experienced commanders). The good general must know friction in order to overcome it whenever possible, and in order not to expect a standard of achievement in his operations which this very friction makes impossible. Incidentally, it is a force that theory can never quite define. Even if it could, the development of instinct and tact would still be needed, a form of judgment much more necessary in an area littered by endless minor obstacles than in great, momentous questions, which are settled in solitary deliberation or in discussion with others. As with a man of the world instinct becomes almost habit so that he always acts, speaks, and moves appropriately, so only the experienced officer will make the right decision in major and minor matters—at every pulsebeat of war. Practice and experience dictate the answer: "this is possible, that is not." So he rarely makes a serious

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mistake, such as can, in war, shatter confidence and become extremely dangerous if it occurs often.

Friction, as we choose to call it, is the force that makes the apparently easy so difficult. We shall frequently revert to this subject, and it will become evident that an eminent commander needs more than experience and a strong will. He must have other exceptional abilities as well.

Concluding Observations on Book One

We have identified danger, physical exertion, intelligence, and friction as the elements that coalesce to form the atmosphere of war, and turn it into a medium that impedes activity. In their restrictive effects they can be grouped into a single concept of general friction. Is there any lubricant that will reduce this abrasion? Only one, and a commander and his army will not always have it readily available: combat experience.

Habit hardens the body for great exertions, strengthens the heart in great peril, and fortifies judgment against first impressions. Habit breeds that priceless quality, calm, which, passing from hussar and rifleman up to the general himself, will lighten the commander's task.

In war the experienced soldier reacts rather in the same way as the human eye does in the dark: the pupil expands to admit what little light there is, discerning objects by degrees, and finally seeing them distinctly. By contrast, the novice is plunged into the deepest night.

No general can accustom an army to war. Peacetime maneuvers are a feeble substitute for the real thing; but even they can give an army an advantage over others whose training is confined to routine, mechanical drill. To plan maneuvers so that some of the elements of friction are involved, which will train officers' judgment, common sense, and resolution is far more worthwhile than inexperienced people might think. It is immensely important that no soldier, whatever his rank, should wait for war to expose him to those aspects of active service that amaze and confuse him when he first comes across them. If he has met them even once before, they will begin to be familiar to him. This is true even of physical effort. Exertions must be practiced, and the mind must be made even more familiar with them than the body. When exceptional efforts are required of him in war, the recruit is apt to think that they result from mistakes, miscalculations, and confusion at the top. In consequence, his morale is doubly depressed. If maneuvers prepare him for exertions, this will not occur.

Another very useful, though more limited, way of gaining familiarity with war in peacetime is to attract foreign officers who have seen active service. Peace does not often reign everywhere in Europe, and never throughout the whole world. A state that has been at peace for many years should try to attract some experienced officers—only those, of course, who have distinguished themselves. Alternatively, some of its own officers should be sent to observe operations, and learn what war is like.

However few such officers may be in proportion to an army, their influence can be very real. Their experience, their insights, and the maturity of their character will affect their subordinates and brother officers. Even when they cannot be given high command they should be considered as guides who know the country and can be consulted in specific eventualities.

Introduction

In the chapter on the nature and purpose of war we roughly sketched the general concept of war and alluded to the connections between war and other physical and social phenomena, in order to give our discussion a sound theoretical starting point. We indicated what a variety of intellectual obstacles besets the subject, while reserving detailed study of them until later; and we concluded that the grand objective of all military action is to overthrow the enemy—which means destroying his armed forces. It was therefore possible to show in the following chapter that battle is the one and only means that warfare can employ. With that, we hoped, a sound working hypothesis had been established.

Then we examined, one by one, the salient patterns and situations (apart from battle itself) that occur in warfare, trying to gauge the value of each with greater precision, both according to its inherent characteristics and in the light of military experience. We also sought to strip away the vague, ambiguous notions commonly attached to them, and tried to make it absolutely clear that the destruction of the enemy is what always matters most.

We now revert to warfare as a whole, to the discussion of the planning of a war and of a campaign, which means returning to the ideas put forward in Book One.

The chapters that follow will deal with the problem of war as a whole. They cover its dominant, its most important aspect: pure strategy. We enter this crucial area—the central point on which all other threads converge—not without some diffidence. Indeed, this diffidence is amply justified.

On the one hand, military operations appear extremely simple. The greatest generals discuss them in the plainest and most forthright language; and to hear them tell how they control and manage that enormous, complex apparatus one would think the only thing that mattered was the speaker, and that the whole monstrosity called war came down, in fact, to a contest between individuals, a sort of duel. A few uncomplicated thoughts seem to account for their decisions—either that, or the explanation lies in various emotional states; and one is left with the impression that great commanders manage matters in an easy, confident and, one would almost think, off-hand sort of way. At the same time we can see how many factors are involved and have to be weighed against each other; the vast, the almost infinite distance there can be between a cause and its effect, and the countless ways in which these elements can be combined. The function of theory is to put

all this in systematic order, clearly and comprehensively, and to trace each action to an adequate, compelling cause. When we contemplate all this, we are overcome by the fear that we shall be irresistibly dragged down to a state of dreary pedantry, and grub around in the underworld of ponderous concepts where no great commander, with his effortless *coup d'oeil*, was ever seen. If that were the best that theoretical studies could produce it would be better never to have attempted them in the first place. Men of genuine talent would despise them and they would quickly be forgotten. When all is said and done, it really is the commander's *coup d'oeil*, his ability to see things simply, to identify the whole business of war completely with himself, that is the essence of good generalship. Only if the mind works in this comprehensive fashion can it achieve the freedom it needs to dominate events and not be dominated by them.

We resume our task then, with some diffidence; and we shall fail unless we keep to the path we set ourselves at the beginning. Theory should cast a steady light on all phenomena so that we can more easily recognize and eliminate the weeds that always spring from ignorance; it should show how one thing is related to another, and keep the important and the unimportant separate. If concepts combine of their own accord to form that nucleus of truth we call a principle, if they spontaneously compose a pattern that becomes a rule, it is the task of the theorist to make this clear.

The insights gained and garnered by the mind in its wanderings among basic concepts are benefits that theory can provide. Theory cannot equip the mind with formulas for solving problems, nor can it mark the narrow path on which the sole solution is supposed to lie by planting a hedge of principles on either side. But it can give the mind insight into the great mass of phenomena and of their relationships, then leave it free to rise into the higher realms of action. There the mind can use its innate talents to capacity, combining them all so as to seize on what is *right* and *true* as though this were a single idea formed by their concentrated pressure—as though it were a response to the immediate challenge rather than a product of thought.

Absolute War and Real War

War plans cover every aspect of a war, and weave them all into a single operation that must have a single, ultimate objective in which all particular aims are reconciled. No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose; the latter its operational objective. This is the governing principle which will set its course, prescribe the scale of means and effort which is required, and make its influence felt throughout down to the smallest operational detail.

We said in the opening chapter that the natural aim of military operations is the enemy's overthrow, and that strict adherence to the logic of the concept can, in the last analysis, admit of no other. Since both belligerents must hold that view it would follow that military operations could not be suspended, that hostilities could not end until one or other side were finally defeated.

In the chapter on the suspension of military activity¹ we showed how factors inherent in the war-machine itself can interrupt and modify the principle of enmity as embodied in its agent, man, and in all that goes to make up warfare. Still, that process of modification is by no means adequate to span the gap between the pure concept of war and the concrete form that, as a general rule, war assumes. Most wars are like a flaring-up of mutual rage, when each party takes up arms in order to defend itself, to overawe its opponent, and occasionally to deal him an actual blow. Generally it is not a case in which two mutually destructive elements collide, but one of tension between two elements, separate for the time being, which discharge energy in discontinuous, minor shocks.

But what exactly is this nonconducting medium, this barrier that prevents a full discharge? Why is it that the theoretical concept is not fulfilled in practice? The barrier in question is the vast array of factors, forces and conditions in national affairs that are affected by war. No logical sequence could progress through their innumerable twists and turns as though it were a simple thread that linked two deductions. Logic comes to a stop in this labyrinth; and those men who habitually act, both in great and minor affairs, on particular dominating impressions or feelings rather than according to strict logic, are hardly aware of the confused, inconsistent, and ambiguous situation in which they find themselves.

¹ Book Three, Chapter Sixteen. Eds.

The man in overall command may actually have examined all these matters without losing sight of his objective for an instant; but the many others concerned cannot all have achieved the same insight. Opposition results, and in consequence something is required to overcome the vast inertia of the mass. But there is not usually enough energy available for this.

This inconsistency can appear in either belligerent party or in both, and it is the reason why war turns into something quite different from what it should be according to theory—turns into something incoherent and incomplete.

This is its usual appearance, and one might wonder whether there is any truth at all in our concept of the absolute character of war were it not for the fact that with our own eyes we have seen warfare achieve this state of absolute perfection. After the short prelude of the French Revolution, Bonaparte brought it swiftly and ruthlessly to that point. War, in his hands, was waged without respite until the enemy succumbed, and the counterblows were struck with almost equal energy. Surely it is both natural and inescapable that this phenomenon should cause us to turn again to the pure concept of war with all its rigorous implications.

Are we then to take this as the standard, and judge all wars by it, however much they may diverge? Should we deduce our entire theory from it? The question is whether that should be the only kind of war or whether there can be other valid forms. We must make up our minds before we can say anything intelligent about war plans.

If the first view is right, our theory will everywhere approximate to logical necessity, and will tend to be clear and unambiguous. But in that case, what are we to say about all the wars that have been fought since the days of Alexander—excepting certain Roman campaigns—down to Bonaparte? We should have to condemn them outright, but might be appalled at our presumption if we did so. Worse still, we should be bound to say that in spite of our theory there may even be other wars of this kind in the next ten years, and that our theory, though strictly logical, would not apply to reality. We must, therefore, be prepared to develop our concept of war as it ought to be fought, not on the basis of its pure definition, but by leaving room for every sort of extraneous matter. We must allow for natural inertia, for all the friction of its parts, for all the inconsistency, imprecision, and timidity of man; and finally we must face the fact that war and its forms result from ideas, emotions, and conditions prevailing at the time—and to be quite honest we must admit that this was the case even when war assumed its absolute state under Bonaparte.

If this is the case, if we must admit that the origin and the form taken by a war are not the result of any ultimate resolution of the vast array of circumstances involved, but only of those features that happen to be dominant. It follows that war is dependent on the interplay of possibilities and probabilities, of good and bad luck, conditions in which strictly logical reasoning often plays no part at all and is always apt to be a most unsuit-

able and awkward intellectual tool. It follows, too, that war can be a matter of degree.

Theory must concede all this; but it has the duty to give priority to the absolute form of war and to make that form a general point of reference, so that he who wants to learn from theory becomes accustomed to keeping that point in view constantly, to measuring all his hopes and fears by it, and to approximating it *when he can* or *when he must*.

A principle that underlies our thoughts and actions will undoubtedly lend them a certain tone and character, though the immediate causes of our action may have different origins, just as the tone a painter gives to his canvas is determined by the color of the underpainting.

If theory can effectively do this today, it is because of our recent wars. Without the cautionary examples of the destructive power of war unleashed, theory would preach to deaf ears. No one would have believed possible what has now been experienced by all.

Would Prussia in 1792² have dared to invade France with 70,000 men if she had had an inkling that the repercussions in case of failure would be strong enough to overthrow the old European balance of power? Would she, in 1806, have risked war with France with 100,000 men, if she had suspected that the first shot would set off a mine that was to blow her to the skies?

² The German has 1798, which obviously is a misprint. Eds.

A. Interdependence of the Elements of War

Since war can be thought of in two different ways—its absolute form or one of the variant forms that it actually takes—two different concepts of success arise.

In the absolute form of war, where everything results from necessary causes and one action rapidly affects another, there is, if we may use the phrase, no intervening neutral void. Since war contains a host of interactions¹ since the whole series of engagements is, strictly speaking, linked together,² since in every victory there is a culminating point beyond which lies the realm of losses and defeats³—in view of all these intrinsic characteristics of war, we say there is only one result that counts: *final victory*. Until then, nothing is decided, nothing won, and nothing lost. In this form of war we must always keep in mind that it is the end that crowns the work. Within the concept of absolute war, then, war is indivisible, and its component parts (the individual victories) are of value only in their relation to the whole. Conquering Moscow and half of Russia in 1812 was of no avail to Bonaparte unless it brought him the peace he had in view. But these successes were only a part of his plan of campaign: what was still missing was the destruction of the Russian army. If that achievement had been added to the rest, peace would have been as sure as things of that sort ever can be. But it was too late to achieve the second part of his plan; his chance had gone. Thus the successful stage was not only wasted but led to disaster.

Contrasting with this extreme view of the connection between successes in war, is another view, no less extreme; which holds that war consists of separate successes each unrelated to the next, as in a match consisting of several games. The earlier games have no effect upon the later. All that counts is the total score, and each separate result makes its contribution toward this total.

The first of these two views of war derives its validity from the nature of the subject; the second, from its actual history. Countless cases have occurred where a small advantage could be gained without an onerous condition being attached to it. The more the element of violence is moderated, the commoner these cases will be; but just as absolute war has never in fact been achieved, so we will never find a war in which the second concept is so prevalent that the first can be disregarded altogether. If we postulate the first of the two concepts, it necessarily follows from the start that every

¹ See Chapter One, Book One. Cl.

² See Chapter Two, Book One. Cl.

³ See Chapters Four and Five, Book Seven. Cl.

war must be conceived of as a single whole, and that with his first move the general must already have a clear idea of the goal on which all lines are to converge.

If we postulate the second concept, we will find it legitimate to pursue minor advantages for their own sake and leave the future to itself.

Since both these concepts lead to results, theory cannot dispense with either. Theory makes this distinction in the application of the two concepts: all action must be based on the former, since it is the fundamental concept; the latter can be used only as a modification justified by circumstances.

In 1742, 1744, 1757, and 1758, when Frederick, operating from Silesia and Saxony, thrust new spearheads into Austria, he was well aware that they could not lead to another permanent acquisition such as Silesia and Saxony. His aim was not to overthrow the Austrian Empire but a secondary one, namely to gain time and strength. And he could pursue this secondary aim without any fear of risking his own existence.⁴

However, when Prussia in 1806, and Austria in 1805 and 1809, adopted a still more modest aim—to drive the French across the Rhine—it would have been foolish if they had not begun by carefully reviewing the whole chain of events that success or failure would be likely to bring in consequence of the initial step, and which would lead to peace. Such a review was indispensable, both in order to decide how far they could safely exploit their successes and also how and where any enemy successes could be arrested.

Careful study of history shows where the difference between these cases lies. In the eighteenth century, in the days of the Silesian campaigns, war was still an affair for governments alone, and the people's role was simply that of an instrument. At the onset of the nineteenth century, peoples themselves were in the scale on either side. The generals opposing Frederick the Great were acting on instructions—which implied that caution was one of their distinguishing characteristics. But now the opponent of the Austrians and Prussians was—to put it bluntly—the God of War himself.

Such a transformation of war might have led to new ways of thinking about it. In 1805, 1806, and 1809 men might have recognized that total ruin was a possibility—indeed it stared them in the face. It might have

⁴ If Frederick had won the battle of Kolin and in consequence had captured the main Austrian army in Prague with both its senior commanders, it would indeed have been such a shattering blow that he might well have thought of pressing on to Vienna, shaking the foundations of the monarchy and imposing peace. That would have been an unparalleled success for those days, as great as the triumphs of the Napoleonic wars, but still more wonderful and brilliant for the disparity in size between the Prussian David and the Austrian Goliath. Victory at Kolin would almost certainly have made this success possible. But that does not invalidate the assertion made above, which only concerned the original purpose of the King's offensive. To surround and capture the enemy's main army, on the other hand, was something wholly unprovided for and the King had never given it a thought—at least until the Austrians invited it by the inadequate position they took up at Prague. Cl.

stimulated them to different efforts that were directed toward greater objectives than a couple of fortresses and a medium-sized province.

They did not, however, change their attitude sufficiently, although the degree of Austrian and Prussian rearmament shows that the storm clouds massing in the political world had been observed. They failed because the transformations of war had not yet been sufficiently revealed by history. In fact the very campaigns of 1805, 1806, and 1809, and those that followed are the ones that make it easier for us to grasp the concept of modern, absolute war in all its devastating power.

Theory, therefore, demands that at the outset of a war its character and scope should be determined on the basis of the political probabilities. The closer these political probabilities drive war toward the absolute, the more the belligerent states are involved and drawn in to its vortex, the clearer appear the connections between its separate actions, and the more imperative the need not to take the first step without considering the last.

B. Scale of the Military Objective and of the Effort To Be Made

The degree of force that must be used against the enemy depends on the scale of political demands on either side. These demands, so far as they are known, would show what efforts each must make; but they seldom are fully known—which may be one reason why both sides do not exert themselves to the same degree.

Nor are the situation and conditions of the belligerents alike. This can be a second factor.

Just as disparate are the governments' strength of will, their character and abilities.

These three considerations introduce uncertainties that make it difficult to gauge the amount of resistance to be faced and, in consequence, the means required and the objectives to be set.

Since in war too small an effort can result not just in failure but in positive harm, each side is driven to outdo the other, which sets up an interaction.

Such an interaction could lead to a maximum effort if a maximum could be defined. But in that case all proportion between action and political demands would be lost: means would cease to be commensurate with ends, and in most cases a policy of maximum exertion would fail because of the domestic problems it would raise.

In this way the belligerent is again driven to adopt a middle course. He would act on the principle of using no greater force, and setting himself no greater military aim, than would be sufficient for the achievement of his political purpose. To turn this principle into practice he must renounce the need for absolute success in each given case, and he must dismiss remoter possibilities from his calculations.

At this point, then, intellectual activity leaves the field of the exact sciences of logic and mathematics. It then becomes an art in the broadest meaning of the term—the faculty of using judgment to detect the most important and decisive elements in the vast array of facts and situations. Undoubtedly this power of judgment consists to a greater or lesser degree in the intuitive comparison of all the factors and attendant circumstances; what is remote and secondary is at once dismissed while the most pressing and important points are identified with greater speed than could be done by strictly logical deduction.

To discover how much of our resources must be mobilized for war, we

must first examine our own political aim and that of the enemy. We must gauge the strength and situation of the opposing state. We must gauge the character and abilities of its government and people and do the same in regard to our own. Finally, we must evaluate the political sympathies of other states and the effect the war may have on them. To assess these things in all their ramifications and diversity is plainly a colossal task. Rapid and correct appraisal of them clearly calls for the intuition of a genius; to master all this complex mass by sheer methodical examination is obviously impossible. Bonaparte was quite right when he said that Newton himself would quail before the algebraic problems it could pose.

The size and variety of factors to be weighed, and the uncertainty about the proper scale to use, are bound to make it far more difficult to reach the right conclusion. We should also bear in mind that the vast, unique importance of war, while not increasing the complexity and difficulty of the problem, does increase the value of the correct solution. Responsibility and danger do not tend to free or stimulate the average person's mind—rather the contrary; but wherever they do liberate an individual's judgment and confidence we can be sure that we are in the presence of exceptional ability.

At the outset, then, we must admit that an imminent war, its possible aims, and the resources it will require, are matters that can only be assessed when every circumstance has been examined in the context of the whole, which of course includes the most ephemeral factors as well. We must also recognize that the conclusion reached can be no more wholly objective than any other in war, but will be shaped by the qualities of mind and character of the men making the decision—of the rulers, statesmen, and commanders, whether these roles are united in a single individual or not.

A more general and theoretical treatment of the subject may become feasible if we consider the nature of states and societies as they are determined by their times and prevailing conditions. Let us take a brief look at history.

The semibarbarous Tartars, the republics of antiquity, the feudal lords and trading cities of the Middle Ages, eighteenth-century kings and the rulers and peoples of the nineteenth century—all conducted war in their own particular way, using different methods and pursuing different aims.

The Tartar hordes searched for new land. Setting forth as a nation, with women and children, they outnumbered any other army. Their aim was to subdue their enemies or expel them. If a high degree of civilization could have been combined with such methods, they would have carried all before them.

The republics of antiquity, Rome excepted, were small and their armies smaller still, for the *plebs*, the mass of the people, was excluded. Being so many and so close together these republics found that the balance that some law of nature will always establish among small and unconnected units formed an obstacle to major enterprises. They therefore limited their wars to plundering the countryside and seizing a few towns, in order to gain a degree of influence over them.

Rome was the one exception to this rule, and then only in her later days. With little bands of men, she had for centuries carried on the usual struggle with her neighbors for booty or alliance. She grew not so much by conquest as by the alliances she made, for the neighboring peoples gradually merged with her and were assimilated into a greater Rome. Only when this process had spread the rule of Rome through Southern Italy did she begin to expand by way of actual conquest. Carthage fell; Spain and Gaul were taken; Greece was subjugated; and Roman rule was carried into Asia and Egypt. Rome's military strength at that period was immense, without her efforts being equally great. Her armies were kept up by her wealth. Rome was no longer like the Greek republics, nor was she even faithful to her own past. Her case is unique.

As singular in their own way were the wars of Alexander. With his small but excellently trained and organized army, Alexander shattered the brittle states of Asia. Ruthlessly, without pause, he advanced through the vast expanse of Asia until he reached India. That was something no republic could have achieved; only a king who in a sense was his own *condottiere* could have accomplished it so rapidly.

Mediaeval monarchs, great and small, waged war with feudal levies, which limited operations. If a thing could not be finished quickly it was impossible. The feudal army itself was an assemblage of vassals and their servants, brought and held together in part by legal obligation, in part by voluntary alliance—the whole amounting to true confederation. Weapons and tactics were based on individual combat, and thus unsuited to the organized action of large numbers. And indeed, cohesion in the state was never weaker or the individual so independent. It was the combination of these factors that gave mediaeval wars their special character. They were waged relatively quickly; not much time was wasted in the field; but their aim was usually to punish the enemy, not subdue him. When his cattle had been driven off and his castles burned, one could go home.

The great commercial cities and the small republics created *condottieri*. They were an expensive and therefore small military force. Even smaller was their fighting value: extremes of energy or exertion were conspicuous by their absence and fighting was generally a sham. In brief, then, hatred and enmity no longer drove the state to take matters into its own hands; they became an element in negotiation. War lost many of its risks; its character was wholly changed, and no deduction from its proper nature was still applicable.

Gradually the feudal system hardened into clearly delimited territorial sovereignty. States were closer knit; personal service was commuted into dues in kind, mostly in the form of money, and feudal levies were replaced by mercenaries. The transition was bridged by the *condottieri*. For a period they were also the instrument of the larger states. But soon the soldier hired on short-term contract evolved into the *permanent mercenary*, and the armed force of the state had become a standing army, paid for by the treasury.

The slow evolution toward this goal naturally brought with it numerous overlappings of these three types of military institutions. Under Henry IV of France feudal levies, *condottieri* and a standing army were used side by side. The *condottieri* survived into the Thirty Years War, and indeed faint traces of them can be found in the eighteenth century.

Just as the character of the military institutions of the European states differed in the various periods, so did all their other conditions. Europe, essentially, had broken down into a mass of minor states. Some were turbulent republics, other precarious small monarchies with very limited central power. A state of that type could not be said to be genuinely united; it was rather an agglomeration of loosely associated forces. Therefore we should not think of such a state as a personified intelligence acting according to simple and logical rules.

This is the point of view from which the policies and wars of the Middle Ages should be considered. One need only think of the German emperors with their constant descents into Italy over a period of five hundred years. These expeditions never resulted in any complete conquest of the country; nor were they ever meant to do so. It would be easy to regard them as a chronic error, a delusion born of the spirit of the times; but there would be more sense in attributing them to a host of major causes, which we may possibly assimilate intellectually, but whose dynamic we will never comprehend as clearly as did the men who were actually obliged to contend with them. So long as the great powers that eventually grew out of this chaos needed time to consolidate and organize themselves, most of their strength and energies went into that process. Foreign wars were fewer, and those that did take place betrayed the marks of immature political cohesion.

The wars of the English against the French are the first to stand out. But France could not yet be considered as a genuine monarchy—she was rather an agglomeration of duchies and counties; while England, though displaying greater unity, still fought with feudal levies amid much domestic strife.

Under Louis XI France took the greatest step toward internal unity. She became a conquering power in Italy under Charles VIII, and her state and her army reached a peak under Louis XIV.

Spanish unity began to form under Ferdinand of Aragon. Under Charles V, as a result of favorable marriages, a mighty Spanish monarchy suddenly emerged, composed of Spain and Burgundy, Germany and Italy. What this colossus lacked in cohesion and domestic stability was made up for by its wealth. Its standing army first encountered that of France. On the abdication of Charles V the colossus broke into two parts—Spain and Austria. The latter, strengthened by Hungary and Bohemia, now emerged as a major power, dragging behind her the German confederation like a dinghy.

The end of the seventeenth century, the age of Louis XIV, may be regarded as that point in history when the standing army in the shape familiar to the eighteenth century reached maturity. This military organization was based on money and recruitment. The states of Europe had achieved complete internal unity. With their subjects' services converted

into money payments, the strength of governments now lay entirely in their treasuries. Thanks to cultural developments and to a progressively more sophisticated administration, their power was very great compared with earlier days. France put several hundred thousand regular troops in the field, and other states could do likewise in proportion to their populations.

International relations had changed in other ways as well. Europe was now split between a dozen monarchies and a handful of republics. It was conceivable that two states could fight a major war without, as in former times, involving twenty others. The possible political alignments were still many and various; but they could be surveyed, and their probability at each given instant could be evaluated.

Domestically almost every state had been reduced to an absolute monarchy; the privileges and influence of the estates had gradually disappeared. The executive had become completely unified and represented the state in its foreign relations. Political and military institutions had developed into an effective instrument, with which an independent will at the center could now wage war in a form that matched its theoretical concept.

During this period, moreover, three new Alexanders appeared—Gustavus Adolphus, Charles XII, and Frederick the Great. With relatively limited but highly efficient forces each sought to turn his small state into a large monarchy, and crush all opposition. Had they been dealing only with Asiatic empires they might have resembled Alexander more closely. But in terms of risks that they ran, they undeniably foreshadowed Bonaparte.

But, if war gained in power and effectiveness, it lost in other respects.

Armies were paid for from the treasury, which rulers treated almost as their privy purse or at least as the property of the government, not of the people. Apart from a few commercial matters, relations with other states did not concern the people but only the treasury or the government. That at least was the general attitude. A government behaved as though it owned and managed a great estate that it constantly endeavored to enlarge—an effort in which the inhabitants were not expected to show any particular interest. The Tartar people and army had been one; in the republics of antiquity and during the Middle Ages the people (if we confine the concept to those who had the rights of citizens) had still played a prominent part; but in the circumstances of the eighteenth century the people's part had been extinguished. The only influence the people continued to exert on war was an indirect one—through its general virtues or shortcomings.

War thus became solely the concern of the government to the extent that governments parted company with their peoples and behaved as if they were themselves the state. Their means of waging war came to consist of the money in their coffers and of such idle vagabonds as they could lay their hands on either at home or abroad. In consequence the means they had available were fairly well defined, and each could gauge the other side's potential in terms both of numbers and of time. War was thus deprived of its most dangerous feature—its tendency toward the extreme, and of the whole chain of unknown possibilities which would follow.

The enemy's cash resources, his treasury and his credit, were all approximately known; so was the size of his fighting forces. No great expansion was feasible at the outbreak of war. Knowing the limits of the enemy's strength, men knew they were reasonably safe from total ruin; and being aware of their own limitations, they were compelled to restrict their own aims in turn. Safe from the threat of extremes, it was no longer necessary to go to extremes. Necessity was no longer an incentive to do so, and the only impulse could come from courage and ambition. These, on the other hand, were strongly curbed by the prevailing conditions of the state. Even a royal commander had to use his army with a minimum of risk. If the army was pulverized, he could not raise another, and behind the army there was nothing. That enjoined the greatest prudence in all operations. Only if a decisive advantage seemed possible could the precious instrument be used, and to bring things to that point was a feat of the highest generalship. But so long as that was not achieved, operations drifted in a kind of vacuum; there was no reason to act, and every motivating force seemed inert. The original motive of the aggressor faded away in prudence and hesitation.

The conduct of war thus became a true game, in which the cards were dealt by time and by accident. In its effect it was a somewhat stronger form of diplomacy, a more forceful method of negotiation, in which battles and sieges were the principal notes exchanged. Even the most ambitious ruler had no greater aims than to gain a number of advantages that could be exploited at the peace conference.

This limited, constricted form of war was due, as we said, to the narrow base on which it rested. But the explanation why even gifted commanders and monarchs such as Gustavus Adolphus, Charles XII, and Frederick the Great, with armies of exceptional quality, should have risen so little above the common level of the times, why even they had to be content with moderate success, lies with the balance of power in Europe. With the multitude of minor states in earlier times, any one of them was prevented from rapidly expanding by such immediate and concrete factors as their proximity and contiguity, their family ties and personal acquaintances. But now that states were larger and their centers farther apart, the wide spread of interests they had developed became the factor limiting their growth. Political relations, with their affinities and antipathies, had become so sensitive a nexus that no cannon could be fired in Europe without every government feeling its interest affected. Hence a new Alexander needed more than his own sharp sword: he required a ready pen as well. Even so, his conquests rarely amounted to very much.

Even Louis XIV, though bent on destroying the balance of power in Europe and little troubled by the general hostility he faced by the end of the seventeenth century, continued waging war along traditional lines. While his military instrument was that of the greatest and richest monarch of all, its character was no different from that of his opponents'.

It had ceased to be in harmony with the spirit of the times to plunder and lay waste the enemy's land, which had played such an important role

in antiquity, in Tartar days and indeed in mediaeval times. It was rightly held to be unnecessarily barbarous, an invitation to reprisals, and a practice that hurt the enemy's subjects rather than their government—one therefore that was ineffective and only served permanently to impede the advance of general civilization. Not only in its means, therefore, but also in its aims, war increasingly became limited to the fighting force itself. Armies, with their fortresses and prepared positions, came to form a state within a state, in which violence gradually faded away.

All Europe rejoiced at this development. It was seen as a logical outcome of enlightenment. This was a misconception. Enlightenment can never lead to inconsistency: as we have said before and shall have to say again, it can never make two and two equal five. Nevertheless this development benefited the peoples of Europe, although there is no denying that it turned war even more into the exclusive concern of governments and estranged it still further from the interests of the people. In those days, an aggressor's usual plan of war was to seize an enemy province or two. The defender's plan was simply to prevent him doing so. The plan for a given campaign was to take an enemy fortress or prevent the capture of one's own. No battle was ever sought, or fought, unless it were indispensable for that purpose. Anyone who fought a battle that was not strictly necessity, simply out of innate desire for victory, was considered reckless. A campaign was usually spent on a single siege, or two at the most. Winter quarters were assumed to be necessary for everyone. The poor condition of one side did not constitute an advantage to the other, and contact almost ceased between both. Winter quarters set strict limits to the operations of a campaign.

If forces were too closely balanced, or if the more enterprising side was also clearly the weaker of the two, no battle was fought and no town was besieged. The whole campaign turned on the retention of certain positions and depots and the systematic exploitation of certain areas.

So long as this was the general style of warfare, with its violence limited in such strict and obvious ways, no one saw any inconsistency in it. On the contrary, it all seemed absolutely right; and when in the eighteenth century critics began to analyze the art of war, they dealt with points of detail, without bothering much about fundamentals. Greatness, indeed perfection, was discerned in many guises, and even the Austrian Field-Marshal Daun—to whom it was mainly due that Frederick the Great completely attained his object and Maria Theresa completely failed in hers—could be considered a great commander. Only from time to time someone of penetrating judgment—of real common sense—might suggest that with superior forces one should achieve positive results; otherwise the war, with all its artistry, was being mismanaged.

This was the state of affairs at the outbreak of the French Revolution. Austria and Prussia tried to meet this with the diplomatic type of war that we have described. They soon discovered its inadequacy. Looking at the situation in this conventional manner, people at first expected to have to deal only with a seriously weakened French army; but in 1793 a force

appeared that beggared all imagination. Suddenly war again became the business of the people—a people of thirty millions, all of whom considered themselves to be citizens. We need not study in detail the circumstances that accompanied this tremendous development; we need only note the effects that are pertinent to our discussion. The people became a participant in war; instead of governments and armies as heretofore, the full weight of the nation was thrown into the balance. The resources and efforts now available for use surpassed all conventional limits; nothing now impeded the vigor with which war could be waged, and consequently the opponents of France faced the utmost peril.

The effects of this innovation did not become evident or fully felt until the end of the revolutionary wars. The revolutionary quarrels did not yet advance inevitably toward the ultimate conclusion: the destruction of the European monarchies. Here and there the German armies were still able to resist them and stem the tide of victory. But all this was really due only to technical imperfections that hampered the French, and which became evident first in the rank and file, then in their generals, and under the Directory in the government itself.

Once these imperfections were corrected by Bonaparte, this juggernaut of war, based on the strength of the entire people, began its pulverizing course through Europe. It moved with such confidence and certainty that whenever it was opposed by armies of the traditional type there could never be a moment's doubt as to the result. Just in time, the reaction set in. The Spanish War spontaneously became the concern of the people. In 1809 the Austrian government made an unprecedented effort with reserves and militia; it came within sight of success and far surpassed everything Austria had earlier considered possible. In 1812 Russia took Spain and Austria as models: her immense spaces permitted her measures—belated though they were—to take effect, and even increased their effectiveness. The result was brilliant. In Germany, Prussia was first to rise. She made the war a concern of the people, and with half her former population, without money or credit, she mobilized a force twice as large as she had in 1806. Little by little the rest of Germany followed her example, and Austria too—though her effort did not equal that of 1809—exerted an exceptional degree of energy. The result was that in 1813 and 1814 Germany and Russia put about a million men into the field against France—counting all who fought and fell in the two campaigns.

Under these conditions the war was waged with a very different degree of vigor. Although it did not always match the intensity of the French, and was at times even marked by timidity, campaigns were on the whole conducted in the new manner, not in that of the past. In the space of only eight months the theater of operations changed from the Oder to the Seine. Proud Paris had for the first time to bow her head, and the terrible Bonaparte lay bound and chained.

Since Bonaparte, then, war, first among the French and subsequently among their enemies, again became the concern of the people as a whole,

took on an entirely different character, or rather closely approached its true character, its absolute perfection. There seemed no end to the resources mobilized; all limits disappeared in the vigor and enthusiasm shown by governments and their subjects. Various factors powerfully increased that vigor: the vastness of available resources, the ample field of opportunity, and the depth of feeling generally aroused. The sole aim of war was to overthrow the opponent. Not until he was prostrate was it considered possible to pause and try to reconcile the opposing interests.

War, untrammelled by any conventional restraints, had broken loose in all its elemental fury. This was due to the peoples' new share in these great affairs of state; and their participation, in turn, resulted partly from the impact that the Revolution had on the internal conditions of every state and partly from the danger that France posed to everyone.

Will this always be the case in future? From now on will every war in Europe be waged with the full resources of the state, and therefore have to be fought only over major issues that affect the people? Or shall we again see a gradual separation taking place between government and people? Such questions are difficult to answer, and we are the last to dare to do so. But the reader will agree with us when we say that once barriers—which in a sense consist only in man's ignorance of what is possible—are torn down, they are not so easily set up again. At least when major interests are at stake, mutual hostility will express itself in the same manner as it has in our own day.

At this point our historical survey can end. Our purpose was not to assign, in passing, a handful of principles of warfare to each period. We wanted to show how every age had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions. Each period, therefore, would have held to its own theory of war, even if the urge had always and universally existed to work things out on scientific principles. It follows that the events of every age must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities. One cannot, therefore, understand and appreciate the commanders of the past until one has placed oneself in the situation of their times, not so much by a painstaking study of all its details as by an accurate appreciation of its major determining features.

But war, though conditioned by the particular characteristics of states and their armed forces, must contain some more general—indeed, a universal—element with which every theorist ought above all to be concerned.

The age in which this postulate, this universally valid element, was at its strongest was the most recent one, when war attained the absolute in violence. But it is no more likely that war will always be so monumental in character than that the ample scope it has come to enjoy will again be severely restricted. A theory, then, that dealt exclusively with absolute war would either have to ignore any case in which the nature of war had been deformed by outside influence, or else it would have to dismiss them all as misconstrued. That cannot be what theory is for. Its purpose is to demonstrate what war is in practice, not what its ideal nature ought to be. So the

theorist must scrutinize all data with an inquiring, a discriminating, and a classifying eye. He must always bear in mind the wide variety of situations that can lead to war. If he does, he will draw the outline of its salient features in such a way that it can accommodate both the dictates of the age, and those of the immediate situation.

We can thus only say that the aims a belligerent adopts, and the resources he employs, must be governed by the particular characteristics of his own position; but they will also conform to the spirit of the age and to its general character. Finally, they must always be governed by the general conclusions to be drawn from the nature of war itself.

Closer Definition of the Military Objective: The Defeat of the Enemy

The aim of war should be what its very concept implies—to defeat the enemy. We take that basic proposition as our starting point.

But what exactly does "defeat" signify? The conquest of the whole of the enemy's territory is not always necessary. If Paris had been taken in 1792 the war against the Revolution would almost certainly for the time being have been brought to an end. There was no need even for the French armies to have been defeated first, for they were not in those days particularly powerful. In 1814, on the other hand, even the capture of Paris would not have ended matters if Bonaparte had still had a sizable army behind him. But as in fact his army had been largely eliminated, the capture of Paris settled everything in 1814 and again in 1815. Again, if in 1812 Bonaparte had managed, before or after taking Moscow, to smash the Russian army, 120,000 strong, on the Kaluga road, just as he smashed the Austrians in 1805 and the Prussians the following year, the fact that he held the capital would probably have meant that he could make peace in spite of the enormous area still unoccupied. In 1805 Austerlitz was decisive. The possession of Vienna and two-thirds of the Austrian territory had not sufficed to bring about a peace. On the other hand, after Austerlitz the fact that Hungary was still intact did nothing to prevent peace being made. The final blow required was to defeat the Russian army; the Czar had no other near at hand and this victory would certainly have led to peace. Had the Russian army been with the Austrians on the Danube in 1805 and shared in their defeat, it would hardly have been necessary to take Vienna; peace could have been imposed at Linz. Equally, a country's total occupation may not be enough. Prussia in 1807 is a case in point. When the blow against the Russian ally in the uncertain victory of Eylau was not sufficiently decisive, the decisive victory of Friedland had to be gained in order to achieve what Austerlitz had accomplished the year before.

These events are proof that success is not due simply to general causes. Particular factors can often be decisive—details only known to those who were on the spot. There can also be moral factors which never come to light; while issues can be decided by chances and incidents so minute as to figure in histories simply as anecdotes.

What the theorist has to say here is this: one must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on

which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed.

Small things always depend on great ones, unimportant on important, accidentals on essentials. This must guide our approach.

For Alexander, Gustavus Adolphus, Charles XII, and Frederick the Great, the center of gravity was their army. If the army had been destroyed, they would all have gone down in history as failures. In countries subject to domestic strife, the center of gravity is generally the capital. In small countries that rely on large ones, it is usually the army of their protector. Among alliances, it lies in the community of interest, and in popular uprisings it is the personalities of the leaders and public opinion. It is against these that our energies should be directed. If the enemy is thrown off balance, he must not be given time to recover. Blow after blow must be aimed in the same direction: the victor, in other words, must strike with all his strength and not just against a fraction of the enemy's. Not by taking things the easy way—using superior strength to filch some province, preferring the security of this minor conquest to great success—but by constantly seeking out the center of his power, by daring all to win all, will one really defeat the enemy.

Still, no matter what the central feature of the enemy's power may be—the point on which your efforts must converge—the defeat and destruction of his fighting force remains the best way to begin, and in every case will be a very significant feature of the campaign.

Basing our comments on general experience, the acts we consider most important for the defeat of the enemy are the following:

1. Destruction of his army, if it is at all significant
2. Seizure of his capital if it is not only the center of administration but also that of social, professional, and political activity
3. Delivery of an effective blow against his principal ally if that ally is more powerful than he.

Up till now we have assumed—as is generally permissible—that the enemy is a single power. But having made the point that the defeat of the enemy consists in overcoming the resistance concentrated in his center of gravity, we must abandon this assumption and examine the case when there is more than one enemy to defeat.

If two or more states combine against another, the result is still politically speaking a *single* war. But this political unity is a matter of degree. The question is then whether each state is pursuing an independent interest and has its own independent means of doing so, or whether the interests and forces of most of the allies are subordinate to those of the leader. The more this is the case, the easier will it be to regard all our opponents as a single entity, hence all the easier to concentrate our principal enterprise into one great blow. If this is at all feasible it will be much the most effective means to victory.

I would, therefore, state it as a principle that if you can vanquish all your

enemies by defeating one of them, that defeat must be the main objective in the war. In this one enemy we strike at the center of gravity of the entire conflict.

There are very few cases where this conception is not applicable—where it would not be realistic to reduce several centers of gravity to one. Where this is not so, there is admittedly no alternative but to act as if there were two wars or even more, each with its own object. This assumes the existence of several independent opponents, and consequently great superiority on their part. When this is the case, to defeat the enemy is out of the question.

We must now address ourselves more closely to the question: when is this objective both feasible and sound?

To begin with, our forces must be adequate:

1. To score a decisive victory over the enemy's
2. To make the effort necessary to pursue our victory to the point where the balance is beyond all possible redress.

Next, we must be certain our political position is so secure that this success will not bring further enemies against us who could force us immediately to abandon our efforts against our first opponent.

France could annihilate Prussia in 1806 even if this brought down Russia on her in full force, since she could defend herself against the Russians on Prussian soil. In 1808 she could do the same in Spain against England; but in respect of Austria she could not. By 1809, France had to reduce her forces in Spain considerably, and would have had to relinquish Spain altogether if she had not already enjoyed a great moral and material advantage over the Austrians.

These three examples call for careful study. One can win the first decision in a case but lose it on appeal and end by having to pay costs as well.

When the strength and capability of armed forces are being calculated, time is apt to be treated as a factor in total strength on the analogy of dynamics. It is assumed in consequence that half the effort or half the total forces could achieve as much in two years as the whole could do in one. This assumption, which rests, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, at the basis of military planning, is entirely false.

Like everything else in life, a military operation takes time. No one, obviously, can march from Vilna to Moscow in a week; but here there is no trace of that reciprocal relationship between time and energy that we would find in dynamics.

Both belligerents need time; the question is only which of the two can expect to derive *special advantages* from it in the light of his own situation. If the position on each side is carefully considered, the answer will be obvious: it is the weaker side—but thanks to the laws of psychology rather than those of dynamics. Envy, jealousy, anxiety, and sometimes perhaps even generosity are the natural advocates of the unsuccessful. They will win new friends for him as well as weaken and divide his enemies. Time, then, is less

likely to bring favor to the victor than to the vanquished. There is a further point to bear in mind. As we have shown elsewhere, the exploitation of an initial victory requires a major effort. This effort must not only be made but be sustained like the upkeep of a great household. Conquered enemy provinces can, of course, bring additional wealth, but they may not always be enough to meet the additional outlay. If they do not, the strain will gradually increase and in the end resources may be exhausted. Time is thus enough to bring about a change unaided.

Could the money and resources that Bonaparte drew from Russia and Poland in 1812 furnish the men by the hundred thousand whom he needed in Moscow to maintain his position there?

But if the conquered areas are important enough, and if there are places in them vital to the areas still in enemy hands, the rot will spread, like a cancer, by itself; and if only that and nothing else happens, the conqueror may well enjoy the net advantage. Time alone will then complete the work, provided that no help comes from outside, and the area that is still unconquered may well fall without more ado. Thus time can become a factor in the conqueror's strength as well; but only on condition that a counterattack on him is no longer possible, that no reversal is conceivable—when indeed this factor is no longer of value since his main objective has been achieved, the culminating crisis is past, and the enemy, in short, laid low.

That chain of argument was designed to show that no conquest can be carried out too quickly, and that to spread it over a *longer period* than the minimum needed to complete it *makes it not less difficult, but more*. If that assertion is correct, it follows equally that if one's strength in general is great enough to make a certain conquest one must also have the strength to do so in a single operation, not by stages. By "stages" naturally, we do not mean to exclude the minor halts that are needed for reassembling one's forces or for administrative reasons.

We hope to have made it clear that in our view an offensive war requires above all a quick, irresistible decision. If so, we shall have cut the ground from under the *alternative* idea that a slow, allegedly systematic occupation is safer and wiser than conquest by continuous advance. Nonetheless, even those who have followed us thus far may very likely feel that our views have an air of paradox, of contradicting first impressions and of contradicting views that are as deeply rooted as ancient prejudice and that constantly appear in print. This makes it desirable to examine the alleged objections in some detail.

It is of course easier to reach a nearby object than a more distant one. But if the first does not suit our purpose, a pause, a suspension of activity, will not necessarily make the second half of the journey any easier to complete. A short jump is certainly easier than a long one: but no one wanting to get across a wide ditch would begin by jumping half-way.

If the ideas that underlie the concept of so-called methodical offensive operations are examined, we will usually find the following:

1. Capture the enemy fortresses in your path.
2. Accumulate the stores you need.
3. Fortify important points like *depots, bridges, positions*, and so forth.
4. Rest your troops in winter quarters and rest-camps.
5. Wait for next year's reinforcements.

If you halt an offensive altogether and stop the forward movement in order to make sure of all the above, you allegedly acquire a new base, and in theory revive your strength as though the whole of your country were immediately to your rear and the army's vigor were renewed with each campaign.

All these are admirable aims, and no doubt they could make offensive war easier; but they cannot make its results more certain. They usually camouflage misgivings on the part of the general or vacillation on the part of the government. We shall now try to roll them up from the left flank.

1. Waiting for reinforcements is just as useful to the other side—if not in our opinion more. Besides, a country can naturally raise almost as many troops in one year as in two, for the net increase in the second year will be very small in relation to the whole.
2. The enemy will rest his troops while we are resting ours.
3. Fortifying towns and positions is no business for the army and therefore no excuse for suspending operations.
4. Given the way in which armies are supplied today they need depots more when they are halted than when on the move. So long as the advance goes properly, enemy supplies will fall into our hands and make up for any shortage in barren districts.
5. Reducing an enemy fortress does not amount to halting the offensive. It is a means of strengthening the advance, and though it causes an apparent interruption it is not the sort of case we have in mind: it does not involve a suspension or a reduction of effort. Only circumstances can decide whether the right procedure is a regular siege, a mere investment, or simply to keep some fortress or other under observation. But we can make the general comment that the answer to this question turns on the answer to another; namely whether it would be too risky to press on and leave no more than an investing force behind. If it is not, and if you still have room to deploy your forces, the right course is to delay a regular siege until all offensive movement is complete. It is important, therefore, not to give way to the idea of quickly securing everything you have taken, for fear you end by missing something more important.

Such a further advance, admittedly, does seem to place in jeopardy the gains already made.

Our belief then is that any kind of interruption, pause, or suspension of activity is inconsistent with the nature of offensive war. When they are

unavoidable, they must be regarded as necessary evils, which make success not more but less certain. Indeed, if we are to keep strictly to the truth, when weakness does compel us to halt, a second run at the objective normally becomes impossible; and if it does turn out to be possible it shows that there was no need for a halt at all. When an objective was beyond one's strength in the first place, it will always remain so.

This seems to us to be generally the case. In drawing attention to it we desire only to dispose of the idea that time, in itself, can work for the attacker. But the political situation can change from year to year, and on that account alone there will often be cases to which this generalization does not apply.

We may perhaps appear to have forgotten our initial thesis and only considered offensive war; but this is not so. Certainly a man who can afford to aim at the enemy's total defeat will rarely have recourse to the defensive, the immediate aim of which is the retention of what one has. But we must insist that defense without an active purpose is self-contradictory both in strategy and in tactics, and in consequence we must repeat that within the limits of his strength a defender must always seek to change over to the attack as soon as he has gained the benefit of the defense. So it follows that among the aims of such an attack, which is to be regarded as the real aim of the defense, however significant or insignificant this may be, the defeat of the enemy could be included. There are situations when the general, even though he had that grand objective well in mind, yet preferred to start on the defensive. That this is no mere abstraction is shown by the campaign of 1812. When Emperor Alexander took up arms he may not have dreamed he would ever completely destroy his enemy—as in the end he did. But would the idea have been absurd? And would it not have been natural in any case for the Russians to adopt the defensive at the outset of the war?

Closer Definition of the Military Objective— Continued: *Limited Aims*

In the last chapter we stated the defeat of the enemy, assuming it to be at all possible, to be the true, the essential aim of military activity. We now propose to consider what can be done if circumstances rule that out.

The conditions for defeating an enemy presuppose great physical or moral superiority or else an extremely enterprising spirit, an inclination for serious risks. When neither of these is present, the object of military activity can only be one of two kinds: seizing a small or larger piece of enemy territory, or holding one's own until things take a better turn. This latter is normally the aim of a defensive war.

In considering which is the right course, it is well to remember the phrase used about the latter, *waiting until things take a better turn*, which assumes that there is ground for expecting this to happen. That prospect always underlies a "waiting" war—that is, a defensive war. The offensive—that is exploiting the advantages of the moment—is advisable whenever the future affords better prospects to the enemy than it does to us. A third possibility, perhaps the most usual, arises when the future seems to promise nothing definite to either side and hence affords no grounds for a decision. Obviously, in that case, the offensive should be taken by the side that possesses the political initiative—that is, the side that has an active purpose, the aim for which it went to war. If any time is lost without good reason, the initiator bears the loss.

The grounds we have just defined for choosing offensive or defensive war have nothing to do with the relative strength of the two sides, although one might suppose that to be the main consideration. But we believe that if it were, the wrong decision would result. No one can say the logic of our simple argument is weak; but does it in practice lead to absurd conclusions? Supposing that a minor state is in conflict with a much more powerful one and expects its position to grow weaker every year. If war is unavoidable, should it not make the most of its opportunities before its position gets still worse? In short, it should attack—but not because attack in itself is advantageous (it will on the contrary increase the disparity of strength) but because the smaller party's interest is either to settle the quarrel before conditions deteriorate or at least to acquire some advantages so as to keep its efforts going. No one could consider this a ludicrous argument. But if the smaller state is quite certain its enemy will attack, it can and should

stand on the defensive, so as to win the first advantage. By doing so, it will not be placed at any disadvantage because of the passage of time.

Again, suppose a small power is at war with a greater one, and that the future promises nothing that will influence either side's decisions. If the political initiative lies with the smaller power, it should take the military offensive. Having had the nerve to assume an active role against a stronger adversary, it must do something definite—in other words, attack the enemy unless he obliges it by attacking first. Waiting would be absurd, unless the smaller state had changed its political decision at the moment of executing its policy. That is what often happens, and partly explains why the indeterminate character of some wars leaves a student very much perplexed.

Our discussion of the limited aim suggests that two kinds of limited war are possible: offensive war with a limited aim, and defensive war. We propose to discuss them in separate chapters. But first there is a further point to consider.

The possibility that a military objective can be modified is one we have treated hitherto as deriving only from domestic arguments, and we have considered the nature of the political aim only to the extent that it has or does not have an active content. From the point of view of war itself, no other ingredient of policy is relevant at all. Still, as we argued in the second chapter of Book One (purpose and means in war), the nature of the political aim, the scale of demands put forward by either side, and the total political situation of one's own side, are all factors that in practice must decisively influence the conduct of war. We therefore intend to give them special attention in the following chapter.

A. The Effect of the Political Aim on the Military Objective

One country may support another's cause, but will never take it so seriously as it takes its own. A moderately-sized force will be sent to its help; but if things go wrong the operation is pretty well written off, and one tries to withdraw at the smallest possible cost.

It is traditional in European politics for states to make offensive and defensive pacts for mutual support—though not to the point of fully espousing one another's interests and quarrels. Regardless of the purpose of the war or the scale of the enemy's exertions, they pledge each other in advance to contribute a fixed and usually modest force. A country that makes this sort of alliance does not consider itself thereby involved in actual war with anyone, for that would require a formal declaration and would need a treaty of peace to end it. But even that has never been clearly settled, and practice in the matter varies.

It would all be tidier, less of a theoretical problem, if the contingent promised—ten, twenty, or thirty thousand men—were placed entirely at the ally's disposal and he were free to use it as he wished. It would then in effect be a hired force. But that is far from what really happens. The auxiliary force usually operates under its own commander; he is dependent only on his own government, and the objective the latter sets him will be as ambiguous as its aims.

But even when both states are in earnest about making war upon the third, they do not always say, "we must treat this country as our common enemy and destroy it, or we shall be destroyed ourselves." Far from it: the affair is more often like a business deal. In the light of the risks he expects and the dividend he hopes for, each will invest about 30,000 to 40,000 men, and behave as if that were all he stood to lose.

Nor is that attitude peculiar to the case where one state gives another support in a matter of no great moment to itself. Even when both share a major interest, action is clogged with diplomatic reservations, and as a rule the negotiators only pledge a small and limited contingent, so that the rest can be kept in hand for any special ends the shifts of policy may require.

This used to be the universal way in which an alliance operated. Only in recent times did the extreme danger emanating from Bonaparte, or his own unlimited driving power, force people to act in a natural manner. The old way was a half-and-half affair; it was an anomaly, since in essence war and peace admit of no gradations. Nevertheless, the old way was no mere

diplomatic archaism that reason could ignore, but a practice deeply rooted in the frailties and shortcomings of the human race.

Finally, some wars are fought without allies; and, political considerations will powerfully affect their conduct as well.

Suppose one merely wants a small concession from the enemy. One will only fight until some modest *quid pro quo* has been acquired, and a moderate effort should suffice for that. The enemy's reasoning will be much the same. But suppose one party or the other finds he has miscalculated, that he is not, as he had thought, slightly stronger than the enemy, but weaker. Money and other resources are usually running short and his moral impulse is not sufficient for a greater effort. In such a case he does the best he can; he hopes that the outlook will improve although he may have no ground for such hopes. Meanwhile, the war drags slowly on, like a faint and starving man.

Thus interaction, the effort to outdo the enemy, the violent and compulsive course of war, all stagnate for lack of real incentive. Neither side makes more than minimal moves, and neither feels itself seriously threatened.

Once this influence of the political objective on war is admitted, as it must be, there is no stopping it; consequently we must also be willing to wage such minimal wars, which consist in *merely threatening the enemy, with negotiations held in reserve*.

This poses an obvious problem for any theory of war that aims at being thoroughly scientific. All imperatives inherent in the concept of a war seem to dissolve, and its foundations are threatened. But the natural solution soon emerges. As the modifying principle gains a hold on military operations, or rather, as the incentive fades away, the active element gradually becomes passive. Less and less happens, and guiding principles will not be needed. The art of war will shrivel into prudence, and its main concern will be to make sure the delicate balance is not suddenly upset in the enemy's favor and the half-hearted war does not become a real war after all.

B. War Is an Instrument of Policy

Up to now we have considered the incompatibility between war and every other human interest, individual or social—a difference that derives from human nature, and that therefore no philosophy can resolve. We have examined this incompatibility from various angles so that none of its conflicting elements should be missed. Now we must seek out the unity into which these contradictory elements combine in real life, which they do by partly neutralizing one another. We might have posited that unity to begin with, if it had not been necessary to emphasize the contradictions with all possible clarity and to consider the different elements separately. This unity lies in *the concept that war is only a branch of political activity; that it is in no sense autonomous*.

It is, of course, well-known that the only source of war is politics—the intercourse of governments and peoples; but it is apt to be assumed that war suspends that intercourse and replaces it by a wholly different condition, ruled by no law but its own.

We maintain, on the contrary, that war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means. We deliberately use the phrase “with the addition of other means” because we also want to make it clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different. In essentials that intercourse continues, irrespective of the means it employs. The main lines along which military events progress, and to which they are restricted, are political lines that continue throughout the war into the subsequent peace. How could it be otherwise? Do political relations between peoples and between their governments stop when diplomatic notes are no longer exchanged? Is war not just another expression of their thoughts, another form of speech or writing? Its grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic.

If that is so, then war cannot be divorced from political life; and whenever this occurs in our thinking about war, the many links that connect the two elements are destroyed and we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense.

This conception would be ineluctable even if war were total war, the pure element of enmity unleashed. All the factors that go to make up war and determine its salient features—the strength and allies of each antagonist, the character of the peoples and their governments, and so forth, all the elements listed in the first chapter of Book 1—are these not all political, so closely connected with political activity that it is impossible to separate

the two? But it is yet more vital to bear all this in mind when studying actual practice. We will then find that war does not advance relentlessly toward the absolute, as theory would demand. Being incomplete and self-contradictory, it cannot follow its own laws, but has to be treated as a part of some other whole; the name of which is policy.

In making use of war, policy evades all rigorous conclusions proceeding from the nature of war, bothers little about ultimate possibilities, and concerns itself only with immediate probabilities. Although this introduces a high degree of uncertainty into the whole business, turning it into a kind of game, each government is confident that it can outdo its opponent in skill and acumen.

So policy converts the overwhelmingly destructive element of war into a mere instrument. It changes the terrible battle-sword that a man needs both hands and his entire strength to wield, and with which he strikes home once and no more, into a light, handy rapier—sometimes just a foil for the exchange of thrusts, feints and parries.

Thus the contradictions in which war involves that naturally timid creature, man, are resolved; if this is the solution we choose to accept.

If war is part of policy, policy will determine its character. As policy becomes more ambitious and vigorous, so will war, and this may reach the point where war attains its absolute form. If we look at war in this light, we do not need to lose sight of this absolute: on the contrary, we must constantly bear it in mind.

Only if war is looked at in this way does its unity reappear; only then can we see that all wars are things of the *same* nature; and this alone will provide the right criteria for conceiving and judging great designs.

Policy, of course, will not extend its influence to operational details. Political considerations do not determine the posting of guards or the employment of patrols. But they are the more influential in the planning of war, of the campaign, and often even of the battle.

That is why we felt no urge to introduce this point of view at the start. At the stage of detailed study it would not have been much help and might have been distracting. But when plans for a war or a campaign are under study, this point of view is indispensable.

Nothing is more important in life than finding the right standpoint for seeing and judging events, and then adhering to it. One point and *one only* yields an integrated view of all phenomena; and only by holding to that point of view can one avoid inconsistency.

If planning a war precludes adopting a dual or multiple point of view—that is, applying first a military, then an administrative eye, then a political, and so on—the question arises whether *policy* is bound to be given precedence over everything.

It can be taken as agreed that the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values, and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests against other states. That it can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests, and

vanity of those in power, is neither here nor there. In no sense can the art of war ever be regarded as the preceptor of policy, and here we can only treat policy as representative of all interests of the community.

The only question, therefore, is whether, when war is being planned, the political point of view should give way to the purely military (if a purely military point of view is conceivable at all): that is, should it disappear completely or subordinate itself, or should the political point of view remain dominant and the military be subordinated to it?

That the political view should wholly cease to count on the outbreak of war is hardly conceivable unless pure hatred made all wars a struggle for life and death. In fact, as we have said, they are nothing but expressions of policy itself. Subordinating the political point of view to the military would be absurd, for it is policy that has created war. Policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political.

If we recall the nature of actual war, if we remember the argument in Chapter 3 above—that *the probable character and general shape of any war should mainly be assessed in the light of political factors and conditions*—and that war should often (indeed today one might say *normally*) be conceived as an organic whole whose parts cannot be separated, so that each individual act contributes to the whole and itself originates in the central concept, then it will be perfectly clear and certain that the supreme standpoint for the conduct of war, the point of view that determines its main lines of action, can only be that of policy.

It is from this point of view, then, that plans are cast, as it were, from a mold. Judgment and understanding are easier and more natural; convictions gain in strength, motives in conviction, and history in sense.

From this point of view again, no conflict need arise any longer between political and military interests—not from the nature of the case at any rate—and should it arise it will show no more than lack of understanding. It might be thought that policy could make demands on war which war could not fulfill; but that hypothesis would challenge the natural and unavoidable assumption that policy knows the instrument it means to use. If policy reads the course of military events correctly, it is wholly and exclusively entitled to decide which events and trends are best for the objectives of the war.

In short, at the highest level the art of war turns into policy—but a policy conducted by fighting battles rather than by sending diplomatic notes.

We can now see that the assertion that a major military development, or the plan for one, should be a matter for *purely military* opinion is unacceptable and can be damaging. Nor indeed is it sensible to summon soldiers, as many governments do when they are planning a war, and ask them for *purely military advice*. But it makes even less sense for theoreticians to assert that all available military resources should be put at the disposal of the commander so that on their basis he can draw up purely military plans for a war or a campaign. It is in any case a matter of common experience

that despite the great variety and development of modern war its major lines are still laid down by governments; in other words, if we are to be technical about it, by a purely political and not a military body.

This is as it should be. No major proposal required for war can be worked out in ignorance of political factors; and when people talk, as they often do, about harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not really saying what they mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself, not with its influence. If the policy is right—that is, successful—any intentional effect it has on the conduct of the war can only be to the good. If it has the opposite effect the policy itself is wrong.

Only if statesmen look to certain military moves and actions to produce effects that are foreign to their nature do political decisions influence operations for the worse. In the same way as a man who has not fully mastered a foreign language sometimes fails to express himself correctly, so statesmen often issue orders that defeat the purpose they are meant to serve. Time and again that has happened, which demonstrates that a certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy.

Before continuing, we must guard against a likely misinterpretation. We are far from believing that a minister of war immersed in his files, an erudite engineer or even an experienced soldier would, simply on the basis of their particular experience, make the best director of policy—always assuming that the prince himself is not in control. Far from it. What is needed in the post is distinguished intellect and strength of character. He can always get the necessary military information somehow or other. The military and political affairs of France were never in worse hands than when the brothers Belle-Isle and the Duc de Choiseul were responsible—good soldiers though they all were.

If war is to be fully consonant with political objectives, and policy suited to the means available for war, then unless statesman and soldier are combined in one person, the only sound expedient is to make the commander-in-chief a member of the cabinet, so that the cabinet can share in the major aspects of his activities.¹ But that, in turn, is only feasible if the cabinet—that is, the government—is near the theater of operations, so that decisions

¹ The first edition has: "so bleibt . . . nur ein gutes Mittel übrig, nämlich den obersten Feldherrn zum Mitglied des Kabinetts zu machen, damit dasselbe Theil an den Hauptmomenten seines Handelns nehme." In the second edition, which appeared in 1853, the last part of the sentence was changed to: "damit er in den wichtigsten Momenten an dessen Beratungen und Beschlüssen teilnehme." In his 1943 translation, based on the second or on a still later edition, O.J.M. Jolles rendered this alteration correctly as: "that he may take part in its councils and decisions on important occasions." That, of course, is a reversal of Clausewitz's original sense. By writing that the commander-in-chief must become a member of the cabinet so that the cabinet can share in the major aspects of his activities, Clausewitz emphasizes the cabinet's participation in military decisions, not the soldier's participation in political decisions.

Of the several hundred alterations of the text that were introduced in the second edition of *On War*, and became generally accepted, this is probably the most significant change. Eds.

can be taken without serious loss of time. That is what the Austrian Emperor did in 1809, and the allied sovereigns in 1813–1815. The practice justified itself perfectly.

What is highly dangerous is to let any soldier but the commander-in-chief exert an influence in cabinet. It very seldom leads to sound vigorous action. The example of France between 1793 and 1795, when Carnot ran the war from Paris, is entirely inapplicable, for terror can be used as a weapon only by a revolutionary government.

Let us conclude with some historical observations.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, when that remarkable change in the art of war took place, when the best armies saw part of their doctrine become ineffective and military victories occurred on a scale that up to then had been inconceivable, it seemed that all mistakes had been military mistakes. It became evident that the art of war, long accustomed to a narrow range of possibilities, had been surprised by options that lay beyond this range, but that certainly did not go against the nature of war itself.

Those observers who took the broadest view ascribed the situation to the general influence that policy had for centuries exerted, to its serious detriment, on the art of war, turning it into a half-and-half affair and often into downright make-believe. The facts were indeed as they saw them; but they were wrong to regard them as a chance development that could have been avoided. Others thought the key to everything was in the influence of the policies that Austria, Prussia, England and the rest were currently pursuing.

But is it true that the real shock was military rather than political? To put it in the terms of our argument, was the disaster due to the effect of policy on war, or was policy itself at fault?

Clearly the tremendous effects of the French Revolution abroad were caused not so much by new military methods and concepts as by radical changes in policies and administration, by the new character of government, altered conditions of the French people, and the like. That other governments did not understand these changes, that they wished to oppose new and overwhelming forces with customary means: all these were political errors. Would a purely military view of war have enabled anyone to detect these faults and cure them? It would not. Even if there really had existed a thoughtful strategist capable of deducing the whole range of consequences simply from the nature of the hostile elements, and on the strength of these of prophesying their ultimate effects, it would have been quite impossible to act on his speculations.

Not until statesmen had at last perceived the nature of the forces that had emerged in France, and had grasped that new political conditions now obtained in Europe, could they foresee the broad effect all this would have on war; and only in that way could they appreciate the scale of the means that would have to be employed, and how best to apply them.

In short, we can say that twenty years of revolutionary triumph were mainly due to the mistaken policies of France's enemies.

It is true that these mistakes became apparent only in the course of the

wars, which thoroughly disappointed all political expectations that had been placed on them. But the trouble was not that the statesmen had ignored the soldiers' views. The military art on which the politicians relied was part of a world they thought was real—a branch of current statecraft, a familiar tool that had been in use for many years. But *that* form of war naturally shared in the errors of policy, and therefore could provide no corrective. It is true that war itself has undergone significant changes in character and methods, changes that have brought it closer to its absolute form. But these changes did not come about because the French government freed itself, so to speak, from the harness of policy; they were caused by the new political conditions which the French Revolution created both in France and in Europe as a whole, conditions that set in motion new means and new forces, and have thus made possible a degree of energy in war that otherwise would have been inconceivable.

It follows that the transformation of the art of war resulted from the transformation of politics. So far from suggesting that the two could be dissociated from each other, these changes are a strong proof of their indissoluble connection.

Once again: war is an instrument of policy. It must necessarily bear the character of policy and measure by its standards. The conduct of war, in its great outlines, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think according to its own laws.

The Limited Aim: Offensive War

Even when we cannot hope to defeat the enemy totally, a direct and positive aim still is possible: the occupation of part of his territory.

The point of such a conquest is to reduce his national resources. We thus reduce his fighting strength and increase our own. As a result we fight the war partly at his expense. At the peace negotiations, moreover, we will have a concrete asset in hand, which we can either keep or trade for other advantages.

This is a very natural view to take of conquered territory, the only drawback being the necessity of defending that territory once we have occupied it, which might be a source of some anxiety.

In the chapter on the culminating point of victory¹ we dealt at some length with the way in which an offensive weakens the attacking force, and showed how a situation might develop that could give rise to serious consequences.

Capturing enemy territory will reduce the strength of our forces in varying degrees, which are determined by the location of the occupied territory. If it adjoins our own—either as an enclave within our territory or adjoining it—the more directly it lies on the line of our main advance, the less our strength will suffer. Saxony in the Seven Years War was a natural extension of the Prussian theater, and its occupation by Frederick the Great made his forces stronger instead of weaker; for Saxony is nearer Silesia than it is to the Mark, and covers both of them.

Even the conquest of Silesia in 1740 and 1741, once completed, was no strain on Frederick's strength on account of its shape and location and the contour of its frontiers. So long as Saxony was not in Austrian hands, Silesia offered Austria only a narrow frontier, which in any case lay on the route that either side would have to take in advancing.

If, on the other hand, the territory taken is a strip flanked by enemy ground on either side, if its position is not central and its configuration awkward, its occupation will become so plain a burden as to make an enemy victory not just easier but perhaps superfluous. Every time the Austrians invaded Provence from Italy they were forced to give it up without any fighting. In 1744 the French thanked God for allowing them to leave Bohemia without having suffered a defeat. Frederick in 1758 found it impossible to hold his ground in Bohemia and Moravia with the same force that had fought so brilliantly the previous year in Silesia and Saxony. Of armies

¹ Book Seven, Chapter Five. Eds.

that had to give up some captured territory just because its conquest had so weakened them, examples are so common that we need not trouble to quote any more of them.

The question whether one should aim at such a conquest, then, turns on whether one can be sure of holding it or, if not, whether a temporary occupation (by way of invasion or diversion) will really be worth the cost of the operation and, especially, whether there is any risk of being strongly counter-attacked and thrown off balance. In the chapter on the culminating point, we emphasized how many factors need to be considered in each particular case.

Only one thing remains to be said. An offensive of this type is not always appropriate to make up for losses elsewhere. While we are busy occupying one area, the enemy may be doing the same somewhere else. If our project is not of overwhelming significance, it will not compel the enemy to give up his own conquest. Thorough consideration is therefore necessary in order to decide whether on balance we will gain or lose.

In general one tends to lose more from occupation by the enemy than one gains from conquering his territory, even if the value of both areas should be identical. The reason is that a whole range of resources are denied to us. But since this is also the case with the enemy, it ought not to be a reason for thinking that retention is more important than conquest. Yet this is so. The retention of one's own territory is always a matter of more direct concern, and the damage that our state suffers may be balanced and so to speak neutralized only if retaliation promises sufficient advantage—that is to say the gains are substantially greater.

It follows from all this that a strategic attack with a limited objective is burdened with the defense of other points that the attack itself will not directly cover—far more burdened than it would be if aimed at the heart of the enemy's power. The effect is to limit the scale on which forces can be concentrated, both in time and in space.

If this concentration is to be achieved, at least in terms of time, the offensive must be launched from every practicable point at once. Then, however, the attack loses the other advantage of being able to stay on the defensive here and there and thus make do with a much smaller force. The net result of having such a limited objective is that everything tends to cancel out. We cannot then put all our strength into a single massive blow, aimed in accordance with our major interest. Effort is increasingly dispersed; friction everywhere increases and greater scope is left for chance.

That is how events tend to develop, dragging the commander down, frustrating him more and more. The more conscious he is of his own powers, the greater his self-confidence, the larger the forces he commands, then the more he will seek to break loose from this tendency, in order to give some one point a preponderant importance, even if this should be possible only by running greater risks.

The Limited Aim: Defensive War

The ultimate aim of a defensive war, as we have seen, can never be an absolute negation. Even the weakest party must possess some way of making the enemy conscious of its presence, some means of threatening him.

No doubt that end could in theory be pursued by wearing the enemy down. He has the positive aim, and any unsuccessful operation, even though it only costs the forces that take part in it, has the same effect as a retreat. But the defender's loss is not incurred in vain: he has held his ground, which is all he meant to do. For the defender then, it might be said, his positive aim is to hold what he has. That might be sound if it were sure that a certain number of attacks would actually wear the enemy down and make him desist. But this is not necessarily so. If we consider the relative exhaustion of forces on both sides, the defender is at a *disadvantage*. The attack may weaken, but only in the sense that a turning point may occur. Once that possibility is gone, the defender weakens more than the attacker, for two reasons. For one thing, he is weaker anyway, and if losses are the same on both sides, it is he who is harder hit. Second, the enemy will usually deprive him of part of his territory and resources. In all this we can find no reason for the attacker to desist. We are left with the conclusion that if the attacker sustains his efforts while his opponent does nothing but ward them off, the latter can do nothing to neutralize the danger that sooner or later an offensive thrust will succeed.

Certainly the exhaustion or, to be accurate, the fatigue of the stronger has often brought about peace. The reason can be found in the half-hearted manner in which wars are usually waged. It cannot be taken in any scientific sense as the ultimate, universal objective of all defense.

Only one hypothesis remains: that the aim of the defense must embody the idea of waiting—which is after all its leading feature. The idea implies, moreover, that the situation can develop, that in itself it may improve, which is to say that if improvement cannot be effected from within—that is, by sheer resistance—it can only come from without; and an improvement from without implies a change in the political situation. Either additional allies come to the defender's help or allies begin to desert his enemy.

Such, then, is the defender's aim if his lack of strength prohibits any serious counterattack. But according to the concept of the defense that we have formulated, this does not always apply. We have argued that the defensive is the more effective form of war, and because of this effectiveness it can also be employed to execute a counteroffensive on whatever scale.

These two categories must be kept distinct from the very start, for each has its effect on the conduct of the defense.

The defender's purpose in the first category is to keep his territory inviolate, and to hold it for as long as possible. That will gain him time, and gaining time is the only way he can achieve his aim. The positive aim, the most he can achieve, the one that will get him what he wants from the peace negotiations, cannot yet be included in his plan of operations. He has to remain strategically passive, and the only success he can win consists in beating off attacks at given points. These small advantages can then be used to strengthen other points, for pressure may be severe at all of them. If he has no chance of doing so, his only profit is the fact that the enemy will not trouble him again for a while.

That sort of defense can include minor offensive operations without their altering its nature or purpose. They should not aim at permanent acquisitions but at the temporary seizure of assets that can be returned at a later date. They can take the form of raids or diversions, perhaps the capture of some fortress or other, but always on condition that sufficient forces can be spared from their defensive role.

The second category exists where the defense has already assumed a positive purpose. It then acquires an active character that comes to the fore in proportion as the scale of feasible counterattack expands. To put it in another way: the more the defensive was deliberately chosen in order to make certain of the first round, the more the defender can take risks in laying traps for the enemy. Of these, the boldest and, if it works, the deadliest, is to retire into the interior. Such an expedient, nonetheless, could hardly be more different from the first type of defensive.

One need only think of the difference between Frederick's situation in the Seven Years War and the situation of Russia in 1812. When war broke out, Frederick's readiness for it gave him some advantage. It meant he could conquer Saxony—such a natural extension of his theater of war that its occupation put no strain upon his forces, but augmented them. In the campaign of 1757 he sought to continue and develop his strategic offensive, which was not impossible so long as the Russians and the French had not arrived in Silesia, the Mark, and Saxony. But the offensive failed; he was thrown back on the defensive for the rest of the campaign, abandoning Bohemia and having to clear his own base of operations of the enemy. That required the use of the same army to deal first with the French and then¹ with the Austrians. What successes he achieved he owed to the defensive.

By 1758, when his enemies had drawn the noose more tightly round him and his forces were becoming seriously outnumbered, he still planned a limited offensive in Moravia; he aimed at seizing Olmütz before his adversaries were in the field. He did not hope to hold it, still less to make it a base for a further advance, but simply to use it as a sort of outwork, as a *contre-approche* against the Austrians, designed to make them spend the

¹ The first edition omits the phrase *die Franzosen, dann gegen* which appears in later editions and seems necessary to give point to Clausewitz's comment. Eds.

rest of the campaign, and possibly a second year's, in trying to retake it. That effort was a failure too, and Frederick now abandoned any thought of a serious offensive, realizing that it would still further reduce his relative strength. A compact position in the center of his territories, in Silesia and Saxony, exploitation of interior lines for quickly reinforcing any danger point, small raids as opportunities occurred, quietly waiting meanwhile on events so as to economize his strength for better times—such were the main elements in his plans. Gradually, his operations became more passive. Realizing that even victories cost too much, he tried to manage with less. His one concern was to gain time, and hold on to what he had. Less and less was he willing to give ground and he did not scruple to adopt a thorough-going cordon-system; both Prince Henry's positions in Saxony and those of the King in the mountains of Silesia deserve this description. His letters to the Marquis d'Argens² show how keenly he looked forward to winter quarters and how much he hoped he would be able to take them up without incurring serious losses in the meantime.

To censure Frederick for this, and see in his behavior evidence of low morale, would in our view be a very superficial judgment. Devices such as the entrenched camp at Bunzelwitz, the positions that Prince Henry chose in Saxony and the King in the Silesian mountains, may not seem to us today the sort of measure on which to place one's final hope—tactical cobwebs that a man like Bonaparte would soon have cleared away. But one must remember that times have changed, that war has undergone a total transformation and now draws life from wholly different sources. Positions that have lost all value today could be effective then; and the enemy's general character was a factor as well. Methods which Frederick himself discounted could be the highest degree of wisdom when used against the Austrian and Russian forces under men like Daun and Buturlin.

This view was justified by success. By quietly waiting on events Frederick achieved his goal and avoided difficulties that would have shattered his forces.

At the start of the 1812 campaign, the strength with which the Russians opposed the French was even less adequate than Frederick's at the outset of the Seven Years War. But the Russians could expect to grow much stronger in the course of the campaign. At heart, all Europe was opposed to Bonaparte; he had stretched his resources to the very limit; in Spain he was fighting a war of attrition; and the vast expanse of Russia meant that an invader's strength could be worn down to the bone in the course of five hundred miles' retreat. Tremendous things were possible; not only was a massive counterstroke a certainty if the French offensive failed (and how could it succeed if the Czar would not make peace nor his subjects rise against him?) but the counterstroke could bring the French to utter ruin. The highest wisdom could never have devised a better strategy than the one the Russians followed unintentionally.

² French author, and confidant of Frederick, who resided in Prussia during the Seven Years War. Eds.

No one thought so at the time, and such a view would have seemed far-fetched; but that is no reason for refusing to admit today that it was right. If we wish to learn from history, we must realize that what happened once can happen again; and anyone with judgment in these matters will agree that the chain of great events that followed the march on Moscow was no mere succession of accidents. To be sure, had the Russians been able to put up any kind of defense of their frontiers, the star of France would probably have waned, and luck would probably have deserted her; but certainly not on that colossal and decisive scale. It was a vast success; and it cost the Russians a price in blood and perils that for any other country would have been higher still, and which most could not have paid at all.

A major victory can only be obtained by positive measures aimed at a *decision*, never by simply waiting on events. In short, even in the defense, a major stake alone can bring a major gain.

The Plan of a War Designed to Lead to the Total Defeat of the Enemy

Having given a more detailed account of the various objects a war can serve, we shall now consider how the whole war should be planned with a view to the three distinguishable phases that can go with each particular aim. After everything we have so far said on the subject, we can identify two basic principles that underlie all strategic planning and serve to guide all other considerations.

The first principle is that the ultimate substance of enemy strength must be traced back to the fewest possible sources, and ideally to one alone. The attack on these sources must be compressed into the fewest possible actions—again, ideally, into one. Finally, all minor actions must be subordinated as much as possible. In short the first principle is: act with the utmost concentration.

The second principle is: act with the utmost speed. No halt or detour must be permitted without good cause.

The task of reducing the sources of enemy strength to a single center of gravity will depend on:

1. The distribution of the enemy's political power. If it lies in the armed forces of a single government, there will normally be no problem. If it is shared among allied armies, one of which is simply acting as an ally without a special interest of its own, the task is hardly any greater. But if it is shared among allies bound together by a common interest, the problem turns on the cordiality of the alliance. We have dealt with this earlier.

2. The situation in the theater of war where the various armies are operating. If all enemy forces are concentrated in a single army in one theater of war they in fact constitute a unity, and the question need not be pursued. But if the enemy in a single theater consists of separate allied armies, their unity is less than absolute; yet they will still be sufficiently integrated for a resolute attack on *one* to involve the rest. If the armies operate in neighboring theaters with no great natural barriers between them, one of them can still have a decisive influence on the others; but with theaters far apart, with neutral territory or mountain ranges in between, the influence in question will be doubtful—in fact, improbable—and if the theaters lie at opposite ends of the country under attack and

operations directed against them therefore have to take divergent lines, they will almost cease to be related.

Should Prussia be attacked by France and Russia simultaneously the effect on the conduct of operations would be as if there were two separate wars. Only at the peace negotiations might their essential unity become clear.

Conversely, in the Seven Years War the Austrian and Saxon forces were practically fused: they shared one another's fortunes, partly because from Frederick's point of view their theaters both lay in the same direction, and partly because of Saxony's total lack of political independence.

Numerous though the enemies were with whom Bonaparte had to contend in 1813, they all faced him from more or less the same direction. Their various operational zones were closely linked and interacted strongly on each other. Had he been able to concentrate his forces at one point and destroy his principal enemy, the fate of the rest would have been decided as well. Had he beaten the main allied army in Bohemia and pressed on via Prague to Vienna, Blücher could not with the best will in the world have remained in Saxony. He would have been summoned to help in Bohemia, and the Crown Prince of Sweden would certainly have lacked the will to remain in the Mark Brandenburg.

Should Austria, on the other hand, make war on France both in Italy and on the Rhine, she will always find it hard to produce a decision in both theaters by striking a successful blow in one of them. For one thing, the Alps are too great a barrier and besides, the roads from Austria to the Rhine and Italy diverge. France would have a somewhat easier task. In either case her lines of attack would converge upon Vienna and the core of the Austrian monarchy, and a decisive victory in one theater would be decisive for the other as well. We should add that if France were to strike a decisive blow in Italy it would have more effect on the Rhenish theater than the other way about. An offensive launched from Italy would threaten the center of Austrian power, while operations from the Rhine would threaten only one of its wings.

From this it follows that the concept of separate and connected enemy power runs through every level of operations, and thus the effect that events in a given theater will have elsewhere can only be judged in each particular case. Only then can it be seen how far the enemy's various centers of gravity can be reduced to one.

The principle of aiming everything at the enemy's center of gravity admits of only one exception—that is, when secondary operations look *exceptionally rewarding*. But we must repeat that only decisive superiority can justify diverting strength without risking too much in the principal theater.

When General Bülow marched into Holland in 1814 it was on the assumption that his 30,000 men would not only neutralize an equal number of the French, but would also enable the Dutch and English to put forces in the field that otherwise could not have been brought to bear.

The first task, then, in planning for a war is to identify the enemy's centers of gravity, and if possible trace them back to a single one.

The second task is to ensure that the forces to be used against that point are concentrated for a main offensive.

In this situation we may be faced with the following reasons for dividing our forces:

1. The original disposition of the forces—and therefore also the geographical location of the attacking states.

If concentration would entail detours and loss of time, and if the risks of advancing separately are not too great, one can justify such a course. If a laborious junction were effected needlessly and at great cost in time, and the first assault were, therefore, made with less than maximum *élan* and speed, it would violate our second general principle. This deserves particular consideration whenever there is a chance to surprise the enemy.

The argument has even greater weight if the attack is undertaken by allies who are placed not one behind the other but facing the enemy side by side. If Prussia and Austria were fighting France, to make both armies start from the same place would waste a great deal of time and strength. The natural route for Prussia to the heart of France is from the lower Rhine, and for Austria from the upper Rhine. It follows that no junction could be made without some sacrifice, and so in any given case the question is whether this sacrifice need be made.

2. An attack on separate lines may promise greater results.

As we are now discussing a divided advance against a *single* center, this implies a *concentric* attack. A divided attack on parallel or divergent lines would be classified as a *secondary operation*, which we have discussed already.

Both in strategy and in tactics a convergent attack always holds out promise of *increased* results, for if it succeeds the enemy is not just beaten; he is virtually cut off. The convergent attack, then, is always the more promising; but since forces are divided and the theater is enlarged, it also carries a greater risk. As with the attack and defense, the weaker form promises the greater success.

All depends, therefore, on whether the attacker feels strong enough to go after such a prize.

In 1757, when Frederick decided to invade Bohemia, he split his forces between Saxony and Silesia. He had two main reasons. First, that was where his forces had been deployed for the winter, and a concentration of forces would have deprived the attack of surprise. Second, his concentric advance threatened both Austrian theaters in flank and rear. The risk he ran was that one of his armies might be defeated by superior strength. If the Aus-

trians *failed* to appreciate this, they would have either to accept battle in the center, or allow themselves to be maneuvered right off their line of communication by one flank or the other until they met disaster. That was the greatest success which this advance promised the King. In fact, the Austrians opted for battle in the center; but they took up positions at Prague, which was far too exposed to the enveloping attack, and their inactivity gave the attack the time it needed to produce its maximum effect. The result was that their defeat turned into a true catastrophe—as is proved by the fact that the commanding general and two thirds of the army was shut up in Prague.

This brilliant success at the start of the campaign was due to the willingness to risk a concentric attack. Who could criticize Frederick for trusting that the precision of his movements, his generals' vigor and his army's high morale, in contrast to the Austrians' obtuseness, were sufficient to guarantee success? It would be wrong to leave out these moral factors and imagine the geometric form of the attack was all that mattered. One only has to compare it with Bonaparte's no less brilliant campaign of 1796, when the Austrians were signally punished for their converging advance into Italy. Leaving aside the moral factor, the resources that the French general had at his command on that occasion were no greater than the Austrian had available in 1757. Indeed, they were less, for the Austrian commander, unlike Bonaparte, was not his enemy's inferior in strength. Hence, if there is reason to fear that a divided and convergent thrust will give the enemy a chance to equalize his strength by using his interior lines, it is better not employed. If the deployment of the forces makes it essential, it must be regarded as a necessary evil.

Seen from that point of view, one cannot possibly approve the way in which France was invaded in 1814. The Russian, Austrian, and Prussian armies were all assembled at Frankfurt, on the obvious and most direct route to France's center of gravity. They were then split up so that one army should invade from Mainz and the other should first pass through Switzerland. France's military strength at that time was so low that there was no question of her defending her frontiers: hence the only point of a convergent invasion was that if all went well one army would take Lorraine and Alsace while the Franche-Comté fell to the other. Was this meager advantage worth the trouble of marching through Switzerland? We know quite well that there were other equally bad grounds on which that march was ordered, but we mention the one most relevant to our discussion.

Bonaparte, on the other hand, had shown by his masterly campaign in 1796 that he knew exactly how to deal with a convergent threat, and though he might be seriously outnumbered, everyone was ready to admit from the start that morally he was far superior. Late in joining his army at Chalons and generally underrating his opponents, he almost managed to strike the two armies separately before they joined up. Yet how weak they were when he met them at Brienne! Out of 65,000 men, Blücher had only 27,000 with him, and of the 200,000 men of the main army only 100,000 were available.

They could not possibly have set the French an easier task. Moreover from the very moment the advance began the allied armies wanted nothing more than to link up again.

After all these considerations, we believe that while an attack on convergent lines is in itself a means toward success, nevertheless in general it should occur only as the result of the original deployment of forces, and it seldom justifies departing from the shortest and simplest line of advance.

3. The extent of a theater of war can constitute a ground for advancing with divided forces.

When an army starts an attack from a given point and succeeds in thrusting deeper into enemy territory, the area that it dominates is not strictly limited to the roads it uses but extends a certain distance on either side. But its breadth will very much depend (if we may use such a metaphor) on the solidity and cohesion of the opposing state. If the enemy country is rather loosely knit, if its people are soft and have forgotten what war is like, a triumphant invader will have no great trouble in leaving a wide swathe of country safely in his rear; but if he is faced with a brave and loyal populace the area of safety will resemble a narrow triangle.

To avoid that risk he must contrive to advance on a broader front, and if the enemy's strength is concentrated at one point the invader can only maintain this breadth until contact is made. On approaching the enemy position it has to be reduced. That is self-evident.

But if the enemy position itself extends over a certain breadth it would be sensible to extend one's own front to the same degree. We have in mind a single operational theater or several adjacent ones, and our remarks will therefore obviously apply no less to cases where the main offensive automatically settles all lesser issues.

But can that *always* be relied upon? Can one afford the risks that will arise if the influence of the main objective on the minor ones is not enough? Perhaps we should look more closely at this requirement, that a theater of operations ought to have a certain breadth.

As usual, it is quite impossible to cover every case that could conceivably arise; but we maintain that the decision on the main objective will, with few exceptions, carry the minor ones as well. That is the principle on which action should invariably be based unless there are obvious reasons to the contrary.

Bonaparte invaded Russia in the sound belief that if he destroyed the principal Russian army the success would sweep away the Russian forces on the upper Dwina too. Oudinot's corps was all he left initially to deal with these; but Wittgenstein attacked, and Bonaparte then had to send the Sixth Corps there as well.

Part of his forces, on the other hand, had initially been detached to deal with Bagration; but the withdrawal of the Russian center swept Bagration away and enabled Bonaparte to recall the force he had detached. Had Witt-

genstein not been obliged to cover the second capital¹ he too would have followed the retreat of the main army under Barclay.

Bonaparte's victories at Ulm and Regensburg in 1805 and 1809 also settled the fate of Italy and the Tyrol, though Italy was a rather distant autonomous theater. Jena and Auerstädt in 1806 put an end to any threat that might have arisen in Westphalia, in Hesse or on the Frankfurt road.

Among the many factors that may influence resistance at subordinate points, two are particularly significant.

The first is that in a country so vast and relatively powerful as Russia, the decisive blow at the vital point may be long delayed and there is no need for a rapid concentration of all one's forces.

The second factor emerges when numerous fortresses confer unusual autonomy on a secondary area, as for example Silesia in 1806. Nevertheless Bonaparte imputed very little importance to it; and although he had to by-pass Silesia on his advance to Warsaw, he detached only his brother Jérôme and 20,000 men to deal with it.

If it seems probable in any given case that the attack on the main objective will not shake the minor ones, or if it has already failed to do so; if the enemy has already committed forces at those points, it will then be necessary to despatch another and more adequate force to deal with them, since lines of communication cannot be left entirely unprotected.

One could be even more prudent. One might demand that the advance against the main objective should keep strictly in step with advances against the minor ones, so that whenever the enemy refuses to give way at other points, the main advance is halted.

This approach will certainly not directly contradict our principle of maximum concentration against the main objective; but the spirit underlying it is wholly contrary. It would impose such sluggishness on movement, such paralysis on the attack, create such opportunities for chance and waste so much time, as in fact to be wholly incompatible with an offensive aimed at defeating the enemy.

The difficulty becomes even greater if the enemy can withdraw his forces from these minor points along divergent lines. What would then become of the unity of our attack?

Consequently we must strictly oppose the principle that makes the main attack dependent on minor operations, and instead assert that an offensive intending the enemy's collapse will fail if it does not dare to drive like an arrow at the heart of the enemy state.

4. A fourth and final ground for advancing with divided forces may be to reduce the problems of supply.

No doubt it is a great deal more agreeable to take a small force through a prosperous area than a powerful army through a poor one; but the latter

¹ St. Petersburg. Eds.

is not impossible if proper arrangements are made and the army is accustomed to privation. The former option should therefore not have so much influence on plans as to justify taking greater risks.

We have now dealt with the grounds that justify dividing forces and splitting one operation into several. If such a division were made on one of those grounds with a clear idea of its purpose and after careful weighing of the pros and cons, we should not presume to criticize it.

But when the usual thing occurs, and a "trained" general staff makes such a plan as a matter of routine, and when all the various operational theaters have to be occupied, like squares on a chessboard, each with the appropriate units before the actual moves begin; when the moves themselves are made with self-styled expertise to reach their goal by devious routes and combinations; when modern armies have to separate in order to display "consummate art" by reuniting two weeks later at the utmost risk: then we can only say we abhor this departure from the straight, simple, easy approach in order to plunge deliberately into confusion. Such idiocy becomes the more likely, the less the war is run by the commander-in-chief himself in the manner indicated in our opening chapter: that is, as a single activity of an individual invested with huge powers; or, in other words, the more the plan as a whole is cooked up by an unrealistic general staff on the recipes of half-a-dozen amateurs.

The third part of our first principle has still to be considered: namely to keep each minor operation as subordinate as possible.

If one seeks to concentrate all military action on a single goal, and if so far as possible a *single* massive operation is envisaged as the means of gaining it, the other points at which the opponents are in contact must lose part of their independence and become subordinate operations. If absolutely everything could be concentrated into one action, those other contact points would be completely neutralized. But that is rarely possible; so the problem is to hold them strictly within bounds and make sure they do not draw off too much strength from the main operation.

We hold, moreover, that the plan of operations should have this tendency even when the enemy's whole resistance cannot be reduced to a single center of gravity and when, as we have once put it, two almost wholly separate wars have to be fought simultaneously. Even then one of them must be treated as the *main* operation, calling for the bulk of resources and of activities.

Seen in this light, it is advisable to operate *offensively* only in this main theater and to stay on the defensive elsewhere. There an attack will only be justified if exceptional conditions should invite it. Moreover the defensive at the minor points should be maintained with the minimum of strength; and every advantage that that form of resistance offers should be turned to account.

This view applies with even greater force to any theater of operations in which several enemy allied armies are engaged in such a way that they are all affected when the common center of gravity is struck.

Against the enemy who is the target of the main offensive there can therefore be no such thing as a defensive in subsidiary theaters of operations. That offensive consists of the main attack and such subsidiary attacks as circumstances make necessary. This removes all need to defend any point that the offensive does not itself directly cover. The main decision is what matters. It will compensate for any loss. If the forces are sufficient to make it reasonable to seek a major decision, then the *possibility of failure* can no longer be an excuse for trying to cover oneself everywhere else. For this would make defeat in the decisive battle that much more probable, and would thus introduce an element of contradiction into our actions.

But while the main operation must enjoy priority over minor actions, the same priority must also be applied to all its parts. Which forces from each theater shall advance toward the common center of gravity is usually decided on extraneous grounds; all we are saying, therefore, is that there must be an *effort* to make sure the main operation has *precedence*. The more that precedence is realized, the simpler everything will be and the less will it be left to chance.

The second principle is the rapid use of our forces.

Any unnecessary expenditure of time, every unnecessary detour, is a waste of strength and thus abhorrent to strategic thought. It is still more important to remember that almost the only advantage of the attack rests on its initial surprise. Speed and impetus are its strongest elements and are usually indispensable if we are to defeat the enemy.

Thus theory demands the shortest roads to the goal. Endless discussions about moving left or right, doing this or that, are otiose.

If we recall what was said in the chapter² on the aims of strategic attack, and the part in Chapter Four above about the influence of time, we believe no further elaboration is needed to show that this principle should be given the priority that we claim for it.

Bonaparte never forgot it. He always preferred the shortest road between one army and another, or between two capitals.

Now, what constitutes the main operation, which we have made central to all else, and for which we have demanded such rapid and straightforward execution?

In Chapter Four we explained what we mean by the defeat of the enemy, to the extent this can be done in general terms, and there is no need to repeat it. Whatever the final act may turn on in any given case, the beginning is invariably the same—annihilation of the enemy's armed forces, which implies a major victory and their actual destruction. The earlier this victory can be sought—that is, the nearer to our frontiers—the *easier* it will be. The later the main battle is fought—that is, the deeper in enemy territory—the more *decisive* its effect. Here, as everywhere, the ease of success and its magnitude are in balance.

In consequence, unless one is so much the stronger that victory is cer-

² Book Seven, Chapter Three. Eds.

tain, the enemy's main force must be sought out if possible. We say "if possible" because if it involved substantial detours, taking the wrong road and wasting time, this could easily prove a mistake. If the enemy's main force is not on our line of advance, and if other reasons make it impossible for us to seek it out, we are bound to find it later, since it cannot fail eventually to oppose us. Then, as we have just argued, the battle is fought under less favorable circumstances—a disadvantage we must accept. Nevertheless, if we win the battle, our victory will be the more decisive.

From this it follows that if in this hypothetical case, the enemy's main army lies across our line of advance, it would be wrong deliberately to by-pass him; at least, if our motive in so doing is to make our victory easier. On the other hand, the premises suggest that we can avoid the enemy provided we are massively superior, in order to make our ultimate victory more decisive.

We have been talking about a total victory—that is, not simply a battle won, but the complete defeat of the enemy. Such a victory demands an enveloping attack or a battle with reversed fronts, either of which will always make the result decisive. It is essential, then, that any plan of operations should provide for this, both as regards the forces it requires and the direction to be given them. We shall say more about this in our chapter on the planning of a campaign.³

It is not impossible, of course, for a battle to end in total victory even if fought with parallel fronts, and military history can show examples: but such cases are rare and are growing rarer as armies approximate to one another in training and in skill. Twenty-one battalions are not captured in a single village nowadays as they were at Blenheim.

Once a major victory is achieved there must be no talk of rest, of a breathing space, of reviewing the position or consolidating and so forth, but only of the pursuit, going for the enemy again if necessary, seizing his capital, attacking his reserves and anything else that might give his country aid and comfort.

Should the tide of victory sweep us past his fortresses, the question whether to besiege them or not will depend upon our strength. If our superiority is very great, we will lose less time by taking them as early as we can; but if we are not so sure that fresh successes lie ahead, we must invest them with the smallest possible forces that precludes all thought of regularly besieging them. From the moment when the siege of fortresses compels us to suspend the advance, the offensive has *as a rule* reached its culminating point. Therefore we demand that the main force should go on advancing rapidly and keep up the pressure. We have already disposed of the idea that an advance toward the main objective should be made to wait upon success at minor points. Hence the main force, as a rule, will leave no more than a narrow band of territory in its rear, which it can call its own and which forms its theater of operations. This can check momentum at the front, as we have

³ The chapter was never written. Eds.

seen, and involve some risks for the attacker. It is a problem: might these tendencies not reach the stage at which further advance is brought to a halt? This is quite possible. But just as we have argued that it would be a mistake to try from the very start to avoid a narrow theater of operations and therefore rob the attack of its momentum, we continue to argue that so long as the general has not yet defeated the enemy, so long as he believes himself to be strong enough to gain his objectives, he must persevere. He may do so with increasing danger, but his success will be all the greater. Should he reach a point beyond which he dare not go, should he feel he must expand to right and left in order to protect his rear, so be it: very likely his attack has reached its culminating point. Its momentum is exhausted; and if the enemy is still unbroken, there is probably no future in it anyway.

Anything the general can do to develop his offensive by taking fortresses, passes and provinces, still means slow progress, but the progress is relative, no longer absolute. The enemy's precipitate retreat has stopped; he may be getting ready to renew his resistance, and it is now possible that even though the attacker is still improving his position the defender, by doing the same, is improving his chances every day. We repeat, in short, that once a pause has become necessary there can as a rule be no recurrence of the advance.

All that theory requires is that so long as the aim is the enemy's defeat, the attack must not be interrupted. If the general relinquishes this aim because he considers the attendant risk too great, he will be right to break off and extend his front. Theory would blame him only if he does so in order to facilitate the defeat of the enemy.

We are not so foolish as to suggest that history contains no example of a state being brought to the last extremity by degrees. Our suggested thesis is not an absolute truth admitting no exception, but is simply based on the normal and likely course of events. Further, we must establish whether the decline of a state was the gradual result of a historical process or was the outcome of a single campaign. We are here only dealing with the latter case, for only here are forces in such tension that they either overcome the load upon them or are in danger of succumbing to it. If the first year's fighting yields a slight advantage and the second year's increases it so that little by little one approaches the objective, the danger is nowhere very grave, but just for that reason it is all the more widespread. Every pause between one success and the next gives the enemy new opportunities. One success has little influence on the next, and often none at all. The influence may well be adverse, for the enemy either recovers and rouses himself to greater resistance or obtains help from somewhere else. But when a single impetus obtains from start to finish, yesterday's victory makes certain of today's, and one fire starts another. For every case of a state reduced to ruin by successive blows—which means that time, the defender's patron, has deserted to the other side—how many more are there in which time ruined the plans of the attacker! It is enough to cite the outcome of the Seven Years War, in which the Austrians sought their goal with such leisure, prudence and caution that they missed it completely.

In the light of this we cannot believe that concern for a secure and soundly administered theater of operations should go hand in hand with the offensive thrust and in a sense balance it. On the contrary, we regard the disadvantages that attach to the offensive as unavoidable evils that should not merit our attention until the advance promises no further hope.⁴

The case of Bonaparte in 1812, far from undermining our argument, merely confirms it.

His campaign failed, not because he advanced too quickly and too far as is usually believed, but because the only way to achieve success failed. Russia is not a country that can be formally conquered—that is to say occupied—certainly not with the present strength of the European States and not even with the half-a-million men Bonaparte mobilized for the purpose. Only internal weakness, only the workings of disunity can bring a country of that kind to ruin. To strike at these weaknesses in its political life it is necessary to thrust into the heart of the state. Only if he could reach Moscow in strength could Bonaparte hope to shake the government's nerve and the people's loyalty and steadfastness. In Moscow he hoped to find peace; that was the only rational war aim he could set himself.

He advanced his main force against that of the Russians'. They staggered back before him, past the Drissa camp, and never stopped till they got to Smolensk. He forced Bagration to withdraw as well, defeated both the Russian armies and occupied Moscow. He acted as he had always done. This is how he had come to dominate Europe, and this was the only way in which he could have done so. No one who admired Bonaparte as the greatest of commanders in his previous campaigns should feel superior to him with regard to this one.

It is legitimate to judge an event by its outcome, for this is its soundest criterion. But a judgment based on the result alone must not be passed off as evidence of human wisdom. To discover why a campaign failed is not the same thing as to criticize it; but if we go on and show that the causes could and should have been seen and acted on, we assume the role of critic, and set ourselves up above the general.

Anyone who asserts that the campaign of 1812 was an absurdity because of its enormous failure but who would have called it a superb idea if it had worked, shows complete lack of judgment.

Suppose that Bonaparte had waited in Lithuania, as most of his critics think he should have done, so as to make certain of its fortresses (of which, incidentally, Riga, lying to one side, is really the only one; Bobruisk is a wretched little place) it would have involved him in miserable defensive operations for the winter. The critics would then have been the first to exclaim, "That is no longer the old Bonaparte! He has not even forced his first great battle—the man who used to seal his conquests of enemy states by victories on their last ramparts, as at Austerlitz and Friedland. Moscow, the enemy's capital, is defenseless—ripe for surrender. Why has he failed

⁴ Here we follow the text of the second edition since that of the first appears hopelessly corrupt. Eds.

to capture it and thus left it as a rallying point for fresh resistance? He had the incredible luck to surprise this remote giant as easily as a nearby city or as Frederick overwhelmed the small and neighboring Silesia—and he does not exploit his advantage. He breaks off his triumphant progress as if the devil was at his heels!" That is the sort of talk we should have heard, for that is the way most critics form their judgments.

We maintain that the 1812 campaign failed because the Russian government kept its nerve and the people remained loyal and steadfast. The campaign could not succeed. Bonaparte may have been wrong to engage in it at all; at least the outcome certainly shows that he miscalculated; but we argue that if he was to aim at that objective, there was, broadly speaking, no other way of gaining it.

Being anxious not to be committed to an interminable, costly defensive war in the East on top of the one he was already fighting in the West, Bonaparte tried the only means he had—a bold attack, which would compel his demoralized opponent to make peace. The risk of losing his army in the process had to be accepted; that was the stake in the game, the price of his vast hopes. It may have been his fault if his army was punished more severely than it need have been, but the fault did not lie in the depth to which he penetrated Russia; that was his object and was unavoidable. It lay in his being late in starting the campaign, in the lives he squandered by his tactics, his neglect of matters of supply and of his line of retreat. Lastly, he stayed too long in Moscow.

It is no great argument against us to point out that the Russians managed to bar the way at the Beresina in the hope of cutting off his retreat. The battle showed precisely how difficult it is to achieve such an object. The conditions were the worst conceivable, but the French contrived to fight their way through all the same. This whole episode deepened the catastrophe, but did not cause it. Second, it was only the unusual nature of the country that enabled the Russians to achieve as much as they did, for if the main road had not crossed the marshes of the Beresina with their wooded, inaccessible approaches, it would have been still less feasible to cut off the French army. Third, the only possible way of guarding against that risk would be by advancing on a certain breadth of front. To that we have already objected that once we are committed to an advance in the center while leaving armies behind as flank guards to left and right, any mishap to one of these would make us withdraw our center. Nothing much could then be expected of the offensive.

Nor can it be said that Bonaparte neglected his flanks. A superior force confronted Wittgenstein. At Riga there was an adequate investing-force—which, incidentally, was superfluous; and Schwarzenberg in the south had 50,000 men, outnumbering Tormasov's and almost equaling even Chichagov's force. In addition, there was Victor with 30,000 men as a central reserve. Even at the most critical period, in November, when Russian strength had grown while the French were already very much depleted, the Russians were not yet markedly superior in the rear of the Moscow army.

Wittgenstein, Chichagov, and Sacken had 110,000 men between them. Schwarzenberg, Reynier, Victor, Oudinot, and St. Cyr together still had 80,000 men. The most cautious general on the move would hardly have given his flanks more protection than that. Of the 600,000 men who crossed the Niemen in 1812 Bonaparte might have brought a quarter-million back instead of the 50,000 who recrossed it under Schwarzenberg, Reynier, and Macdonald, if he had not committed the mistakes we blame him for; but the campaign would have been a failure just the same. There would, however, have been nothing to criticize in theory, for the loss of more than half an army in such a case is not unusual. If it strikes us as such, the reason is simply the scale of the expedition.

So much for the main operation, the form it must assume and the risks inseparable from it. As for secondary operations, we would emphasize that all have a common aim, but this aim must be such as not to paralyze the activities of the separate parts. If anyone invaded France from the upper and the middle Rhine and from Holland, intending to join up in Paris, and if each army were ordered to take no risk and preserve itself so far as possible intact until it reached its rendezvous, we would call such a plan *calamitous*. A sort of balance between the three of them would be sure to come about and cause delay, timidity, and hesitation in each. It would be better to leave each army its own mission and only insist on united action at the point where their various activities naturally coincide.

The separation of forces in order to reunite again a few days later is a feature of almost every war, but basically it is senseless. If a force is detached it should know why, and the *purpose* must be met. This purpose cannot simply consist in a subsequent reunion as if one was dancing a quadrille.

So if armies do attack in different operational theaters, each should be given a distinct objective. What *matters* is that the armies everywhere expend their full energies, not that all of them should make proportionate gains.

If one army finds its task too difficult because the enemy's defensive scheme is not what it expected, or if it runs into bad luck, the actions of the others must not be modified or a general success will be unlikely from the start. Only if most of them are unfortunate or if the principal operations fail is it right and necessary that the others should be affected. Then it is the plan itself that has gone wrong.

That rule should also be applied to armies and detachments originally given a defensive role but set free by their success to take the offensive—unless one prefers to transfer their superfluous units to the main point of the offensive. The question will principally turn on the topography of the theater of operations.

But then what becomes of the geometric form and unity of the whole attack? What happens to the flanks and rear of columns adjoining operational units? It is exactly this kind of attitude which we are especially concerned to combat. The glueing together of a major offensive into a geometrical square is to get lost in a false intellectual system.

In the fifteenth chapter of Book Three we showed that the geometric element is less effective in strategy than in tactics, and at this point we need only restate the conclusion—that actual successes at particular points, especially in the offensive, deserve much more attention than the shape that may gradually emerge from the varying fortunes of the attack at one point or another.

In any case, seeing the large areas with which strategy is concerned, the commander-in-chief can properly be left to deal with the arguments and decisions that settle the geometric pattern of the parts, and so no subordinate commander has the right to ask what his neighbor is doing or failing to do. He can be told simply to carry out his orders. If serious dislocation should really result, the supreme command can still put it right. In this way the objection to separate operations is removed—that is, the obfuscation of realities by a cloud of fears and suppositions that seeps into the actual course of events, so that every mishap affects not just the part that suffers it but, contagiously, all the rest, and personal weakness and antipathies among subordinate commanders are given ample scope.

We do not think this point of view is likely to seem paradoxical to those who have spent much time and thought on the study of military history, learned to distinguish between essentials and inessentials, and fully realize the influence of human weaknesses.

As all experienced soldiers will admit, it is difficult even from the tactical point of view to make a success of an attack in several separate columns by smoothly coordinating every part. How much more difficult, or rather, how impossible the same must be in strategy, where intervals are so much greater! If then the smooth coordination of all parts is a precondition of success, a strategic attack of that kind ought to be avoided altogether. But, on the one hand, one is never wholly free to reject it since it may be imposed by circumstances that one cannot alter; while, on the other, the smooth coordination of every part of the action from start to finish is not even necessary in tactics, let alone strategy. From the strategic point of view, then, there is all the more reason to ignore it; and it is all the more important to insist that every part be given an independent task.

We must add an important comment concerning the proper division of labor.

In 1793 and 1794 the main Austrian army was in the Netherlands, with the Prussian army on the upper Rhine. Austrian troops then marched from Vienna to Condé and Valenciennes, crossing the Prussians' route to Landau from Berlin. Admittedly, the Austrians had their Belgian provinces to defend, and they would have welcomed any conquests made in French Flanders. But that concern was not adequate reason for these arrangements, and after Prince Kaunitz's death the Austrian Minister Thugut determined to relinquish the Netherlands altogether for the sake of a better concentration of his forces. Austria is indeed almost twice as far from Flanders as from Alsace, and at a time when troops were strictly limited and their supplies had to be paid for in cash, that was no small consideration. But

Thugut had yet another point in mind. He wanted to confront Holland, England, and Prussia, the powers that had the most interest in the defense of the Netherlands and the lower Rhine, with the urgency of the danger and the need for making greater efforts. He miscalculated, because at that time there was no way to make the Prussian government change its policy; but these events show the influence that political considerations had on the course of the war.

Prussia had nothing to defend or to conquer in Alsace. Her march in 1792 through Lorraine to Champagne had been made in a spirit of chivalry, but since as things turned out that operation promised little more, she pursued the war without enthusiasm. Had the Prussian troops been in the Netherlands, they would have been next door to Holland, which they almost looked on as their own, having occupied it in 1787; they would then have covered the lower Rhine and with it the part of Prussia that was nearest the theater of operations. Through her subsidies Prussia also had a closer alliance with England, and would thus less easily have become involved in the machinations of which at that time she became guilty.

It might have been far more effective, therefore, if the Austrians had placed their main force on the upper Rhine and the Prussians theirs into the Netherlands, where Austria would only have left a modest corps.

If General Barclay had commanded the Silesian army in 1814 instead of the enterprising Marshal Blücher and Blücher had stayed with the main army under Schwarzenberg, the campaign might well have broken down completely. Again, if the enterprising Laudon had not been given Silesia, the strongest part of Prussia, as a theater of operations, but had been with the army of the Holy Roman Empire, the whole of the Seven Years War might well have turned out differently.

For a closer look at the subject, let us examine the main characteristics of the following cases.

The first is when war is being jointly waged with other powers that are not only our allies but have independent interests of their own.

The second is when an allied army comes to our assistance.

The third is when all that matters is the personalities of the commanders.

In the first two cases, the question is whether the various allied troops are better mixed, so that armies have corps of different nationalities as was done in 1813–1814, or better kept as separate as possible so that each can play an independent role. Clearly the first is the better plan; but it assumes a rare degree of friendliness and common interest. With forces integrated in that way their governments will find it much more difficult to pursue their private interests; and as for their commanders' egoism, its harmful influence can, in the circumstances, only show among the subordinate commanders—that is, in the tactical realm, and even then less freely and with less impunity than if national contingents were completely separate. In the latter case it will extend to strategy, and crucial matters will be affected. But as we have said, a rare degree of self-effacement is required of governments. Sheer necessity drove everyone in that direction in 1813. Still one cannot speak

too highly of the Czar of Russia. Although he commanded the largest army in the field and had had the greatest share in the reversal of our fortunes, he placed his forces under Prussian and Austrian generals and made no pretension to command an independent Russian force.

If forces cannot be integrated in that way, it is admittedly better to keep them completely rather than partially separate. The worst situation of all invariably results when two autonomous generals of different nationality share a theater, as was often the case with Russian, Austrian, and Imperial forces in the Seven Years War. If forces are wholly separate it is easier to divide the burdens; each army will then suffer only from its own. Circumstances will, therefore, stimulate each to greater efforts. But if they are in close contact with each other, or even in the same operational theater, that will not occur, and, what is more, if one of them does show bad faith the others will be paralyzed.

Total separation will do no harm in the first of the three cases I have sketched, for each state's natural interests will normally settle how its forces should be used. That may not be so in the second case, and in that event there is usually no choice but to place one's troops entirely at the disposal of the allied army, assuming the latter's size to be at all appropriate. The Austrians did this at the end of the campaign of 1815 as the Prussians had in 1807.

As for commanders' personal characteristics, everything depends on the individual, but one general comment must be made. Though it is often done, subordinate armies should not be put under the command of the soundest and most cautious men. The right men here are the most *enterprising* ones, for we must again insist that in separate strategic operations nothing is more important than that every part should do its best and develop its powers to the full. Any error made at one point can be set off against successes elsewhere. But maximum effort by everyone can only be ensured if all commanders are spirited, active, eager men, with a strong inner drive. Cool objective deliberation about the need for action is seldom enough.

Lastly, it remains to be said that wherever possible troops and commanders should be assigned to missions and areas appropriate to their special qualities. Regular armies, excellent troops, abundant cavalry, elderly, wise, and prudent generals should be used in open country; militia, national levies, hurriedly mobilized rabble, young and enterprising generals in wooded country, mountainous areas, and passes; and auxiliary forces in prosperous areas where they will enjoy themselves.

All we have said so far about the plans of operations in general and, in this chapter in particular, about plans intended to achieve the total defeat of the enemy, has been intended to emphasize their object and then to suggest principles to guide operational arrangements. We wished to gain a clear understanding of what we want and should do in such a war. We would emphasize the essential and general; leave scope for the individual and accidental; but remove everything *arbitrary, unsubstantiated, trivial,*

far-fetched, or supersubtle. If we have accomplished that we regard our task as fulfilled.

Should anyone be shocked at finding nothing here about how to turn a river, command a mountain area from its heights, by-pass a strong position or find the key to a whole country, he has failed to grasp our purpose; we are afraid, moreover, that he has still not understood the essential elements of war.

In previous books we have dealt with these details in a general way, and reached the conclusion that they are apt to be a great deal less important than is usually thought. The part that they can or ought to play in a war intended to defeat the enemy is even slighter. It certainly cannot affect the general plan.

The structure of supreme command will occupy a special chapter at the end of the present book.⁵ To conclude the present chapter we shall offer an example.

If Austria, Prussia, the German Confederation, the Netherlands, and England decide to make war on France, with Russia neutral—a case the last century-and-a-half has often seen—they would have capacity enough to wage an offensive war with the object of totally defeating the enemy. Large and powerful as France is, the greater part of her territory might well be overrun by hostile armies; Paris would be in enemy hands and France herself reduced to inadequate resources, with no other state but Russia able to give her really effective help. Spain is too far away and badly placed; the Italian states are still too weak and unstable. Not counting their possessions overseas the countries named have 75 million inhabitants to draw on while France has only 30 millions. At a conservative estimate the army that could take the field for a really serious attack on France could be composed as follows:

Austria	250,000 men
Prussia	200,000
The rest of Germany	150,000
The Netherlands	75,000
England	50,000
Total	725,000

If such a force were actually put into the field it would almost certainly be far superior to any that France could field against it. Under Bonaparte she never raised a force of comparable strength. Allowing for the troops required to man the fortresses and depots and to guard the coast, there can be little doubt that the allies would have a significant superiority in the principal theater; and this superiority would be the main consideration in their plan to bring about a French collapse.

The center of gravity of France lies in the armed forces and in Paris. The allied aim must, therefore, be to defeat the army in one or more major

⁵ The chapter was never written. Eds.

battles, capture Paris, and drive the remnants of the enemy's troops across the Loire. The most vulnerable area of France is that between Paris and Brussels, where the frontier is only 150 miles from the capital. That is the natural concentration area for one group of allies—England, the Netherlands, Prussia, and the North German states—all of which have territories nearby, some being actually adjacent. Austria and southern Germany can conveniently operate only from the upper Rhine, and their natural direction of attack is toward Troyes and Paris, possibly also toward Orleans. Both invasion lines, the one from the Netherlands and the other from the upper Rhine, are perfectly natural, short, unforced, and effective; and the center of gravity of France's power is where the two lines meet. Between these two points, therefore, the whole offensive force should be divided.

Only two considerations qualify the simplicity of this plan.

The Austrians will not uncover their Italian provinces. They will always wish to control the situation there, and hence they will never let matters reach a point where Italy is only indirectly covered by forces engaged in attacking the heart of France. The state of Italian politics being what it is, this Austrian concern, though secondary, is real; but it would be a great mistake to let the old and oft-attempted scheme of attacking southern France from Italy be linked with it. Austrian strength in Italy would then be raised to a far higher level than security alone would require if the first campaign met with grave reverses. Only modest numbers should remain in Italy, and nothing more should be withheld from the main offensive if the precept of all precepts is to be observed—*unity of conception, concentration of strength*. One could as easily pick up a musket by the tip of the bayonet as conquer France by way of the Rhône. But even as a supplementary operation an attack on southern France should be condemned, for it could only stimulate fresh sources of resistance. Whenever an outlying province is attacked, one stirs up concerns and activities that would otherwise have remained quiescent. An attack on southern France from Italy would not be justified unless it were obvious that the forces left in Italy were more than its security required and were, therefore, destined to be idle.

Hence, we repeat that the force to be kept in Italy must be the very smallest that conditions permit. It is large enough if it will save the Austrians from losing the whole area in one campaign. For the purpose of our illustration we shall put it at 50,000 men.

The other consideration is the coast of France. England dominates the sea; France must, therefore, be extremely sensitive about her whole Atlantic coast and she must keep some forces to defend it. However weak their coastal defenses might be, they make her frontiers three times as long and hence she must withdraw substantial forces from the theater of war. If England has 20,000 to 30,000 landing troops available to threaten France, they might perhaps immobilize two or three times as many French; and this would involve not only troops but also money, guns, etc., for the fleet and the coastal batteries. Let us assume that for this purpose the English have 25,000 men.

The plan of operations therefore in the simplest terms would be as follows:

First, for assembly in the Netherlands, 200,000 Prussians, 75,000 Netherlands, 25,000 English, 50,000 North-German Federal Troops—350,000 men.

Of these, some 50,000 would be used to garrison the frontier fortresses, which would leave 300,000 free to advance on Paris and fight a major battle against the French.

Second, 200,000 Austrians and 100,000 South-German troops would be assembled on the Rhineland. They and the Dutch would advance simultaneously toward the upper Seine and thence toward the Loire, and would also aim at a major battle. The two thrusts might perhaps be united on the Loire.

This outlines the main points. Our further remarks are chiefly intended to remove misunderstandings, and are as follows:

1. The main concern of the commanders-in-chief must be to seek the necessary major battle and fight it with such superiority of numbers, and under such conditions, as will promise decisive victory. Everything must be sacrificed to that objective and the fewest possible men should be diverted into sieges, investments, garrisons, and the like. If, like Schwarzenberg in 1814, they fan out as soon as they reach enemy soil, all will be lost. In 1814 it was only the impotence of France that saved the allies from complete disaster in the first two weeks. The attack should be like a well-hammered wedge, not a bubble that expands till it bursts.

2. Switzerland must be left to its own devices. If neutral, it forms a good *point d'appui* on the upper Rhine. If France attacks it, let it defend itself—which it can do very well in more respects than one. Nothing could be more foolish than to think that Switzerland, as the highest ground in Europe, must dominate the geographical course of the war. That influence could only operate under certain very limited conditions, which do not exist in the present case.

While the heart of France is being attacked, the French cannot mount a powerful offensive based on Switzerland against either Italy or Swabia, and least of all can the altitude of Switzerland count as a decisive factor. Any advantage from this kind of strategic domination accrues in the first place primarily to the defense, and any importance it has for the attack can only operate in the first assault. If anyone does not understand this, he has not yet thought it through. If in a future council of war some learned general staff officer should solemnly serve up this kind of wisdom, we declare it in advance to be arrant nonsense, and we hope that some tough fighting soldier, full of commonsense, will be there to shut him up.

3. The space between the two offensives is hardly worth discussing. With 600,000 men assembled only 150 or 200 miles from Paris, poised to strike at the very heart of France, need one really think about covering the upper Rhine—which means covering Berlin, Dresden, Munich, and Vienna? There would be no point in doing so. Should the lateral communications be cov-

ered? This merits some attention; but one might then logically be led to give this cover the strength and significance of another offensive. Then instead of advancing on two lines, which the location of the allied states makes unavoidable, one would find them advancing along three, which is not necessary. The three could then turn into five, or even seven, and the whole sad business would begin again.

Each of the two attacks will have its own objective and there is no doubt that the forces detailed for them will be markedly superior to the enemy's. If each attack is pressed with determination it cannot fail to benefit the other. Should one of them run into trouble because the enemy's strength has not been equally divided, it should be possible to rely on success by the other automatically to repair the damage. This is the real connection between the two armies. Seeing how far apart they are, an interdependence covering day-to-day events would not be possible. Nor is it needed; so close or, rather, direct links between the two have little value.

The enemy, assailed at the very core of his being, can spare no strength worth speaking of to disrupt the cooperation of the two offensives. The worst that can happen is that the populace, supported by raiding parties, might try to do this, and save the French from diverting regular forces for this purpose. To counter them only a corps of 10,000 to 15,000 men, strong in cavalry, need be sent out from Treves in the general direction of Rheims. It will ride roughshod over any raiding party and can keep up with the main force. It should neither watch fortresses nor invest them, but by-pass them; it should not depend on any definite base, and should retire before superior force in any direction it pleases. No great harm can befall it, and even if it did, that would be no disaster for the whole. Under these conditions such a corps might usefully serve as a link between the two offensives.

4. The two subsidiary operations—the Austrian army in Italy and the English landing force—can pursue their purposes at their discretion. Provided they are not idle, their existence will be justified, and under no condition should either of the main offensives be in any way dependent on them.

We are quite convinced that in this manner France can be brought to her knees and taught a lesson any time she chooses to resume that insolent behavior with which she has burdened Europe for a hundred and fifty years. Only on the far side of Paris, only on the Loire, can she be made to accept the conditions which the peace of Europe calls for. Nothing else will demonstrate the natural relationship between thirty millions and seventy-five. But that will certainly not be done if France is ringed by armies from Dunkirk to Genoa, as she has been for a century and a half, while fifty different small objectives are pursued, not one of them important enough to overcome the inertia, the friction, and the outside interests that always emerge, especially in allied armies, and perpetually reappear.

The reader is unlikely to misunderstand how little such a scheme fits the provisional organization of the federal German armies. By this the federal part of Germany is to form the nucleus of German power; Prussia and Austria are thus weakened and lose the preponderance they should possess.

But a federal state is a poor sort of nucleus in war time, lacking unity and vigor, without any rational way of choosing its commander, bereft of authority or responsibility.

Two natural centers of power exist in the German *Reich*—Austria and Prussia. Theirs is the genuine striking-power, theirs is the strong blade. Each is a monarchy, experienced in war. Their interests are clearly defined; they are independent powers and are preeminent above all the rest. These natural lines, not the mistaken idea of "unity," define the lines that German military organization should follow. Unity is anyhow impossible under these conditions, and the man who sacrifices the possible in search of the impossible is a fool.