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CLAUSEWITZ'S THEORY ON WAR IN THE FIGHT AGAINST INSURGENCY (COIN): IS IT STILL VALID?

Abstract

Following the bloody attacks on Washington and New York on September 11, 2001, the United States got involved in a Global War on Terror, GWOT, leading military forces to insist on dedicating most of their human resources and materials in the fight against Islamist fanaticism and extremism throughout the world, in particular in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the need to confront this specific type of adversary in these two scenarios, and within its particular context, led the armed forces to adopt a special form of military power, different from that which had traditionally been used to face a conventional adversary.

Thus, the war on insurgency (COIN) in the last decade became the main focus for the American armed forces and for those from other western countries, with multiple implications in the organizational and doctrinal fields, and, above all, in the change of mindset of its participants, more prone to combat an adversary in symmetric terms, and with the application of maximum strength combat for a rapid and total destruction. In short, it meant a change in the paradigm of the preferred use of force in the military culture, and the way to wage war by the members of Western armies, particularly of the United States.

Therefore, the adoption of what may be called the "COIN paradigm" has dominated the action of the American armed forces to fulfill their mission in Afghanistan and Iraq up to the strategic change imposed by the Obama administration in 2012, moment in which there was a redirection of priorities of the essential postulates of the security and defense policy of the United States toward the Asia-Pacific scenario.

This has led one to question the current validity of the general principles identified in armed conflicts throughout history; in other words, the fundamentals of the theory on war that have controlled the organization, preparation, and equipment of armies in the past.

This article intends to analyze the persistence of the nature of war in its traditional concept, within the context of the COIN paradigm, as the form of conflict that prevails presently. To do so, the theory of war of the famous Prussian philosopher Carl von Clausewitz, published in his major work *On War*, has been used as a basis for this study. Written during the first half of the 19th century, in light of his experiences and reflections about the Napoleonic campaigns, it is still a required reference for all studies regarding the nature of war. This theory is analyzed in view of the basic principles of today's predominant adversary: insurgency, with COIN as the strategy to combat it.

The hypothesis for the development of this analysis is that war, in the sense of the struggle between the will of two adversaries to prevail, through the use of force, has intrinsic principles and a logic that are identifiable and can also be extended to the dynamics which are characteristic of a COIN struggle. The analysis undertaken will lead to the development of conclusions regarding the degree of applicability of the premises characteristic of a theory of war, such as the one of the famous Clausewitz in the struggle against insurgency and, with it, if the theory of the brilliant Prussian is still valid in a COIN context. In short, whether the death certificate of the famous Prussian should be issued, or he is still alive and in good health.

KeyWords

Counterinsurgency (COIN), Clausewitz, war theory, asymmetric warfare, global insurgency.

CLAUSEWITZ'S THEORY ON WAR IN THE FIGHT AGAINST INSURGENCY (COIN): IS IT STILL VALID?

INSURGENCY AND THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE COIN PARADIGM

Categorizing the adversary in an armed conflict has had two main concepts. On the one hand is the regular or conventional enemy, with its armies having their organization, equipment, and doctrine adapted to their performance in the battlefield while facing an enemy with similar characteristics. On the other hand, there is another type of adversary, non-conventional or irregular, which in the last decades has been termed “asymmetric”, “terrorist”, “guerrilla”, “revolutionary”, “hybrid”, “irregular”, or even the most commonly used “insurgent”.

In the middle of the seventies, Professor Andrew Mack coined the term “asymmetric enemy”, which, as opposed to the conventional adversary, seeks its victory not through superiority on the battlefield, but by its preferred attack on the political will of the opposing side to continue the conflict, all the while avoiding open confrontation.¹ This depiction of the adversary occurs in the context of the post-Vietnam War era, and reflects the situation that the US had faced in previous years. The concept of “asymmetric conflict” then becomes popular, and finds an echo in American official documents and doctrinal publications beginning in 1995.²

Throughout the history of war, the search for the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of the adversary to exploit them to one's own benefit has been a constant feature. This form of confrontation of the weak against the strong, of David against Goliath, is as old as the history itself of armed conflicts. The work of Sen Tzu, military strategist and philosopher in ancient China, is famous. In the 5th century B.C., he referred to the advantage of avoiding a confrontation against the strengths of the adversary by making the most use of deception and deceit. This could lead to the conclusion that

1 “In every case, success for the insurgents arose not from a military victory on the ground –though military successes may have been a contributory cause – but rather from the progressive attrition of their opponents' political capability to wage war. In such asymmetric conflicts, insurgents may gain political victory from a situation of military stalemate or even defeat.” MACK, Andrew. *Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict*. World Politics, Vol. 27, Number 2, January 1975, p. 177. <http://web.stanford.edu/class/polisci211z/2.2/Mack%20WP%201975%20Asymm%20Conf.pdf> (viewed August 2, 2015).

2 The first reference in an official American document regarding asymmetric confrontation is found in the main joint doctrinal publication, Joint Publication 1. *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, published in January, 1995.

all conflicts are asymmetric by nature, based on the fact that each side always seeks to attack the weaknesses of the adversary with its own strengths.³ Furthermore, it could be argued that the US is the country with the most asymmetric armed forces in the world, insofar as no other nation can confront the military power of the US in symmetric or equal terms.⁴

Nonetheless, what gives validity to the concept of asymmetric conflict, and relevance to the subject of this article, is the preferred recourse on the part of the weaker side militarily to use innovative tactics and procedures, as opposed to the conventional ones, to compensate for its inferiority in the battlefield. This may be considered the basis for the concept of asymmetry in a conflict of war.⁵ The expert in strategy, Professor Colin S. Gray, characterizes the asymmetric threat mainly as one which uses irregular, unusual means and procedures that are not recognized by the laws and applications of war, and which try to avoid an efficient reply from our means and strategies, provoking, at the same time, a response that is disproportionate and indiscriminate.⁶

Within this conceptualization of the asymmetric adversary is where insurgency should be classified. The insurgent is the asymmetric adversary par excellence. It fundamentally seeks to undermine the will of political resistance in obtaining its objectives, by the use of means and procedures different from the ones characteristic of a confrontation in symmetric or conventional terms.

In the middle of the 20th century, the term “insurgency” begins to spread in reference to this essentially asymmetric adversary, led by different authors who may be considered as “COIN classics”.⁷ One of the most relevant is the French author David

3 BOWYER, Daren. *The Moral Dimension of Asymmetric Warfare: Accountability, Culpability and Military Effectiveness*. En Theodor VAN BAARDA y D.E.M. VERWEIJ (Eds.), *The Moral Dimension of Asymmetrical Warfare. Counterterrorism, Democratic Values, and Military Ethics*. p. 137. Leiden, The Netherlands, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009.

4 THOMAS, Timothy. *Deciphering Asymmetry's World Game*. *Military Review*, July- August 2001. p. 33. http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/thomas_asym.pdf (viewed May 2nd, 2015).

5 MCKENZIE, Kenneth. *The Revenge of the Melians: Asymmetric Threats and the Next QDR*. MacNair Paper 62, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2000. p. 95. www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ndu/mcnair62.pdf (viewed July 21st, 2015).

6 GRAY, Colin S. *Thinking Asymmetrically in Times of Terror*. *Parameters*, Spring 2002. p. 5. <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/articles/02spring/gray.htm> (viewed July 21st, 2015).

7 Among those acknowledged as “COIN classics” are Mao Tse-tung, “Ché” Guevara, General Giap, the British C.E. Caldwell, T.E. Lawrence (better known as “Lawrence of Arabia”), Sir Robert Thomson, and Frank Kitson; and the French Roger Trinquier and David Galula. More recently, for the study of the development of the modern COIN paradigm, the Australian David Kilcullen, and the Americans John Nagl, David Ucko, Gian Gentile, Fred Kaplan, and General David Petraeus are required references.

Galula,⁸ who, in the sixties, wrote two works about his experience in the war of Algeria against the insurgency, which would have great repercussion in this area.⁹ For Galula, the essential purpose of COIN is to articulate “a reaction against insurgency”,¹⁰ which is why it is essential to know its procedures and purpose, in short, its final objective, to combat it effectively.

This final objective will always have an essential characteristic: its political nature. The insurgent activity always has an ultimate trait: an objective which may be generically described as political. This political objective may take different forms in order to satisfy religious, ethnic, or ideological demands, among others. It differs from other types of violence that are for mere economic enrichment, and are simply considered as organized crime.¹¹

Thus, the insurgents will try to subvert the existing political and social regime to alter the status quo through subversion, political action, insurrection, armed violence, and terrorism.¹² Every insurgent movement has its own objectives, whether it be the establishment of an independent nation-state from an occupying power, or to constitute a sort of Caliphate or an Islamist-type state, among others. In any case, the use of violence on the part of the insurgency will always have a common denominator: its political aim. It may be asserted that this is the fundamental characteristic of the insurgency.

After studying the literature of the COIN classics, as well as other relevant authors in this field, we may conclude that there are two defining characteristics of the insurgency with respect to other types of violence. On the one hand, is the use of tactics, techniques, and procedures different from the conventional ones, with contempt toward the laws and usage of war. On the other hand, is the need to have a population with similar interests that gives ideological support and materials to the insurgency and that constitutes, at the same time, the new battlefield where the conflict takes place.

Among the tactics, techniques and procedures that define the actions of modern insurgency, terrorism is the most common form of violence. The preferred objectives are found among the civilian population to cause a psychological impact and terror on

8 Galula has been referred to as “the COIN Clausewitz” in acknowledgement to the enormous influence his ideas have had for the composition of the modern COIN paradigm.

9 These works are “Pacification in Algeria 1956-1958”, written in 1963, and “Counterinsurgency Warfare”, in 1964, with the latter being the most relevant.

10 GALULA, David. *Counterinsurgency Warfare. Theory and Practice*. New York, Praeger Publishers, 2005. p. 43. (Original work published in 1964).

11 STEVEN, Graeme. y GUNARATNA, Rodham. *Counterterrorism: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA, ABC-CLIO Inc., 2004. p. 4.

12 KILCULLEN, David. *Countering Global Insurgency*. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4, August 2005, p. 603. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01402390500300956> (viewed October 15, 2014).

the community or society an objective with a disproportionate impact relative to the physical effects of its actions.¹³

Terrorism has been a form of violence widely used in the last decades,¹⁴ but which has reached an unprecedented degree with the attacks on September 11, 2001 in the US, and on March 11, 2004 in Madrid, among others. Terrorism, in the hands of the insurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq, within the context of the COIN operations carried out by the Western military forces in the past decade, has also found a new stage.

The second central characteristic of the insurgency is its appearance within the context of a specific sector of the population, of a given social group identified by its religious or ideological peculiarities, from which it receives support and which is the model of its actions. Mao Tse-tung referred to this reality when he declared that the insurgency must live “like fish in water”, referring metaphorically to the supporting social group that the insurgent necessarily needs to be able to carry out his actions.¹⁵

This led Sir Rupert Smith, retired British General with ample military experience, to assert that the current conflicts are “wars amongst the people”, with the battlefield blended among the civilian population, and in which this population is the objective to be attacked as well as to be defended.¹⁶

Given the *raison d'être* of COIN to counteract an insurgency,¹⁷ these characteristics which can be considered distinctive of an insurgent movement are, likewise, essential for the conceptualization of COIN. Furthermore, they serve to identify the two schools traditionally acknowledged for their approach in fighting against the insurgency.

13 REINARES, Fernando. *Terrorism and Anti-terrorism*. Barcelona, Paidós, 1998. p. 15.

14 Since the end of the 19th century, four “waves” or phases in the demonstration of the terrorist phenomenon must be discerned. The first is the “anarchist wave”, which would last about four decades since 1880. Following was the “anti-colonial wave”, which became apparent until the decade of the sixties, within the context of the wars of independence. The third was the “wave of the new left”, practically extinguished at the end of the nineties. And presently, we find ourselves in the last wave or “religious wave”. RAPOPORT, David. *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism*. En CRONIN, Audrey Kurth y LUDES, James M. (Eds.). *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*. Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press, 2004. p. 46-73.

15 MAO TSE-TUNG. *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Translated by Samuel B. Griffith. Champaign, IL, University of Illinois Press, 1961. See Chapter 6, “The Political Problems of Guerrilla Warfare”, pp. 88-93.

16 SMITH, Sir Rupert. *The Utility of Force. The Art of War in the Modern World*. London, The Penguin Group, 2005. p. 3.

17 David Kilcullen, principal advisor in COIN to General Petraeus in Iraq, in 2007 and 2008, and later to the American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and presently considered an authority for the study of COIN, has defined “counterinsurgency” as “the set of measures adopted to suppress an insurgency”, which are of a military, political, economic, diplomatic, and psychological nature. KILCULLEN, David. *Counter-insurgency Redux*. *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 48:4, 30 Nov 2006, pp. 111-130. http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/counterinsurgency_redux.pdf (viewed August 14, 2014).

On the one hand, is the enemy-centric school, which interprets the fight against the insurgency in terms of application of military strength over insurgent elements and cells to neutralize or physically destroy them. On the other hand, the “population-centric” model considers the main focus of COIN to be protecting the population, and on gaining its acquiescence toward the counterinsurgent cause, thus depriving the insurgency of the support of the population.¹⁸

These are two different ways to interpret COIN; the first one more focused on counterterrorist actions and of direct action with the use of force, and the second, directed at nation-building tasks and of cooperation with the civilian population. Nonetheless, a COIN campaign always combines elements from both, changing even the priority of one COIN model to the other throughout time.¹⁹

This was the case of the Vietnam War, in which a COIN strategy, based on search and destroy operations, preferred by General Westmoreland, chief of the American forces in Vietnam, later evolved to a winning hearts and minds strategy with Westmoreland's successor, General Abrams.

CLAUSEWITZ AND THE ERRONEOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF HIS THEORY ON WAR

Clausewitz's theory on war has been and is “frequently quoted, rarely read, and understood very few times”.²⁰ There is a series of preconceived conceptual associations that identify Clausewitz's theory with the traditional and conventional theory of waging war, such that both concepts are referred to synonymously. Similarly, Clausewitz has been described by the famous British strategist and historian Sir Basil Liddell Hart as the “apostle of total war”, ascribing to his theory a preference for total war.²¹ Neither view reflects the truth about Clausewitz's thinking.

18 See SPRINGER, Nathan for a wide study of the characteristics of one and the other models of COIN, and the consequences of its application in Afghanistan. *Stabilizing the Debate between Population-Centric and Enemy-Centric Counterinsurgency: Success Demands a Balanced Approach*. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011. www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA547334 (viewed August 4, 2015).

19 U.S. GOVERNMENT. *Counterinsurgency Guide*, January 2009, p. 15. Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf> (viewed August 4, 2015).

20 FRANKLIN, William. *Clausewitz on Limited Wars*. *Military Review*, June 1967. Págs. 23-29. <http://www.clausewitz.com/bibl/Franklin-ClausewitzOnLimitedWar.pdf> (viewed July 22, 2015).

21 BASSFORD, Christopher. *John Keegan and the Grand Tradition of Trashing Clausewitz*. *War and History*, v.1, no. 3, November 1994. <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Keegan/> (viewed July 21, 2015).

There is a tendency to identify Clausewitz's arguments with a confrontation between contenders of equal capacity, with a symmetric conflict, in conventional terms. This argument has been used by some authors to conclude the non-applicability of Clausewitz's theory to the new paradigm of the current asymmetric conflict and the irregular war.²²

Other authors, although conceding that the essence of Clausewitz's theory has remained valid throughout decades, consider that the recent revolutionary changes in materials and technology require its revision and update.²³

An essential feature of Clausewitz's theory of war is that it was conceived without the prescriptive nature of other theories which, at that time, offered formulae and recipes for success in armed conflict.

Thus, the strategic models of von Bülow and Jomini, prominent military thinkers at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, were based on geometric systems of advance lines and seizure of key geographic sites,²⁴ whose systematic application would necessarily lead to victory in an armed conflict.

In the case of Jomini,²⁵ he sets forth the annihilation of the adversary's armed forces as a sure way to obtain victory,²⁶ through the implementation of these basically systematic formulations. Thus, in these formulations, it is not possible to speak of the "art" of war, reducing its practice to a "science". Likewise, for von Bülow, the formula for success was based on the use of massive force and maximum firepower, such that the side that was able to apply these principles would necessarily be victorious. Military talent and genius became irrelevant.²⁷

The popularity that these theories enjoyed at that time was the reason that, around the middle of the 19th century, the appearance of Clausewitz's work did not generate

22 "Asymmetrical wars do not fit in with either Clausewitz's concept of war between basically equal parties or the traditional concept of international humanitarian law." PFANNER, Toni. *Asymmetrical Warfare from the Perspective of Humanitarian Law and Humanitarian Action*. International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 87, Nr 857, March 2005, p. 158. http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/irrc_857_pfanner.pdf (viewed in May, 2014).

23 "Although Clausewitz' basic and most important theories are as valid today as they were when first set down on paper, the growing political, economic, and technological complexities of the modern world require the updating of his theories." HANDEL, Michael I. (Ed.) *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*. London, Frank Cass, 1989. p. 10.

24 MARINI, Alberto. *De Clausewitz a Mao Tse-tung*. Pleamar, Buenos Aires, 1981. p. 44.

25 "Jomini also wrote of discovering 'secrets' and 'keys' to victory and, indeed, to the whole science of war." ECHEVARRIA, Antulio J. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*. Oxford University Press. New York, 2007. p. 15.

26 NAGL, John A. *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife. Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Chicago, IL, The University of Chicago Press, 2005. p. 18.

27 ECHEVARRIA. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*. Op. Cit. p. 14.

many followers, given the preference at the moment for the theories that formulated principles or recipes to guarantee the success of war.²⁸ Nonetheless, it may be considered that those theories based on reliable formulas for victory were invalidated with the passing of time, due to the changing nature of the context where the armed conflict took place. This is not the case in Clausewitz, whose ambition was to obtain a “revolution in the theory of war”, basing his conception of the war phenomenon on the combination of his personal experiences, rigorous logic, and the analysis of historical examples.

A second argument set forth by Clausewitz's critics has to do with his ascribed preference for “total war”. In fact, in the first half of the 20th century, Clausewitz already had fierce critics, such as Basil Liddell Hart. This influential British thinker attributed to the Prussian writer the indirect responsibility for the tragedy that was World War I, due to the prevalence of Clausewitz's theses on the military thinking of the time, and the erroneous interpretation that the British military leaders had made of the concept of “total war” in Clausewitz's work.

This preference of the military strategists for the supposed “totalitarian” vision of war by Clausewitz would have been the direct cause of the appalling carnage of trench warfare, and the death of millions of combatants in the Great War.²⁹

Clausewitz has been misinterpreted as the proponent of a theory for “total war”, which could be attributed to an erroneous interpretation of his concept of “absolute war”. The North American professor and historian Antulio Echevarria, acknowledged as one of the most prominent experts in the work of the brilliant Prussian writer, has studied this point, arguing that the concept of “absolute war” set forth by Clausewitz in his work is actually associated with an endless escalation in the use of resources for conflict, which is unfeasible due to the inherent finite nature of the resources. Nonetheless, this concept has often been wrongly identified with “total war”,³⁰ a concept which Clausewitz does not even mention in his work.³¹ The total war undertaken by

28 “To Clausewitz, war was a messy affair that could not be reduced to a set of lessons or laws. Its uniqueness lay in its complexity, which could only be comprehended by the military genius. It is for this reason that Jomini's work, as well as that of other theorists who attempted to reduce war to a set of ‘principles’ that would guarantee success, was more popular than that of ‘On War’.” HANDEL. *Op. Cit.* p. 2.

29 “And Liddell Hart's sustained attacks bore fruit. For well over a generation, Clausewitz's reputation in the West was the one that Liddell Hart had conjured up: the ‘Mahdi of Mass,’ the ‘apostle of total war,’ the ‘evil genius of military thought,’ the man whose ‘gospel’ had been ‘accepted everywhere as true’ and was directly responsible for the pointless carnage of the First World War.” BASSFORD. John Keegan and the Grand Tradition of Trashing Clausewitz. *Op. Cit.*

30 ECHEVARRIA. Clausewitz and Contemporary War. *Op. Cit.* p. 40.

31 “The last [category of war], ‘total war,’ while widely attributed to Clausewitz, does not appear in *On War* at all and is in fact completely antithetical to his approach.” BASSFORD, Christopher. Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America. New York, Oxford University Press, 1994. <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Cworks/Works.htm> (viewed August 6, 2015).

Hitler's Germany has little to do with the idea of absolute war in Clausewitz's theory.

It was in the past decade when different prestigious authors, strategists, and academicians put an end to "Clausewitz's era" of war,³² upon the appearance of a new diffuse, irregular threat, different from that of conventional armies, and which led to a different way to conceive and wage war, apart from the one that traditionally characterized armed conflict. Among the most recent critics are the historian Martin van Creveld, for whom the new conflicts have rendered the classic theories by Clausewitz obsolete;³³ the strategist Edward Luttwak, who sees Clausewitz's model surpassed in the current period of "post-heroic war";³⁴ and Steven Metz, who considers it necessary to overcome the North American philosophy of war, predominantly Clausewitzian, to be able to carry out the indispensable transformation of its military forces.³⁵

On this issue, to evaluate the relevance of Clausewitz's theory in relation to the COIN paradigm, which is, and will likely be, the preferred method of the American armed forces and, by extension, of its Western allies, one needs to examine the following: Clausewitz's ideas regarding insurgency and irregular war, and, those considered to be core principles of Clausewitz's theory in relation to COIN.

IRREGULAR WAR IN CLAUSEWITZ'S WORK

Before the publication of the work that made him immortal, *On War*, Clausewitz had already shown interest for the study of guerrilla warfare. In his lectures given at the War College of Berlin in 1811, he stated his conclusions to the analysis of the rebellion in la Vendée in 1793-1796, the insurrection in the Tyrol in 1809, and above all, the Spanish War of Independence starting in 1808, which caused him to be labeled as

32 Complete work on Clausewitz and the school of thought regarding the new wars in SCHUURMAN, Bart. Clausewitz and the "New Wars" Scholars. *Parameters*, Spring 2010. <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/2010spring/40-1-2010schuurman.pdf> (viewed on July 24, 2015).

33 "The present volume also has a message – namely, that contemporary 'strategic' thought is rooted in a 'Clausewitzian' world-picture that is either obsolete or wrong." VAN CREVELD, Martin. *The Transformation of War*. New York, Free Press, 1991. p. ix.

34 "Both [Napoleon's and Clausewitz's models] were fully appropriate to the circumstances of the two world wars and also of the Cold War as far as the planning of non-nuclear operations was concerned. Neither fits present circumstances, domestic or international." LUTTWAK, Edward N. *Toward Post-Heroic Warfare*. *Foreign Affairs*, May/ June 1995, p. 3. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/50977/edward-n-luttwak/toward-post-heroic-warfare> (viewed July 24, 2015).

35 METZ, Steven. *A Wake for Clausewitz: Toward a Philosophy of 21st-Century Warfare*. *Parameters*, Winter 1994-95, pp. 126-132. <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Metz.htm> (viewed July 22, 2015).

one of the first theoreticians on national liberation wars.³⁶ The Spanish case was put forward by Clausewitz in 1812 as an example to follow to liberate Prussia from the occupation carried out by the Napoleonic forces, upon the inability to defeat them on open ground, presenting the situation in Spain as a model to be followed for the mobilization of all the nation's resources in the struggle for independence.³⁷

In *On War*, Clausewitz dedicates a short chapter to what he calls “The People in Arms”,³⁸ within the part dedicated to defense. This situation unfolds due to the incapacity of the regular forces to defend the territory against an invading army. The guerrilla forces should avoid the confrontation against the main body of this invading army, harassing it and denying its control of certain areas of the territory.³⁹ Thus, Clausewitz considers the use of guerrilla warfare in the context of conventional warfare, in view of the defeat of the regular forces, as a last resource, and always in coordination with their actions.⁴⁰

Over a century later, Mao captured the essence of this Clausewitzian concept. The employment of guerrilla warfare as a step prior to the constitution of regular forces, organized on the basis of and as evolution of the guerrilla forces, which are the ones that will finally obtain victory, presumes Mao's belief that the application of military force represented “the last stage of revolutionary warfare”.⁴¹ Thus, the guerrilla forces should evolve in the context of revolutionary struggle toward armed formations of great significance, with the ultimate aim the creation of a regular army.⁴² For Mao,

36 “It is safe to say, then, that biographically and intellectually ‘people's war’ was at the heart of Clausewitz's career.” DAASE, Christopher. Clausewitz and Small Wars. In: STRACHAN y HERBERG-ROTHE. Op. Cit. p. 183.

37 *Ibid.* p. 190.

38 CLAUSEWITZ, Carl Von. *On War*. Edited and Translated by Michael HOWARD and Peter PARET. New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1984. See Book Six “Defense”, Chapter Twenty-Six “The People in Arms”. pp. 479-483. Historians Michael Howard and Peter Paret have been acknowledged as two of the best experts in Clausewitz's work.

39 “Militia and bands of armed civilians cannot and should not be employed against the main enemy force- or indeed against any sizable enemy force. They are not supposed to pulverize the core but to nibble at the shell and around the edges. They are meant to operate in areas just outside the theater of war – where the invader will not appear in strength – in order to deny him these areas altogether.” *Ibid.* p. 480.

40 “For Clausewitz, guerrilla warfare was a strategy to be employed only if the regular armed forces were defeated. Furthermore, it should be executed in close coordination with the regular armed forces.” HANDEL. Op. Cit. p. 16.

41 “Although Mao employed every technique he could devise to shift the correlation of forces, he knew that the final destruction of the Nationalist government would depend on a maneuver campaign by conventional forces: ‘The concept that guerrilla warfare is an end in itself and that guerrilla activities can be divorced from those of the regular forces is incorrect.’” HAMMES, Thomas X. *The Sling and the Stone. On War in the 21st Century*. St. Paul, MN, Zenith Press, 2004. p. 54.

42 “... Mao always regarded the ultimate aim as the creation of a regular army capable of meeting

therefore, guerrilla warfare is nothing but the initial stage of revolutionary strategy.⁴³

Likewise, this argument is adopted by “Ché” Guevara for whom the final victory will only be possible when the guerrilla army evolves to reach the characteristics of a regular army.⁴⁴ In Indochina, and later in the Vietnam war, General Giap, chief of the military forces of North Vietnam, who led the struggle first against the French, and later against the Americans, adopted the three stages defined by Mao, but gave priority to military operations with conventional forces rather than the strictly guerrilla forces. Thus, Giap launched several attacks with ample deployment of the regular forces, such as the campaign of the Red River Delta against the French in 1951, and against the Americans in South Vietnam in the Tet offensive in 1968, and the Easter offensive in 1972.⁴⁵ With this he seemed to look for a short-cut to the revolutionary process, moving forward the achievement of the third stage of confrontation in operations that may be considered conventional.

Therefore, it can be proven that Clausewitz not only dedicated his work and academic activity to the idiosyncrasy of irregular war and insurgency, but also that the main actors in the sphere of insurgency such as Mao Tse-tung, “Ché” Guevara and General Giap seemed to adopt Clausewitzian principles in their guerrilla activity.

TOWARDS A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COIN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CLAUSEWITZ’S THEORY

On reaching this point, it is necessary to now study the two aspects which may be considered central and distinctive of Clausewitz’s theory on war, analyzing if they are still relevant in light of new times and the COIN struggle. These two pillars of the Clausewitzian theory are, on the one hand, the subordination of war to political ends, with the famous maxim “war is the continuation of politics by other means” as an es-

and defeating opponents on the conventional battlefield.” Ver Chapter 4, “Mao Tse- Tung and Revolutionary Warfare”, en BECKETT, Ian F. W. *Modern Insurgencies and Counter- Insurgencies. Guerrillas and their Opponents Since 1750*. New York, Routledge, 2001. p. 73.

43 “These guerrilla operations, established by Mao Tse-tung, must not be considered as an independent form of warfare. They are but one step in the total war, just one aspect of the revolutionary struggle.” VAN BAARDA y VERWEIJ D.E.M. *Op. Cit.* p. 387.

44 “It is well established that guerrilla warfare is a phase in war which does not have in itself opportunities to obtain victory, and is furthermore, one of the primary phases of war, and that it will proceed and develop until the Guerrilla Army, in its constant growth, acquires the characteristics of a Regular Army [...] Victory will always be the product of a Regular Army, even though its origins may be those of a Guerrilla Army”. GUEVARA, Ernesto “Ché”. *La Guerra de Guerrillas. (Guerrilla Warfare)* Centro de Estudios “Ché Guevara”. Nueva York, Ocean Sur, 2006. p. 7.

45 BECKETT. *Op. Cit.* p. 80.

sential paradigm in its conception.⁴⁶ And, on the other hand, the identification of the “trinity” represented by hostility and passion, chance and probability, and purpose, associated respectively to the people, to the military, and to the government, as core aspects or tendencies that constitute the nature of the phenomenon of war.⁴⁷

The interpretation of these two core aspects of Clausewitzian thinking in light of a COIN context will lead to conclusions about the survival of the theses of the Prussian philosopher about the preferential conflicts at the beginning of this 21st century, practically two centuries after the formulation of his theory.

War as a political act

Clausewitz considers war as an essential political act, as an instrument of policy, to whose end war is a subordinated effort.⁴⁸ This may be considered as the central argument of Clausewitz's theory and his fundamental contribution to the thinking about the nature of war: in short, his “Copernican revolution”.⁴⁹ Thus, the fundamental message of his work is the primacy of politics in the act of war, this being the central and defining element of the nature of war.⁵⁰ Consequently a “political determinism” can be seen in his theory, in the way that the social, cultural, economic, ethical, and other circumstances, involved in the war conflict are inevitably conditioned by politics.⁵¹

46 “... war is only a branch of political activity; that it is in no sense autonomous [...] The only source of war is politics [...] 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.” CLAUSEWITZ. *Op. Cit.* p. 605. See Book Eight, Chapter Six, “B. War is an Instrument of Policy”. pp. 605-610. See also Book One, Chapter One, paragraph 24. “War is Merely the Continuation of Policy by other Means”. p. 87.

47 “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.” CLAUSEWITZ. *Op. Cit.* p. 89.

48 “...war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.” CLAUSEWITZ. *Op. Cit.* p. 87.

49 HANDEL. *Op. Cit.* p. 7.

50 ECHEVARRIA, Antulio J. Globalization and the Nature of War. Strategic Studies Institute, March 2003. p. 5. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub215.pdf> (viewed March 24, 2014).

51 ECHEVARRIA. Clausewitz and Contemporary War. p. 84.

Nonetheless, this premise is questioned by some authors. The historian John Keegan affirms that war has basically cultural and religious reasons, leaving political considerations subordinated to them.⁵² Another of Clausewitz's notable critics, Martin van Creveld, believes that affirming that war serves the interests of politics is to imply rationality in the action of the nation-state through war, which is contrary to the intrinsic irrationality of war; this would invalidate this principle; thus, for van Creveld, war and politics can never be compatible.⁵³

Regarding the above, Antulio Echavarría holds that the phenomenon of war as it is taking place in the age of globalization is still basically a political fact, this being the essence of the nature of war.⁵⁴ It is precisely its consideration as a form of doing politics that explains the changes in the way of carrying out confrontations of war throughout history; changes that are due to the necessity to adapt to the political purposes of every moment.⁵⁵

The conceptualization of war as an action subordinated to political activity is at the epicenter of modern theories of civil-military relations, understood as the interaction among political and military leaders in the nation-state.⁵⁶ According to these, the political power should exercise the so-called "civil control" over the military power, which is its subordinate. According to the "normal" theory of civil-military relations proposed by Samuel Huntington in 1957 in his famous work *The Soldier and the State* as the desirable form of interaction among political and military leaders, the civil and military spheres should each keep to its own sphere of autonomy, with interference by either power undesirable, but in any case assuming the primacy of the civil power over the military power.⁵⁷

The Huntington theory about civil-military relations has prevailed over other theories that defend alternative forms of interaction between the two spheres and diverse

52 KEEGAN, John. *A History of Warfare*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. pp. 24, 46.

53 VAN CREVELD. *Op. Cit.* pp. 33-62, 124-126.

54 "War is foremost a political act and that policy alone determines (or ought to determine) the object for which a war is to be fought, the scale of effort to be exerted, and the means to be employed. Since policy gives war purpose and direction, so the reasoning goes, it forms the central element in war's nature." ECHEVARRÍA. *Globalization and the Nature of War*. *Op. Cit.* p. 5.

55 "The fact that war was not an independent thing, but a sub-concept of politics also helped explain why its nature was so variable: war took on different forms over time to serve the diverse political purposes that call it into being." ECHEVARRÍA. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*. *Op. Cit.* p. 69.

56 The concept of "civil-military relations" must be differentiated, in the terms referred, from that of civil-military cooperation, CIMIC. The latter related to the actions of collaboration and cooperation that military chiefs establish at all levels, to support the fulfillment of their mission, with the civil actors in general, with the local population and its authorities, as well as with national organizations, non-governmental, civil agencies and organizations. The sphere of CIMIC is, therefore, more ample than that of civil-military relations.

57 HUNTINGTON, Samuel. *The Soldier and the State. The Theory and Politics of Civil- Military Relations* (19a. Ed.). Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002. (Original work published in 1957).

expressions of the principle of “civilian control” over the military, but which under no circumstances questions the subordination of the latter to the aims of political power. The agreement between the basic principle of civil-military relations in the Western world and the central thesis of the Clausewitzian thought may, therefore, be confirmed: the subordination of war to the ends of politics.

Nonetheless, the possibilities new technologies provide nowadays, applied to the command and control systems to carry out military operations, allow for a detailed follow-up and in real time, by the civil authorities, of everything taking place in the operations zone. This imposes new demands from the leadership of war, by allowing a detailed and minute by minute supervision of the execution of the actions carried out by military forces in the field, to levels inconceivable decades ago. This leaves an open door to interference, not always desirable, by the political authorities down to the lowest levels, provoking at the same time inevitable tensions in the civil-military relations. As a last resort, it is the military command, and not the civilian leaders, who are the “managers of violence”,⁵⁸ and as such, should be able to undertake this task with due autonomy. But always in accordance with the guidelines emanating from the political power, as Clausewitz himself hastened to add.

In addition to the above is the aversion of Western public opinion toward their own casualties and the collateral damages among the population, which is a fundamental reason for the growing political control of military operations carried out in these conflicts, which in turn is favored by the tools that new telecommunications and information technologies bring within reach for “micromanagement” of the theatre of theater from the highest levels. The latter, along with the extension in time of military intervention, which is characteristic of stabilization operations carried out, brings as a result the adjustment of political aims of military action, to adapt them to the changing situation, and thus allow for an “exit strategy” that puts an end to the intervention, as has been recently demonstrated in both scenarios.

On the other hand, political power can move “hostile passions” of public opinion in support of the ends of war more easily than in days gone by, thanks to the possibilities offered by globalization, a distinctive trait of the current world. At the same time, globalization offers possibilities unknown until now, such that insurgent and terrorist groups can coordinate and, above all, spread their actions, thanks to new technologies and the advent of social communications and social media. Likewise, this globalization facilitates the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or other new means of aggression, such as cyberwar.⁵⁹ In short, although the political power may make the most of the advantages of globalization in its struggle against insurgency, the latter can take advantage of the new possibilities it offers. All of this must be taken in the context that war has been, is, and will continue to be an essentially political act.

58 HERSPRING, Dale. *The Pentagon and the Presidency. Civil-Military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush*. Lawrence, KS, University Press of Kansas, 2005. p. 6.

59 ECHEVARRIA. *Globalization and the Nature of War*. Op. Cit. p. 21.

From the point of view of the irregular or insurgent adversary, the essentially political nature characteristic of the activity of these groups previously set forth goes beyond mere criminal activity with lucrative purposes. For Mao Tse-tung, guerrilla warfare must have a defined political end in order to attain victory, in what may be considered a clear influence of Clausewitz's theories.⁶⁰

In fact, Mao directly quotes the Prussian philosopher in one of his essays, his influence noticeable even in the Maoist sentence: "politics is war without bloodshed; war is politics with bloodshed".⁶¹ The preeminence of the political factor for Mao is obvious.

The global insurgency represented by jihadist groups, despite their decentralized activities, has a clear political direction that provides the ultimate aim of their actions, and makes their center of gravity of a political and ideological nature, more than a physical one.⁶² The fatwa or edict proclaimed by Osama bin Laden in 1998, by which he called the jihad or "holy war against the Crusaders and Zionists",⁶³ is an example of the religious and political powers that the leader of Al-Qaeda appropriated for himself.⁶⁴ And the answer from the US to the dramatic attacks of 9/11, organized by the Bush administration around the declaration of "war on terrorism", endorses the political nature of the American reaction. The mere usage of the term "GWOT" indicated the intended political dimension of the American reply to the new threat.⁶⁵

Therefore, it may be asserted that the armed confrontation in the GWOT, later called the Long War, in which the COIN operations took place, is determined by the essentially political nature of the aims of its adversaries.⁶⁶ The US military operations

60 "As the first practitioner to define insurgency, Mao, like Clausewitz, understood that war is fundamentally a political undertaking." HAMMES. *Op. Cit.* p. 51.

61 BECKETT. *Op. Cit.* p. 73.

62 "Jihadist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, might well have decentralized cells and other sympathetic organizations operating globally, if somewhat autonomously. Nonetheless, a certain political unity can be found in their avowed hatred of apostasy and secularism." ECHEVARRIA. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War. Op. Cit.* p. 186.

63 After his fatwa in 1996, declaring war on the American forces that occupied the Holy Sites in Saudi Arabia, in 1998 Bin Laden also published a second fatwa in a London newspaper to declare the holy war or jihad against the Crusaders and Zionists. This second fatwa appeared signed by Osama bin Laden, leader of Al-Qaeda; Ayman al-Zawahiri, then leader of the group Egyptian Jihad; and various other leaders of radical Islamist groups. BIN LADEN, Osama. Declaration of War against the Crusaders and Zionists. *Al Quds Al Arabi*, February 23, 1998. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-jan-june98-fatwa_1998/ (viewed July 21st, 2015).

64 Bin Laden issued a fatwa calling for jihad, indicating that bin Laden claimed religious authority (necessary to issue a fatwa) and political authority as a Muslim ruler (needed to issue a call to jihad)." KILCULLEN. *Countering Global Insurgency. Op. Cit.* p. 598.

65 *Ibid.* p. 597.

66 "Both the United States and al-Qaeda are clearly using, or attempting to use, armed force to achieve ends that are as political as they are religious or secular in nature." ECHEVARRIA. *Clausewitz and the Nature of the War on Terror. Op. Cit.* p. 213.

and those of its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan have been led by a clear political aim, as well as that of its opponents, which allows the assertion that it was a “Clausewitzian conflict”.⁶⁷

The Trinitarian concept in COIN

The second aspect considered distinctive of Clausewitz's theory refers to the existence of three participating forces in war, the so-called “trinity”:⁶⁸ hostility and passion; chance and probability; and purpose, represented, respectively, by the people, the army, and the government. They are the three main aspects that form the phenomenon of warfare.⁶⁹ They act in a concurrent fashion, with a cause-effect relation among them, with the performance of each one influencing the others, and thus explaining the dynamism of the phenomenon of warfare throughout time. Likewise, they all contribute to define a “universe of war” characterized by violence, danger, friction, uncertainty, and physical effort.⁷⁰

According to Colin S. Gray, Clausewitz aspired to give birth to a general theory on war that could be applied to both regular and irregular warfare.⁷¹ The dynamic nature of warfare, as a consequence of the performance of the forces that take part in Clausewitz's conception of the trinity, makes unviable a prescriptive approximation to a theory of war that intends to be valid in a general way.⁷² This may be considered a

67 “The 9/11 attacks may have changed the character and even the nature of war. However, much of what happened thereafter, and especially the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, does not support that proposition. Armed forces were used by the United States and Britain in the pursuit of political objectives: the actions of both governments were Clausewitzian in the most hackneyed sense.” STRACHAN y HERBERG-ROTHE. Op. Cit. p. 4.

68 With the term “Trinity”, the Prussian philosopher intended to put emphasis, on the one hand, on the distinctive nature of each one of these three aspects, but on the other hand, their belonging to an indivisible whole, the phenomenon of war, is a metaphor about the conception of the Holy Trinity in the Christian religion. See ECHEVARRIA. Clausewitz and Contemporary War. Op. Cit. p. 70.

69 “Clausewitz's wondrous trinity captures the principal tendencies or forces at work in war by bringing them together in the form of a brilliant synthetic metaphor.” ECHEVARRIA. Clausewitz and the Nature of the War on Terror. Op. Cit. p. 204.

70 ECHEVARRIA. Clausewitz and Contemporary War. Op. Cit. p. 74.

71 “A general theory of war and strategy, such as that offered by Clausewitz and in different ways also by Sun-tzu and Thucydides, is a theory with universal applicability. Because war and strategy are imperially authoritative concepts that accommodate all relevant modalities, a single general theory of war and strategy explains both regular and irregular warfare.” GRAY, Colin S. Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt? Strategic Studies Institute, March 2006. p. 4. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB650.pdf> (viewed July 21st, 2015).

72 “In a perfect world, understanding the nature of war would preclude attempts to use armed conflict to achieve

decisive factor when validating Clausewitz's theory as a model for the understanding of the current phenomenon of war. Thus, one mustn't look for an infallible formula for victory in a COIN context in the Clausewitzian theory, although one may consider if there are aspects in this theory that are applicable in the mentioned context, increasingly more frequent in current conflicts.

Regarding irregular wars, some authors do not acknowledge the validity of the trinitarian concept of war, because they consider these undertaken outside the framework of the nation-states, scope to which the trinity would be limited.⁷³ Given that the non-state actors wage war in a completely different way than the one undertaken by the states, we find the concept of "non-trinitarian war",⁷⁴ set forth by van Creveld as a way to discredit the validity of the Clausewitzian theory of war within the sphere of the GWOT.⁷⁵ Additionally, the existence of the war phenomenon is hardly acceptable outside the scope of the nation-states, to whom the monopoly of war has normally been attributed, which has constituted the norm since the signing of the Peace of Westphalia practically four centuries ago.⁷⁶

There is also a technocentric approach when representing this trinitarian viewpoint, which advocates the inclusion of a fourth dimension or determining element in the nature of the current war, which is the "material" component, derived from the recent technological revolution.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that in guerrilla warfare,

something it cannot. It would alert us to the fallacy of developing rigid, one-sided theories or formulae that purport to guarantee victory. The nature of war, as Clausewitz presented it, and which history validates, is too dynamic for that." ECHEVARRIA Antulio J. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*. P. 77.

73 "The fact that nearly all the wars that have been fought in the last 15 years or so have had states involved on no more than one side (frequently the losing side) changes everything." LIND William S., SCHMITT John F., and others. "Fourth Generation Warfare: Another Look". Marine Corps Gazette, December 1994, pp. 34-37. <http://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/4Th%20GENERATION%20WARFARE%20ANOTHER%20LOOK.pdf> (viewed October 15th, 2014).

74 OSINGA, Frans. On Boyd, Bin Laden, and Fourth Generation Warfare as String Theory. On New Wars, 26 June 2007, p. 10. Oslo. http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/boyd/osinga_4gw_boyd_copyright2007.pdf (viewed in May, 2014).

75 "The War on Terror is precisely the kind of conflict that scholars, such as van Creveld, wrongly refer to as 'non-trinitarian' on the grounds that it does not fit within Clausewitz's concept of the trinity." ECHEVARRIA. Clausewitz and the Nature of the War on Terror. Op. Cit. p. 217.

76 "The Four Generations began with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War. With that treaty, the state established a monopoly on war. Previously, many different entities had fought wars—families, tribes, religions, cities, business enterprises—using many different means, not just armies and navies [...] Now, state militaries find it difficult to imagine war in any way other than fighting state armed forces similar to themselves." LIND, William. Understanding Fourth Generation War. Military Review, Sep- Oct 2004, p. 13. <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/lind.pdf> viewed June 13th, 2014).

77 The impact of the technological revolution on warfare is not simply quantitative or environmental- it is indicative of a much deeper qualitative and psychological change as well [...] For this reason, I suggested adding a fourth material dimension Clausewitz' triad, which is based on the three human,

passion as represented by the people is more important than this fourth dimension represented by technology.⁷⁸ Thus, although the advances in information warfare have altered the way war is conducted, they have not altered its nature.⁷⁹

The civilian population, the military forces, and the government, the trinitarian elements of the theory of war for Clausewitz, may be considered as the “three legs of a stool” which exemplify the essential relationship that must exist among the civil, political, and military authorities in the struggle against insurgency.⁸⁰ These three elements interacting in the phenomenon of war correspond, therefore, to many other institutions which, throughout the history of conflicts, may adopt different forms of expression, but which are the repository of the same tendencies: hostility and passion, chance and uncertainty, and purpose.⁸¹

In a COIN struggle scenario, these elements are perfectly identifiable. Mao knew how to interpret correctly the three interacting tendencies in all armed conflicts when developing his theory on guerrilla warfare, conceding to the people, with its potential of hostility and passion, the priority over the rest,⁸² although it was the synergistic concurrence of these three tendencies that decided the final victory of Mao's insurgency over the nationalist Chinese government.

In this sense, it coincides with Clausewitz's vision about the value of passion provided by the national enthusiasm of the population,⁸³ which, in the case of guerrilla

political, and organizational dimensions.” HANDEL. Op. Cit. p. 11.

78 *Ibid.* p. 61.

79 LONSDALE, David. Clausewitz and Information Warfare. En STRACHAN y HERBERG-ROTHE. Op. Cit. p. 249.

80 “As with all warfare, it is impossible to divorce the military from the political and civil. Crucially, the interrelationship between the respective leaders creates the conditions for success and for failure.” BENEST, David. British Leaders and Irregular Warfare. En VAN BAARDA y VERWEIJ D.E.M. Op. Cit. p. 174.

81 ECHEVARRIA, Antulio J. Fourth-Generation War and Other Myths. Strategic Studies Institute, November 2005. p. 7. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=632> (viewed January 6th, 2014).

82 “Mao's contribution to the theory of warfare is an even closer interlinking of the people, the army, and the government than that discovered by Napoleon and analyzed by Clausewitz. In fact, the people in and of themselves were the greatest weapon the Communists possessed, both in their struggle against the Japanese invaders and in the temporarily postponed fight against the Nationalists. In Mao's own words, “The richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people.” NAGL. Op. Cit. p. 21.

83 “Clausewitz emphasizes that national enthusiasm cannot only be used offensively to conquer foreign countries but also defensively to protect the national homeland. For him, people's war is the defensive side of the offensive ‘levee en masse’ [...] National will -or, to use more current parlance, political identity- is particularly crucial in asymmetrical constellations, since it tends to help the underdog.” DAASE. Op. Cit. p. 192.

warfare, would have more preponderance over the other two trinitary tendencies.⁸⁴ In fact, the struggles against communist insurgencies do not represent a new form of war, but rather the adaptation to Clausewitz's trinity, such that the decisive value that the Prussian philosopher gave the defeat of the enemy's army has been substituted in COIN for the need to defeat the will of the population to support the insurgent cause, thus obtaining its separation from it.⁸⁵ It is, in short, what the COIN schools "focused on the population" defended, which became prevalent in the "Long War" carried out mostly in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Therefore, in the COIN scenario which has been adopted by the Western military forces, these three tendencies that comprise the trinitarian concept of war for Clausewitz must also be identified, although with certain adaptations. Thus, the tendency that represents hostility and passion is identified with the population that supports the insurgent cause, in the case of the GWOT with the Muslim community, which considers itself offended for what they perceive as humiliations and aggressions from the West. The second trinitarian tendency, the political end or aim, has been defined by the leaders of the global insurgent movement which tries to give a political aim to its struggle against "infidels and apostates", as has been represented for a long time by the Al-Qaeda high command,⁸⁶ although they have been recently substituted by other groups.

And the third tendency, chance and probability, represented by the military forces, are identifiable with the armed jihadist cells, those who support them, and those who would form part of them if given the opportunity. This element acts in accordance with the guidelines provided by those in a position of direction or some semblance of government, as well as by its interaction with the Muslim community, which they must necessarily attract to their cause. Thus, the three tendencies that represent the trinitarian vision of war for Clausewitz are identifiable, as is the cause-effect relation among all of them.

Therefore, it may be concluded that the three tendencies that compose the trinitarian concept of war for Clausewitz are present in all types of conflicts and thus, also in a COIN environment.⁸⁷ Throughout the history of conflicts, hostility, chance, and purpose have always been present at different levels of intensity and importance, as

84 HEERWAGEN, Belinda. Carl Von Clausewitz and his Relevance as a Contemporary Theorist. U.S. Army War College. Carlisle Barracks, PA, March 2007, p. 8. <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA468496> (viewed October 7, 2014).

85 "Far from Communist insurgency's being a new kind of war, it is in fact merely an adaptation of Clausewitz's "remarkable trinity" [...] Now defeating the army required that the people be defeated as well -or at least persuaded not to fight on behalf of, nor even support, the insurgents." NAGL. Op. Cit. p. 25.

86 ECHEVARRIA, Antulio J. Clausewitz and Contemporary War. Pág. 75.

87 "Indeed, his portrayal appears accurate, for we find these forces present, in varying degrees, in every war, ancient or modern, traditional or otherwise. From the standpoint of the war on terror, for instance, hostility is quite a strong force indeed." ECHEVARRIA. Fourth-Generation War and Other Myths. Op. Cit. p. 6.

is also identifiable in the “Long War”.⁸⁸ These are the three primary and distinctive tendencies of the Clausewitzian trinity, which have remained unalterable.

Complementary to the three primary tendencies, hostility, chance, and purpose or rationale are what may be considered secondary elements of the trinity, on the basis of collective groups and institutions associated with each one of the primary elements. These are, respectively, the people, the army, and the government. They themselves do not constitute the essence of the trinitarian concept of war, but rather subjective representations of them, and change with the passing of time.⁸⁹ But the primary tendencies, Clausewitz's trinitarian basis, remain unalterable, as has been previously stated.

As a result, it is in the confusion about what Clausewitz's trinity tendencies mean that one of the reasons argued to invalidate his theory lies. The people, the army, and the government are only secondary trinitarian tendencies, which are modified and adapted, with different portrayals according to the type of conflict and operative environment.

Identifying Clausewitz's trinitarian conception with these three tendencies is a reductionist and simplistic view of its real meaning.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, the interaction of the three primary trinitarian tendencies is identifiable in the COIN campaigns that predominate in the military operations at the beginning of this century.

In this sense, a strategy to effectively fight against the threat from the global jihad must deal with each one of the three tendencies of the triad, constituting in any case the tendency “passion and hate” or hostility, represented by the whole of the Muslim population potentially favoring this type of global insurgency, which is the one that must receive a higher priority from the Western governments,⁹¹ which is in agreement with Mao's principles about guerrilla warfare mentioned above. In short, it is about preferably implementing a “population focused” COIN.

All of the above, together with the identification of the fundamental features of his theory of war in the characteristics of the current paradigm of the conflict, lead to the conclusion that Clausewitz's theory of war maintains its validity in explaining the

88 ECHEVARRIA. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*. Op. Cit. p. 74.

89 “... the trinity is not the people, government, and military -as some have argued, but rather the principal tendencies: hostility, purpose, and chance. Clausewitz held that the institutions themselves to be little more than the subjective representations of those tendencies. Thus, the fundamental problem with so-called non-trinitarian war is that it does not understand the concept it purports to negate.” ECHEVARRIA. *Clausewitz and the Nature of the War on Terror*. Op. Cit. p. 217.

90 WILLIAMSON, Steven. *From Fourth Generation Warfare to Hybrid War*. Strategic Studies Institute. U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 2009. p. 10. www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA498391 (viewed August 6th, 2015).

91 “... the most important element for United States policymakers to consider in the War on Terror is the passion of the mass of people who adhere to radical Islam [...] The GWOT cannot be won unless or until the number of people who believe in radical Islam's central tenets – namely its antipathy toward Western values – is greatly reduced, or until they can be persuaded to eschew violent means.” HEERWAGEN. Op. Cit. p. 9.

war phenomenon that characterizes the framework within which the current COIN operations take place.⁹²

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the Copernican turn that President Obama's North American administration has tried to carry out to avoid future implications in conflicts to build nations and fight against insurgency, in response to what may be called the "Afghan-Iraqi syndrome", these types of wars will prevail in the newly begun century. They have their conceptual roots in asymmetric conflicts, in which one of the sides consciously resorts to ways and means other than conventional ones, supported by the related population, and with a specific political aim. This side is the insurgency, with COIN being the response to deal with it. From there the imposition of the COIN paradigm has been the preferred way to employ military power in recent times.

It may be observed that the theory of war of the Prussian philosopher Carl von Clausewitz, written in the first half of the 19th century in a context dominated by the Napoleonic post-war, and when other theories of war of a prescriptive type were being established, has overcome the test of time, and continues to be perfectly valid in the current environment. Besides being reflected in his work, the irregular war featured in current conflicts includes the distinctive elements of the Clausewitzian theory.

The two tendencies that may be considered as the core, which are the essentially political nature of war, whose execution is subordinated to political ends, as well as the trinitarian concept of hostility and passion, chance and uncertainty, and purpose, as the principal tendencies that interact, are reflected in the COIN context of current conflicts. Therefore, we may conclude that conceived with the ambition of becoming a general theory of war almost two centuries ago, the work of the brilliant Prussian writer has been, is, and will continue to be a model to use in approaching the essential nature of armed conflicts. In the 21st century as well.

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92 "Clausewitz helps us to understand these issues. Not despite the emergence of small wars and terrorism, but because of the changing form of war, Clausewitz and his thinking are relevant today. He provides a superior conceptualization of political violence and theoretical insights into the dialectic of defence and offence and offers elements for a theory of unconventional warfare that explains why states have such problems in fighting asymmetrical conflicts." DAASE. Op. Cit. p. 194.

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