THREE ERAS OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS:
CHARACTERISTICS, FUNCTIONS, ETHICS

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I. Introduction.

The essential issue of military ethics is certainly that raised by
the question, "Are Tactics and Strategy Amoral?" Frequently we
formulate our concerns as soldiers, or as citizens interested in the
practical matters of the Profession of Arms, under the rubrics of
"professional ethics". In our hearts we all know, of course,
that when we speak of the ethics of military life, operations,
leadership, command, or philosophy, we are always dealing with
matters which go far beyond the confines of professional ethics.
We face, rather, the issues of the ethics of war itself and the
ethics of its methods, objectives, and consequences. Therefore,
the heart of the matter of military ethics is not merely that of
the ethics of our professional behavior, style, goals, or
integrity. The essential issue of military ethics is expressed
in the more comprehensive and profound question, "Are Tactics and
Strategy Moral, Immoral, or Amoral?"

The history of warfare has progressed through three discreate eras.
Each is distinctive for the strategy and tactics which character-
ized it. The functions and characteristics of military
operations in each era were surprisingly different from those of
the other two eras. Nonetheless, basic principles in the science
and art of war, have remained very much the same throughout history.
The eras may be designated as follows: First, BC, that is, before
Clausewitz; Second, CE, the Clausewitz era; and Third, AD, for
"afta dat". BC runs from the days of primitive warfare to about
the end of the eighteenth century, CE from 1800 to 1953, and AD
"afta dat".

It is my purpose to examine the similarities and differences in
strategy and tactics throughout those eras, with an eye to the
dynamics and functions of both, in the light of the basic ethical
principles of humaneness and economy of resources. I hope in
this way to address the question, "Are Tactics and Strategy
Amoral?", and so comment upon the ethical claims which should
shape the strategy and tactics of the present era.

II. Exposition.

From the earliest primitive assault by one human being upon
another, throughout the age of medieval warfare, and until Napolean
in the modern era, the primary objective of military operations
was assault upon and reduction of persons and populated areas.
There are rare exceptions to this in the strategy and tactics of
the ancient Persians and Macedonians, but none are thorough-going
exceptions, nor do they indicate a generalized difference of
policy from that which describes the era. The prevailing policy
of assault upon and reduction of persons and populated areas took

the form of envelopement and siege; whether in the primitive form of sneaking up on and murdering opponents individually, surprising and burning down homes or hamlets, or surrounding and starving out major cities. The basic ethical issues raised by or during this era, whether they were thought of seriously at the time or not, were three in number. First, issues related to the necessity of the extermination of humans and destruction of their cultures for the sake of increasing the safety or prosperity of the aggressor's policy, society, and culture. Second, issues related to how ruthlessly or humanely this "necessary" extermination could be carried out and whether noncombatants were taken captive for integration into the aggressor society or exterminated along with the combatants (Cf. I Samuel 15). Finally, issues related to the relative advantage of the result compared with the losses realized in achieving it.

Napoleanic warfare brought new objectives. With Napoleanic mobility and his refinement of the Fundamentals of Strategy, Principles of War, and Elements of Tactical Maneuver. persons and populated areas were no longer seen as key objectives. Indeed, they came to be seen, in this second era of the history of warfare, as obstacles to be avoided or interim objectives to be neutralized or eliminated as simply as possible, so as to remove them as obstacles to the main objectives. Persons and populated areas became obstacles because they tended to tie down the freedom of military maneuver and delay or prevent the achievement of domination and control of the high ground; of other key terrain such as mountain passes. river crossings, and road or rail junctions; and of supply and communication routes. Therefore, they were avoided, since the intent of military field operations was to interdict enemy forces in their efforts to gain such control themselves. Such frustration of the enemy's tactical intentions tended to undermine the enemy nation's will to continue the military contest, thus nullifying its strategic plan.

Jomini formulated the underlying assumption of military operations for the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, by pointing out that in this era of massive armies and grand strategies, reflecting geopolitical perspectives, the purposes and objectives of warfare were not the slaughter of enemy soldiers or the genocide of enemy populations but rather the effective killing of enemy strategy. Moreover, he saw clearly that the killing of enemy strategy rather than enemy soldiers required, primarily, the domination of key real estate zones (Jomini).

For both Jomini and Clausewitz, strategy dealt with national purposes, wide spaces, long periods, large movements, ultimate objectives, and geo-political perspectives. Tactics, on the other hand was understood to deal with the factors involved in management of the action on the battlefield itself. Both were seen as designed to compel the enemy to engage at a disadvantage, depriving him of freedom of maneuver, key terrain, effective communication, and satisfactory supply.

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Clausewitz applied the lessons of Napoleanic strategy and tactics, in the light of Jomini's _dictum_, to the formulation of the "total war" concept. This is the notion that any action is appropriate to war if it hampers the enemy's ability to carry out his strategy. Any economic, political, psychological, or military insult is an appropriate act of war if it kills enemy strategy or the will to carry out that strategy.

With the ascendance of contemporary sophisticated technology applied to warfare, particularly with the introduction of the helicopter, new tactics were necessitated. In consequence, neither populated areas as in the pre-Napoleanic era, nor key terrain features as in the Napoleanic era, survived as the primary objectives controlling the management of the battlefield. Instead, mobility, strong points, escape and evasion, and targets of opportunity on a fluid battlefield have come to dominate field operations in this third era of the history of warfare. The intent of war is still the same, to kill enemy strategy by defeating the effectiveness of enemy tactics, but the battlefield methods and objectives have significantly changed because the battlefield conditions have changed as the battlefield environment has become infused with high technology weapons (Cf. Airland Battle Theory and Concepts, U.S. Army).

In this new era, the ethical concerns take new shapes as the tactics of field operations move further and further from the logic of Napoleanic objectives and principles of maneuver.

Clausewitzian Theory.

Clausewitz was a voracious student of Napoleanic military operations and distilled from them, and the then developing philosophy of war, a number of concepts which he saw as the rudiments of the science of war. He delineated his principles as follows. He contended that war should be kept to as limited an enterprise as possible, defining it as a rational instrument of foreign policy, "an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will." Therefore, he thought that all military science becomes a matter of simple prudence, its principle object being to keep an instable balance from shifting suddenly to our disadvantage and the proto-war from changing into total war. He saw the importance of deterent threats for intimidating the enemy from initiating war, escallating war, or turning potential war into total war. "Peace is maintained by the equilibrium of forces, and will continue just so long as this equilibrium exists, and no longer" (Maude).

Ironside summarized this dimension of Clausewitzian theory in his observation that the object of war is to defeat the enemy armed force and to destroy his power to resist, with minimum expenditure of men, money, and material (Ironside). However, it is clear in Clausewitzian perspective, that when the enemy escallates the contest to the point of serious threat, a nation is morally bound to opt for total war, mobilizing the total population and economy and identifying the total enemy force,

psyche, and sources of supply as fit targets of military action.

> War is not merely a political act, but also a real
> political instrument, a continuation of policy car-
> ried out by other means.... War admittedly has its
> own grammar but not its own logic (Clausewitz, "Con-
> clusion").

That is to say, the logic of war is in its political objectives. By
implication, the ethics of a war concerns the appropriateness of its
political objectives, the relative humaneness of their pursuit,
and the appropriateness of the ratio of cost to results in the
cause of terminating enemy counter-strategy.

War as Science.

In contending that war has its own distinctive grammar, rooted in
the general principles of universal logic, Clausewitz intended to
claim that war is a discreet and significant science, with precisely
identifiable laws and components. His motivation in research and writ-
about the theory and practice of war was to delineate and develop
the contours of that science. He endeavored with considerable
success to articulate its paradigms and taxonomy. The categories
of his scientific understanding of war fall mainly into three sets.
The are The Fundamentals of Strategy, The Principles of War, and
the Elements of Tactics or Battlefield Management.

Clausewitz perceived that the Fundamentals of Strategy are made
up of a society's National Aims, National Policy, Assessment of
the Acceptable Calculated Risk, and the Employment of Battle to
gain the political objective the war intends (Clausewitz, Ch. 3).
His concern in defining the science of war was to establish once
and for all the understanding that war can be a rational instru-
ment for gaining wholesome and responsible national objectives in
responsible and humane ways. He believed that such an
understanding would rid the world of irrational wars of impet-
uousity, vindictiveness, piracy, narcissism, and irresponsible
arrogance or accident. He clearly assumed that by bringing war under
the claim and control of a rational scientific system of thought, it
could become answerable to ethical claims in that it would be
controlled by rational constraints. One can see readily the
influence of Hegel's thought upon the Clausewitzian philosophy
of war.

In this light, Clausewitz set down what he conceived quite appro-
priately to be the Principles of War. In his taxonomy they are
eight in number: The Advantage of the Offensive; Unity of
Command, Economy of Force; Mass or concentration of force; Fire
Power; Surprise; Maneuver; and Security of Force and Movement from
attack, sabotage and subversion. British theorists have added a
ninth, namely, Administration, and Russian militarists have added
a characteristic tenth, namely, Annihilation of the Enemy Force.
Clausewitz assumed the ninth in his second and third. He would have
found the tenth unethical, erroneous, unnecessary, and illogical.

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The management of the battlefield itself was of particular inter-
est to both Clausewitz and Jomini.   They knew a great deal about
this practical matter,   as well,   since both had served
significantly as leaders in battle. Clausewitz saw the laws and
elements of battlefield maneuver or tactics as finite and defini-
tive, in the sense in which mathematics is finite and definitive.
He felt that there were only a specified number of things a
battlefield commander could do with his forces, and only predict-
able ways in which he could do them. Battle management was, in
his view,   subject to a precise set of laws. If these were not
followed seriously, failure was inevitable. A commander could employ
the tactic of Defense; the Frontal Assault; Penetration; Envelopment,
single or double; Pursuit; focus upon a Specified Objective; Ex-
ploitation; Diversion; Speed; and Retrograde Action.

War as Ethical Imperative.

A subtle but certain implication of Clausewitz' way of viewing war
is its ethical implication. Though he did not draw out this as-
pect of his theory to any great extent, one can clearly see in his
system the notion that war becomes an expression of national pol-
icy when illegitimate threats arise against legitimate national
aims. Assuming the legitimacy of the national aims, therefore, the
policy designed to achieve those aims is legitimated.   Assuming
the adherence to the principles of the science of war, then, the
process and consequence is inevitably ethical.

Moreover, that ethical implication can be drawn out one step fur-
ther.   Assuming the ethical and legitimate pursuit of national
policy,   when   legitimate national aims are illegitmately
threatened, warfare as an extension of that policy, becomes an
ethical imperative. For Clausewitz war was an ethical imperative
or it was irrational and, therefore, an inappropriate expression
of national policy.   By implication, he would have argued, one
would imagine, that when international conflict deteriorates into
guerilla warfare it is a calamity and a social disaster because
it ceases to be a rational expression of legitimate aims of a
responsible society or its government, and it then and therefore,
ceases to be rationally managed or manageable, in keeping with the
science of war.

This perspective, arising as it did at the outset of the great age
of humanist rationalism, the nineteenth century, has its roots and
source in the Just War Theory, particularly as it was developed by
Thomas Aquinas and articulated in the work of Hugo Grotius, the
Hague Conventions and the Geneva Conventions.   It inevitably
links itself with the long history of the pursuit of a philosophy
of international law and its application to the conduct of nations
at war.   All these notions and efforts at statuatory constraint
upon international affairs have as their common denominator the
assumption that war, when legitmately waged, is an ethical enter-
prise, indeed, an ethical imperative; and that when it is not an
ethical imperative, in that sense, it must not be perpetrated. A
secondary assumption is that "necessary" war, when waged in keeping
with rational and scientific principles such as Clausewitz articulated

in his three sets of categories, is ethical in style as well as in aims and purposes. The conclusion one is led to draw from this is that Tactics and Strategy are, in and of themselves, amoral, but become legitimated components of an ethical enterprise when conditions prevail which makes war an imperative of legitimate national aims and policy. Conversely, they become illegitimate as components of an unethical enterprise when they are not carried out in keeping with the rational constraints of the science of war or when they are employed in an unjust war.

It is in this context, precisely, that the Total War Concept recommended itself to Clausewitz, Jomini, most military theoreticians and commanders since then, and particularly to the movers and shapers of WW II such as Marshall, Roosevelt, and Churchill, as well as Eisenhower and MacArthur.

Contemporary Practical Views.

In a speech delivered on 28 November 1984, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger declared that the responsible use of military force is a moral issue. Its employment by a democracy is as a final political tool which is legitimate only when all else in diplomacy and statesmanship has failed (Halloran). Based upon Clausewitzian theory he set down six tests of ethically defensible and morally responsible engagement in warfare (Weinberger). They express in practical terms Clausewitz' Principles of War.

George F. Kennan recently contended for moral principle as the motivator and guide for national foreign policy. He pointed out that the conduct of diplomacy is the responsibility of government and not of private individuals or of the entire society. The first principle of moral constraint, says Kennan, is that government action genuinely serve the interests and not just the preferences or tastes of the society: a people's needs rather than merely its wants. The main obligations the government holds to its people are two: security of its territory and culture against military aggression and security of its environment against waste and abuse. Unfortunately, Kennan points out, there are no objective or internationally accepted standards of morality to which a government may appeal or against which it may measure its own or another's behavior. There are merely high sounding statements or charters, with no substance or statuatory character to them. The policies and actions of a government can conform to moral standards, therefore, only in the sense that they conform to that nation's own principles of justice and propriety. When other governments threaten the national interests of the former, retalliation is ethical, so long as its aims and methods conform to the reacting nation's own principles of justice and propriety. To insure the success of such morally upright policy we must always distinguish with care between "the true substance and mere appearance of moral behavior" (Kennan).

It is quite clear that both Weinberger and Kennan assume that strategy and tactics are in and of themselves amoral and that the

ethical quality of their employment in the pursuit of policy depends upon the legitimacy of that policy, the humaneness of the methods of its pursuit, the appropriateness of the cost to results ratio, and the rational coherence of the military process as it is managed in the theater of war and on the battlefield.

One can cite Creveld, Weigley, Wells, Millis, Brodie, Fuller, Hart, Earle, and Dupuy to the same effect. Most of them are still thinking in terms of the second era of the history of warfare, namely, that dominated by Napoleanic strategy and tactics, Clausewitzian theory, and the philosophy of Jomini. However, the world has changed greatly. Battlefield tactics have been revised by the impact of technological changes of a an entirely new order of magnitude of a genuinely monstrous character and nature. The third era of the history of warfare is irrevocably upon us. This is the era in which the introduction of the helicopter and other machines has added a new tactical element, namely that of the vertical envelopment. To that is now added the potential for long range tactical nuclear explosions, and the like. In consequence, neither populated areas nor key terrain make sensible objectives for battle. Both can be rendered highly vulnerable and, therefore, highly disadvantageous in war. Instead, a fluid battlefield of undefined boundaries, in which tactical patterns are, perforce, increasingly clandestine, employed in terms of targets of opportunity; reduces the entire enterprise to something increasingly like guerilla warfare. That reduces the entire operation of warfare to a form of irrational terrorism, carried out at various levels of force, sophistication, and legitimacy. Little care can be given to distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants, humane and inhumane methods, rational or irrational war grammar, an appropriate ratio between cost and results, or coherence of separate actions with the general strategy and defined national purpose.

What does this change do to the ethical question, to the morality of tactics or strategy? If such warfare as characterizes the era since 1953 is to retain any inherent legitimacy and ethical warrant, it must conform to one fundamental principle: That war in all of its manifestations, must reflect legitimate national aims and must achieve those aims humanely, at the earliest moment and at the lowest level of insult to the nation which has defined those aims. To do that, it will most certainly be the case that massive destruction of enemy populations or occupation of key terrain will not be of the highest priority nor maximum long term usefulness. Destruction of enemy strategy and will to fight will still be the main issue. Whatever can or must be done to achieve that at the lowest cost in men, money, and materiel is surely the moral imperative. That may be the massive mobilization of whole populations and economies against enemy societies and political-economic systems or it may be the skillful application of scientific battlefield tactics in a local situation. If it achieves the original legitimate objective in the most humane way available, with the best ratio of cost to result, it is the course of inevitable ethical imperative. The tactics and strategy have no inherent moral quality. How and to what end they are employed does.

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III. Conclusion

The progress from primitive, ancient and feudal warfare to Napol-
eanic practice and from there to modern mobile or guerilla
warfare does not change the essence of the enterprise. It changes
only the objectives and tactics. The ethical questions remains the
same throughout. Are the national aims legitimate? Is the policy
for their achievement a responsible one? Does the strategy afford
an appropriate cost to result ratio? Do the tactics provide the
most humane pursuit of the national aims? Can the war be
controlled in terms of the rational science of legitimate and
successful battlefield management?

The strategy and tactics are not moral or immoral in quality or
character in themselves. The objectives for which they are
employed and the coherence and rationality with which they are
executed give rise to issues of ethics and morality.

One might raise the point, in a more cosmic context, of course,
that in the ultimate sense it is likely that all war is immoral,
but that it is legitimated when it is less immoral than all of
the other options in a given situation. In any case, the
overriding principle that seems more urgent now than at any time
in the three eras of the history of warfare or in any of the
theories, philosophies, and practical designs for the enterprise
of the Profession of Arms, is the principle that we are under
moral constraint to complete any war at the earliest possible
moment with the least possible damage to humanity of whatever
stripe or persuasion, particularly the offended nation. Any
measure necessary to accomplish that goal in the most humane way
possible is the ethical and moral requirement.

Kennan declared wryly,

> In a less than perfect world, where the ideal so
> obviously lies beyond human reach, it is natural
> that the avoidance of the worst should often be a
> more practical undertaking than the achievement of
> the best, and that some of the strongest impera-
> tives of moral conduct should be ones of a nega-
> tive rather than a positive nature. The strictures
> of the Ten Commandments are perhaps the best illus-
> tration of this state of affairs (Kennan).

Weinberger would agree: "The commitment of ... forces to combat
should be a last resort" (Weinberger).

<center>References</center>

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