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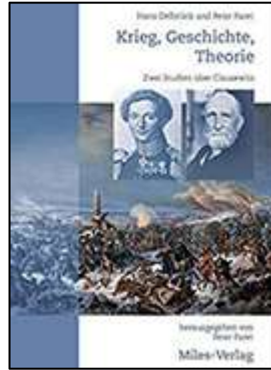


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# CLAUSEWITZ, 'THE PEOPLE IN ARMS' AND THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA: CAN THEY BE LINKED?

*Thean Potgieter and Francios Vrey*

The relevance of Clausewitz reflects a long and winding history as proponents for and against Clausewitz continues to dot the literature. Between those rejecting Clausewitz and those arguing for his continued relevance, reside a wide spectrum of opinions, yet his work remains integral to debates attempting to explain, explore or describe contemporary war, strategy, and armed violence.[1] Clausewitz has influenced the thoughts of military decision-makers across the globe and the interpretation of Clausewitz continues to cut across ideological and cultural divides. Although not influential in every country, *On War* certainly continues to stimulate debate. Historically the focus was on the conventional side of war, but currently more emphasis is being placed on the application of Clausewitz to "small wars".

In their struggles against colonialism, African societies have historically used unconventional tactics to fight colonial forces. After the Second World War political, socio-economic and psychological elements were included to form a cohesive new approach, often referred to as revolutionary warfare. In 1948 the apartheid government came to power in South Africa and as a result of its colonial legacy and the rise of white-minority rule it lacked legitimacy. Resistance to apartheid quickly gained momentum and eventually developed into a revolutionary struggle that drew strongly upon the support of the people.

Due the discrepancy in force between the apartheid government and those wishing to destroy it, the conflict that followed was not only military in nature, but included economic pressure, subversion, diplomacy and psychological actions. As it was essentially a political war waged for the power of the state, the stakes were high – it was about achieving the overthrow of the incumbent government and bringing about a total or revolutionary change. Apartheid's response was known as "total strategy" and it was a pragmatic approach relying on lessons learned and adapting skills and techniques over close to 20 years of conflict. Yet, despite militarily successes the apartheid gov-

ernment lacked legitimacy and, unlike the liberation forces, it failed to provide an acceptable political alternative to the masses.

This paper is not a narrative of the liberation struggle in South Africa. It is rather an endeavour to note aspects of Clausewitz's conceptions of "the people in arms" and their continuing theoretical impetus for those engaged in such struggles.

## Clausewitz: A Relevant Legacy?

Clausewitzian thought as an explanatory theory on war has limitations that stem from the unique set of circumstances of his time. Gray[2] maintains that Clausewitz remains the pre-eminent theorist on war and strategy as his views have best withstood the test of time, but acknowledges that they are not perfectly suited to explain contemporary strategy and war in their entirety. Both Angstrom and Kinross list a number of rather influential strategic theorists who question the contemporary relevance of Clausewitz. Keegan, Lutwak and Van Creveldt are mentioned as prominent critics in this regard.[3] Given the changes in the wars of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, much of the criticism evolves from explanations of major interstate wars as opposed to the significant growth and prevalence of irregular armed conflicts in recent times.[4]

In opposition to the critics, are those who defend the continuing relevance of Clausewitz. Contemporary theorists such as Gray, Angstrom, Smith, Kinross and Heuser argue for the continued relevance of Clausewitz. This debate between the critics and proponents shows the typical coexistence of two competitive explanatory paradigms that each draws its own constituency of supporters.[5] The proponents and critics of the continued relevance of Clausewitz appear to coexist, with each holding and defending their views. The almost disproportionate contemporary prevalence of low-intensity conflicts forms one particularly salient matter that drives the polemics between the proponents and critics of Clausewitz's contributions in *On War*.[6] This particular matter therefore requires closer scholarly attention.

Brodie in *The Continuing Relevance of On War*[7] also addresses the controversies that surround the durability of Clausewitz's thought and in an even-handed manner points out those aspects of the work that are still of relevance and those that are of diminishing relevance. Brodie quite harshly sets out the voids or irrelevance of some parts of the work to the present. This acknowl-

edgement must, however, not be exploited to also undermine the continued utility of the work. For example, the war-politics nexus and the rise of the so-called "lesser" forms of warfare, known today as guerrilla warfare or people's war, remain topical. The war-politics connection is well known, but the aspect of lesser forms of war is perhaps less visible, although it grew in stature during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Daase, in turn, offers a more updated and enthusiastic argument for the continued relevance of Clausewitz and in particular his contributions to a better understanding of contemporary, irregular armed conflicts.[8] Through study and experience Clausewitz understood small wars better than most of his contemporaries and instances of traditional small wars, national insurrection by guerrilla warfare, and people's war are depicted in *On War*.

The setting, or unique circumstances of his time, is a point of criticism, but the debate and differences of opinion offer an opportunity to once again learn from some of the enduring insights Clausewitz offers. Although the debates for and against Clausewitz for some time tended to cluster around so-called major wars,[9] low-intensity conflicts now stand at the centre of one strand of the dispute. Although seen as a point of entry to challenge the relevance of Clausewitz, the literature portrays that Clausewitz did not ignore or snub this particular form of war, and, in fact, contributed much at a point in time when general Prussian military thought left little room for innovative ideas.[10]

Clausewitz was exposed to, participated in, lectured and wrote on matters related to what we now term low-intensity conflict, insurgency and terrorism. Just as is the case today, during the time of Clausewitz, several terms denoted the irregular manifestations of war as displayed by references to small war, partisan warfare, and as noted by himself in *On War*, The People in Arms.[11] In a sense, the realities of major war as illustrated by the conquest of most of Europe by Napoleon, dominated the strategic landscape of the time. A second, and perhaps less spectacular range of events materialised that did not leave the military untouched. A range of political, economic and social challenges were set in motion across the European continent that required from armed forces to maintain internal order, prevent revolution and even prop up unpopular regimes.[12] A third phenomenon relates to a gradual movement to bring war, soldiering and society closer together and make war the concern or an affair of the people or broader population as well.[13] In a sense Europe moved into a phase of social and political revolution that tended to sweep

aside embedded political and military preferences for major wars between the political entities of the time.

Clausewitz and the irregular side of war show a nexus that runs along two broad lines. Firstly, irregular operations and resistance that took place in Prussia as well as on the wider European continent during the time of Clausewitz. Secondly, his own thought and scripts about people's war and its eventual inclusion in *On War*. Of interest is also that during Clausewitz's very first introduction to soldiering, he formed part of a regiment that fought in an irregular mode against the French.[14] His first exposure (at the age of twelve) to war thus entailed operations that comprised raids, ambushes and smaller detachments that at the time were viewed as part of a small war. The socio-political setting of war at the time of Clausewitz must, however, also be considered.

Geoffrey Best describes Europe of 1770-1870 – a period coinciding with the life of Clausewitz (1780-1831) – as "Revolutionary Europe".[15] One influence during this period stemmed from thought and efforts to involve broader society more closely in defending the homeland – well beyond that of participation only in strict Prussian-styled conventional combat formations.[16] By the turn of the eighteenth century broader changes in the social and economic spheres also allowed for shifts in the Prussian military, in particular shifts that brought the Prussian military and society closer together.[17] The notion of a nation in arms slowly began to take shape in Prussia. This was initially viewed as a threat to the Prussian status quo, rather than a pathway to build a better Prussian military by the involvement of broader society. The ideas propounded by Clausewitz, that society indeed has a more influential role to play during war and should be integrated more closely into the military effort, were unfortunately not well received.[18]

The French occupation of Prussia and surrounding Europe, however, gave rise to several uprisings.[19] The salient outcomes of this period are a better understanding by, and a determined drive for the physical entry of, broader society into the Prussian military. Simultaneously a rising climate calling for some liberation from French domination swept across Europe. This anti-French climate gave rise to insurrections by small groups against the regular French forces of occupation. It is therefore not strange that Best ends his discussion on revolutionary Europe with "*People's wars of national liberation*"[20] – a period that overlaps with the life of Clausewitz and continues after his death. It was a time when major wars in Europe had to coexist with the growth of do-

mestic insurrections and wars of a lower intensity fought in a different manner by soldiers not viewed as professional regulars.

As for Prussia, the "*Aufruf an mein Volk*" by Frederick William (March 1813) created the impetus to move beyond the normal conventions of warfare.[21] The window of opportunity did not slip past reform-minded Prussian officers like Clausewitz, but the call did not only apply to ideas relevant to irregular forces fighting in more irregular ways. Opportunities for change in the regular and irregular domains were on offer. This is where the prospect for change tied in with the view of Clausewitz that society must be more involved in fighting wars. War no longer stood as a matter of concern for the military only.[22] By reforming the state, opportunities to make the armed forces more effective and legitimate unfolded. Pressure on the political level created the leeway for changes to a bureaucratic Prussian military that had to adjust to adaptations that had made its major foe, France, militarily much more effective.

Other events and developments also influenced Clausewitz and his ideas on more irregular forms of warfare. Both Hahlweg and Heuser expounded on these matters.[23] The American Revolution and the French Revolution both showed how armed forces could fight differently and be more effective. As other European countries reacted to the French occupation of most of Europe, regular forces that operated in the "*Kleinkrieg*" mode became more common and successful. The Vendee fighting, the Tyrolian case and the Spanish uprising against the French all served to underline French vulnerabilities.[24] Although they were not very strong in military terms, irregulars augmented regular forces to deal more effectively with the occupying French and their allies. The regular-irregular combination that drew society into the fighting in several ways was not lost upon Clausewitz. While the irregular fighting initially seems to denote regular forces fighting in a somewhat irregular mode, it appears that over time the forces themselves assumed an irregular profile and sought out irregular tactics to employ against the regulars.

The growth in partisan and people's wars that stemmed from the practice of small wars conducted on the fringes of regular wars is significant. As a concept and a practice, small wars as small-scale military operations conducted by small 'detachments' comprised of irregular forces on the fringes of major operations where regular forces dominate as primary actors predate the ideas of Clausewitz.[25] The real contributions of smaller irregular detachments were, however overshadowed by the preference of the period to have regular forces,

often consisting of foreign or mercenary elements, to do the fighting. Some interplay between major and small wars thus took place, although major or regular warfare remained privileged in the literature and in fact serves as rationale for Heuser's contribution on *Small Wars in the Age of Clausewitz* that highlights the more irregular side of war that drew Clausewitz's attention.

Manifestations of small wars during the time of Clausewitz are important. In greater Europe several examples underline the fact that another form of warfare in fact coexisted with major war. Rulers employed certain ethnic groups with skills in horsemanship, mountain warfare and local languages to gather information. Thus the use of military contingents that play a different role to that of primary fighting units to bring about an outcome through armed violence against a military opponent becomes apparent. It remains, however, a matter of scale or choice on just how different the two contingents were. Heuser nonetheless attributes guerrilla and partisan modes of warfare to these small war contingents as they exemplify how today's special forces and guerrilla fighters tend to operate.[26]

Clausewitz was initially more familiar with small war (*kleiner Krieg*) than guerrilla warfare for he studied the former as a military, not a political manifestation, and as part of special operations by regular forces (not guerrilla warfare) to conduct reconnaissance, patrols, raids and ambushes.[27] Guerrilla warfare (that stands closer to people's war or insurgency) on the other hand, brings the political affiliation closer. Clausewitz does make the political connection between politics and war a central tenet of his views and particularly so in arguing that without politics war is in fact meaningless and serves no purpose.[28]

A second exposure to a tighter triad of war, politics and people also influenced Clausewitz. People (broader society) became generally more closely involved in war and began to serve in active fighting in particular. The American War of Independence and the French Revolution are two meaningful events depicting how American and French societies were recruited or herded into the military machinery. The foreign or mercenary elements did not disappear as such, but people from all levels of society began to augment the regulars and initiated irregular fighting tactics. Irregular or small war tactics accordingly became part of the overall fighting regime and featured alongside or in tandem with the tactics of the regular forces.[29] The Spanish resistance to the French reinforced the idea that people outside the formal military structures (hereafter often called guerrillas) are able to augment the war effort through irregular tactics that eventually can be orchestrated into a broader campaign.[30]

Kinross[31] maintains that Clausewitz's deeper understanding of irregular warfare stems from his *Bekenntnisdenkschrift* and his exposure to small wars, partisan warfare in Russia and the mobilisation of the *Landwehr* against the French in 1813. Whether as an introduction or mere departure, Clausewitz studied the irregular side of war at a time when strategic reality and what governments (Prussia in particular) wished to see, appeared not to coincide. Reality in fact is portrayed by much of what appears in Book 8 of *On War* about the changing face of war over time as a product of the nature of states and societies, time and prevailing conditions.[32] Rulers and societies portray different preferences on how to conduct war, who to involve and what aims to pursue, and Clausewitz understood that the Prussian preferences were strong, but had become outdated.

In addition to exposure to instances of small wars over a period of time, Clausewitz also actively studied and published or lectured on the topic. In addition to The People in Arms in *On War* (Book 6 Defence), other publications and bodies of thought also emerged.[33] Clausewitz is most explicit in viewing guerrilla war "as a people's war of liberation or resistance"[34] with the people's uprising showing tactics found in guerrilla warfare. Although a last resort, guerrilla warfare is now placed within the realm of the general theory of war. This move to maturity by involving society in the framework of war also offers the opportunity of broad resistance by the social order to external occupation – not just by building larger regular forces, but by broadening the scope of opposition to any foe in direct and indirect ways. Although seemingly comprehensive in appearance, Clausewitz acknowledges that his views are perhaps not authoritative due to people's war still being uncommon and (at the time) not open to comprehensive study.[35]

In his analysis of two of Clausewitz's documents, Hahlweg manages to isolate some important thoughts on Clausewitz and guerrilla war. [36] From the *Bekenntnisdenkschrift* (a document more focussed upon liberating Prussia from French occupation), the following salient thought arises. A people's war of liberation and resistance includes a general uprising using guerrilla war and tactics reflecting reconnaissance, raids, ambushes, and terror by employing popular forces to augment the regulars. It is the *Bekenntnisdenkschrif* that shaped Clausewitz's thought on what was often considered the lesser form of war. Although he does not offer a comprehensive theory of guerrilla warfare as an independent way of warfare, Clausewitz accurately sets guerrilla warfare in the theory of war, outlines its ways and means and conveys its utility of resistance

by the people, at a time when the institutional barriers to this very notion began to crumble.[37]

The chapter titled "The people in arms" in *On War* attends to guerrilla warfare more comprehensively within the realm of defence against an invader. The chapter sets the scene for people's war by explaining the context of opportunities to involve society in a war effort within a wider framework of general war, facilitating population and geographic features in a country and how to avoid defeat.[38] Important for survival is that the irregular forces must avoid set battles with the regular forces and operate on the periphery of the main theatre of war, thus forcing the enemy to divert a disproportionate effort towards containing the insurgents. The chapter also covers the vulnerabilities of this strategic defensive way of war.[39] Understanding that insurgent actions are fought by irregular troops, Clausewitz notes the danger of entrapment by regular forces that holds the real possibility of military defeat for the insurgent. Whether as an addition on the fringes of the main military effort, or as a last stance to survive, insurrection and armed resistance by the people through lesser military means grew in importance in Clausewitz's outlook.

## Notes on the Liberation Struggle in South Africa

The above discussion indicates that the relevance of Clausewitz continues to receive scholarly attention. As the focus is more often upon different manifestations of war, Clausewitz's applications to African countries such as South Africa might perhaps be rare, but it is not irrelevant. Given the prevalence of irregular wars on the African continent and of liberation movements claiming the successful conduct of people's wars in Southern African countries, the relevance of Clausewitz cannot be ignored. It is therefore not strange that Daase[40] points out that the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa succeeded in surviving politically against superior military odds by employing the concept of people's war. In the South African case the weak political position, but rather solid security position of the incumbent apartheid government resulted in no small way from its hold over the defence establishment. The South African liberation movements embarked upon an armed struggle that reflected discernable political and military pathways. The importance of drawing in society became apparent over time and quite early in the history of the armed resistance, the utility of Clausewitz and guerrilla warfare featured quite prominently.[41]

After the Second World War armed resistance against colonialism was fused with political, social-economic and psychological elements to form a cohesive new approach, often referred to as revolutionary warfare. European colonial powers therefore became engaged in various such wars in their colonies. In South Africa the situation was somewhat different; the colonial government was replaced by a local government that in 1948 instituted apartheid – a political system based on race, with the majority excluded from direct participation in political processes and a series of racial discriminatory laws. Apartheid had no legitimacy amongst the masses and in due course it became the scorn of the international community. For decades a complex and multidimensional anti-apartheid struggle was waged in South Africa, in the African region and across the world.

The 1950s saw an upsurge in popular protest against the apartheid system under the banner of the African National Congress (ANC) and other organisations. Mass action included protests, boycotts, stayaways, strikes, defiance campaigns and civil disobedience. The most notable protest action was the Sharpeville shootings in March 1960. During a peaceful march to the police station, organised by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), nervous constables alarmed by the size of the crowd, panicked and fired into the crowd. Sixty-nine people died and 180 were wounded, many shot in the back. Sharpeville was a dramatic turning point. The government declared a State of Emergency, detained many ANC and PAC leaders and banned both organisations. To those opposing apartheid Sharpeville indicated that non-violent resistance had achieved nothing, while apartheid was condemned internationally and calls for sanctions against South Africa were made in the United Nations.[42]

Clausewitz reminded us that to understand the nature of the conflict is the "first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive".[43] For many years an effort to understand the nature of the conflict and design an appropriate strategic response was part and parcel of the struggle history of South Africa, and it is reflected in the efforts of both the liberation forces and the apartheid government. Furthermore, as the strategies of the opposing forces are dialectically linked, both sides tried to adapt to the unique political, socio-economic, topographical and operational conditions.

Nelson Mandela explains that when peaceful campaigning against apartheid policies did not succeed, he realised it is the oppressor that defined the nature of the struggle, and the only recourse the oppressed had was to use methods mirroring those of the oppressor. This implied that they had no alter-

native but to resort to an armed struggle, specifically as the non-violent weapons they used – such as speeches, deputations, threats, marches, strikes, stay-aways and volunteer imprisonment – were met with an iron hand. Non-violence has failed and "violence was the only weapon that would destroy apartheid".[44]

In 1961, the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) established an underground guerrilla army, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), the Spear of the Nation. With its establishment the MK high command made its commitment to the liberation struggle clear and emphasised that its decision to embark on an armed struggle, was not reached easily, but emanated from the lack of success of peaceful protests and the repression by the oppressor.[45]

After the creation of MK, Mandela studied the literature on warfare, revolutions and guerrilla warfare. Specifically the creation and sustaining of a guerrilla force was of interest. Some of the sources he found particularly interesting were *Commando* by Deneys Reitz, on the guerrilla tactics the Boer generals applied during the Anglo-Boer War; Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*, on Mao's determined approach and non-traditional thinking; while *The Revolt* by Menachem Begin was of interest as it showed how to conduct a guerrilla campaign in a country without mountains or forests. He also studied the theories of Mao Tse-tung, Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara. Clausewitz, Mandela stated, was particularly interesting as Clausewitz's central thesis, that war was a continuation of politics by other means, "dovetailed with my own instincts".[46]

MK now had four alternatives, sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism and revolution. Due to its fledging status Mandela regarded revolution as inconceivable, while terrorism "inevitably reflected poorly on those who used it" and might undermine public support, guerrilla warfare was a possibility but the sensible place to start was sabotage. He preferred it, as sabotage would inflict "the least harm against individuals" and offered the best hope of reconciliation between races afterwards. The MK strategy was to "make selected forays against military installations, power plants, telephone lines and transportation links; targets that would not only hamper the military effectiveness of the state, but frighten National Party supporters, scare away foreign capital and weaken the economy".[47] It was hoped that this would induce the government to negotiate, but if sabotage did not work, the struggle had to move onto the next phases, guerrilla warfare and terrorism.

On 11 July 1963 the headquarters of MK in Rivonia were raided. Its leadership was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island. During the 1960s both the ANC and PAC faced major difficulties as exiled organisations. Despite being welcome in a number of African countries, it was difficult to infiltrate South Africa because of the terrain, the strength of the security forces and the fact that South Africa's northerly neighbours (the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola as well as Rhodesia) provided a protective cordon. Military action therefore remained limited and much attention was focussed on attempts to develop underground structures and train insurgents, but there was little opportunity to carry out operations.[48]

The ANC leadership understood that though much could be learned from theorists such as Mao Tse-tung, Che Guevarra, Regis Debray and others, as well as from the examples of the revolutionary struggles in China, Vietnam, Latin America and others, the South African situation must be seen as unique. As Joe Matthews explained, the people had to be armed for "the problems posed by the South African revolution … learn from the revolutionary experience all over the world, but … applied to the South African revolution".[49]

At the Morogoro conference in 1969 the ANC decided to adopt a new strategy calling for a protracted armed struggle and mass mobilisation. Guerrilla warfare was considered to be the best method for the materially weak to fight against the materially strong as its unique attributes (such as surprise, mobility, stealth and tactical retreat) would stretch the resources of the government's conventional forces. Influenced by Mao, the strategy emphasised the countryside as the primary theatre of the insurgency, supported by urban actions.[50] As the ANC had to conduct this rural action from beyond the borders of the country and did not have a secure base within the country or immediately across the border, the struggle was fraught with problems. Not only was a significant segment of society urbanised, but much of the resistance against apartheid was concentrated in urban areas and few rural areas could sustain an insurgency.

The decolonisation of Mozambique and Angola changed the situation dramatically as the new pro-Soviet governments provided sanctuaries and made it possible for guerrillas to infiltrate South Africa. Though MK also developed guerrilla cells in urban areas, they were, in essence, seen as an extension of the countryside approach. Not much occurred in terms of the armed struggle and when the large-scale Soweto riots occurred in 1976, the ANC and MK were surprised. They were not really ready to fully exploit the situation

and only limited acts of sabotage occurred. However, the Soweto uprisings challenged MK's emphasis on the rural approach and by 1979 a policy shift to "people's war" dictated a focus on urban guerrilla warfare, specifically in the townships, with the guerrilla linking up with mass political organisations. International support for the struggle was also deemed important and as a result the revolutionary strategy now rested on four pillars, international support, mass action, underground activity and the armed struggle.[51]

As the apartheid state had to confront a variety of challenges, the rigid apartheid model was breaking down and it was in decline during the late 1970s and the 1980s. These challenges had to do with the requirements of an industrial economy, labour and urban resistance and the changing geopolitical situation in Southern Africa due to the independence of Mozambique and Angola in 1974 and the political settlement in Zimbabwe. As the spiral of resistance and repression deepened, the South African state reacted.

The apartheid government realised that change was necessary due to changing economic and social conditions and commenced with a process to reform apartheid incrementally, while still retaining political power. It interpreted the challenges it faced in terms of a "total onslaught", which was closely linked to the broader Cold War as the apartheid government professed to be a bastion against communist expansion and the perceived threat posed by revolutionaries from inside and outside the country. This "total onslaught", it believed, was inspired from abroad and coordinated by communist powers.[52] The Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan, explained that many African states had "promised their absolute support … to the communist-inspired terrorist organisations such as the ANC, the PAC and SWAPO in their so-called liberation struggle … The Russian aim is to build up a force in this way to be able to attack South Africa … [they] train terrorists within and outside Africa ... We cannot permit Russia to proceed unhindered with its diabolical plans in our subcontinent ..."[53].

The outcome was a policy known as "total strategy" and the Defence White Paper of 1977 was the blueprint: A "Total National Strategy" had to be formulated at the highest level to secure the government and its institutions; identifying, preventing and countering subversion and revolution; and countering any form of revolutionary action. The national security structure had to develop a counter to any threat; emphasis was placed on the permanent force as the nucleus of the SA Defence Force; while counterinsurgency techniques, intelligence networks and the capacity to operate throughout the region had to

improve. The SA Police was responsible for countering the internal unrest, but the SA Army would provide countrywide support. Politically a process of incremental reforms had to take place. Total strategy essentially rested on two pillars, a political programme and the security component. These military, political, and economic aspects of the government's response were further understood to be in constant need of adaptation to meet changing situations.[54]

The inspiration for total strategy came from a variety of sources, most notably the French theorist General André Beaufre. Based on the French counterinsurgency experiences in Indochina and Algeria, Beaufre advocated that coordinated total onslaughts demand total, indirect counter-strategies coordinating military with political and economic policy. Strategy should achieve its results through a series of methods, with the military playing "… no more than an auxiliary role".[55] To Beaufre, strategy was not a single doctrine but a "method of thought" and to select the best course of action requires a thorough understanding of the situation as every situation requires a specific strategy. A strategy that might be effective in one specific situation might be disastrous in another. Beaufre indicated that countries often go to war with tactics alone – a military approach based on false premises. In Indo-China the French lost although their tactics were excellent, but they were defeated by enemy strategy. Despite this experience, the same mistakes were repeated in Algeria as the approach did not fit the situation. Ignorance of strategy is therefore often the most fatal error.[56]

If a military victory is unattainable in a specific struggle, other methods must be used to great effectiveness as twentieth century revolutionary, irregular, and asymmetrical struggles have shown. Beaufre emphasised that strategy provides a whole series of means, which includes everything from the application of hard military power to propaganda, economic and psychological measures. As the desired outcome of any conflict is to force the enemy to accept your will, the aim of strategy is to achieve policy objectives by using all possible resources, including those available in the multidimensional revolutionary warfare environment. As this type of war is total and is "carried on in all fields, political, economic, diplomatic and military", strategy must also be total and it should no longer be the exclusive domain of the military.[57] It all seemed very appropriate to the Apartheid planners.

In essence total onslaught reflected the mindset of apartheid leaders, their notion of the challenge to their authority, and it shaped the response – total strategy. The rationale was quite clear: South Africa was the target of a

total onslaught which must be combated with a total strategy combining effective security with a policy of reform. Reform was aimed at removing the grievances the revolutionaries could exploit, while society had to be restructured in line with the requirements of industry and the economy, the political interest of the government and the security interests of the military and security forces. Total strategy in actual fact combined political and military action.

Many reforms that addressed grievances in the fields of industry, economy, labour, education, pass laws and petty apartheid followed. Constitutional development was an inherent part of total strategy. In an attempt to co-opt sections of society that were previously excluded from government, the tricameral constitution of 1983 created a parliament with three separate assemblies, one for White, one for Coloured and one for Indian Members of Parliament. But the overall authority was effectively still with the white House of Assembly. As the system clearly made no provision for African participation, a system of Black local authorities was instituted to elect local governments. The tricameral system and token Black local authorities in effect had very little appeal for the population and was resented. It was seen as not real reform and a ploy of the apartheid government to maintain authority. It led to much protest action and caused a legitimacy crisis for the apartheid reform process.[58] With the political pillar of total strategy thus unsuccessful, only the security pillar remained.

The security establishment (police and military in particular) had an important role to play in the total strategy. A National Security Management System was created with the State Security Council at its head. The State Security Council, an advisory body to Cabinet, soon gained much influence as it controlled the security situation and in many ways, according to some observers, it became an alternative Cabinet.

In their counterinsurgency approach the SADF and its generals initially drew from French and British experiences. Soon, and within the context of total strategy, it developed a counterrevolutionary response with much emphasis on the fact that it was a struggle for the people. The American theorist J.J. McCuen, who placed the accent on mirroring Maoist style revolutionary guerrilla warfare based on a protracted, phased struggle, was well studied.[59] The counterrevolutionaries had to arrest the progression of the struggle in every phase, implement a counter-phase, and force it back into an earlier phase.

By the late 1970s and the 1980s, due to the changing geopolitical situation and the support anti-apartheid forces received from many countries in the region, the SADF became embroiled in the conflict in Angola. This conflict, conducted across the Namibian-Angolan border, involved the liberation forces (such as the SWAPO and the ANC), Angolan and Cuban forces, Soviet advisors, as well as UNITA. In addition the SADF also operated across the region, often neutralising targets in countries harbouring guerrillas, which affected the stability of those countries adversely. Inside South Africa it supported and even supplanted the SA Police.

With its practical, instinctive approach, the SADF achieved much military success. It often discounted theory and relied on experience as much of its theory was in any case determined by the experience in Namibia and Angola.[60] Military leaders recognised that local conditions made it unwise to narrowly follow theories and models, as a former Chief of the SADF explained: "I had too much experience of people who have certain models and then they apply those models, come hell or high water, they apply those models ... I would like to get the facts and the figures and listen to everybody, analyse situations and decide on what would be the best approach ..."[61]. So, despite the notions echoed by the political leaders that such a struggle is 80% political and 20% military, without a clear and legitimate political alternative, the political problem was addressed by the application of military power.

Coinciding with the establishment of the tricameral parliament and the Black local authorities, internally the conflict entered a new phase in popular resistance by the middle 1980s. From 1984 onwards primary resistance against the government grew and by 1985 a township revolt had spread to most parts of the country. In many townships civil government collapsed and was replaced by alternative structures, those supporting or working for security forces and local authorities were isolated, student and labour unrests as well as rent and consumer boycotts were common and there were calls to make South Africa ungovernable and create a revolution. The exiled ANC received increased support, while guerrilla infiltration and attacks on state installations increased.

South Africa was now reaching new heights in popular resistance and state repression and there was a widespread but mistaken belief that the state was about to collapse. Despite the open rebellion and chaos, the state reacted with force and made it clear that the revolution was not about to occur. The Army and Police deployed in the townships from October 1984 onwards. In July 1985 the government declared a State of Emergency in many regions and

in the following year a full State of Emergency came into effect (only lifted in 1990). The entire resources of the state were mobilised in the internal struggle. Coordination of counter-revolutionary measures improved and the security forces managed to effectively crush the internal uprising by 1987. [62]

At the Kabwe Consultative Conference in June 1985, the ANC reappraised its strategy of "people's war" and "making the country ungovernable" as this policy had shown a specific weakness due to the focus on urban operations. The result was more operations in rural areas, landmines and attacks on white farms. If operations were conducted in border areas, guerrillas could retreat back across the border. Though the harsh nature of the State of Emergency led to a large number of detentions, and harmed the operational capability of MK, many operations still occurred during the late 1980s.[63]

South African society was paying the price for the fact that there was no credible political solution. The State Security Council seemed to dictate government policy, while through the National Security Management System a web of strict security controls were instituted.[64] The defence budget was huge and much militarization took place amongst the white segment of society. The media was also curtailed and in general South Africa became a security state. The international condemnation of apartheid and economic sanctions had caused a profound economic crisis. Popular protests, on the other hand, continued. In such conditions an increasing spiral of worsening poverty, disaffection and continued repression was inevitable.

A stalemate therefore existed. The dissidents could not overthrow the hegemony of the state, while the state had lost the initiative and its legitimacy. The cost of the war was unacceptable and without a political solution there was no way out. The application of military power, or "war", therefore ceased to be a political tool, but had become an objective on its own.

Change occurred suddenly. On 2 February 1990 F.W. de Klerk, the new President of South Africa, announced sweeping changes that included the unbanning of the ANC and other parties and organisations, as well as the release of many political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela. Soon key sections of apartheid legislation were repealed and formal multiparty negotiations, leading to a new political dispensation and a democratic South Africa commenced. The notion of a clear and acceptable political outcome, instead of the mere application of force, again entered the equation and paved the way towards a negotiated settlement.

Though the relationship between war and politics is obvious to all students of Clausewitz, its relevance to lesser forms of war is less evident. If politics is the "guiding intelligence" and war is only the "instrument", then political constraints will inherently moderate the conduct of war. This is specifically relevant to this type of conflict. For example, if an uprising is brutally suppressed by force, it would leave a bad legacy and create much animosity which could undermine efforts to seek a solution. In this sense suppression and the Sharpeville uprising in 1960, the Soweto uprising in 1976 and the State of Emergency in the 1980s created vast resentment against the apartheid government and caused many potential recruits to join the ranks of the liberation forces. Only a changed political situation provided an outcome.

A clear political programme is very important in a revolutionary struggle. In 1955 the Congress of the People (various liberation movements) accepted the Freedom Charter which demanded an end to apartheid, equality before the law and the creation of a righteous society based on the will of the people. The Charter became the foundation of ANC ideology, a blueprint in the liberation struggle and a beacon of hope for many. Mandela likened it to other political manifestos such as the American Declaration of Independence, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Communist Manifesto.[65] Despite much criticism of the Charter, it must be seen as a revolutionary document because it propagated radical changes to the economic, social and political structure of South Africa and served as a benchmark for opposition to apartheid into the 1990s.

In his study of Clausewitz, Lenin highlighted that by analysing the psychological and sociological makeup of an enemy and its reactions, crucial weaknesses can be identified. The soundest strategy is then "to postpone operations until moral disintegration of the enemy renders a mortal blow both possible and easy". As a revolutionary Lenin saw political action as psychological. It was not military action (as Clausewitz emphasised) that had to break the moral of the enemy, but political action.[66] Within the Leninist framework state power should be seized by insurrection and the transformation of society should then take place. These ideas were pleasing to the ANC as they placed much emphasis on the leadership, making the revolutionary struggle a calculated and precisely executed affair. The ANC saw state power as central to the process and Oliver Tambo (former President of the ANC) explained it as follows: "All revolutions are about state power … 'power to the people' means … to destroy the power of apartheid tyranny and replace it with popular power

with a government whose authority derives from the will of all our people, both black and white." In the same context, Thabo Mbeki saw the ANC as the "vanguard" of "national liberation", working towards mobilising all groups and classes for the "destruction of the apartheid system" with victory of the "national democratic revolution" as the objective.[67]

As a result of the unique political situation experienced in the time of Clausewitz, in his conception, war and soldiering increasingly became a concern of the people and the notion of a nation in arms gradually developed. Clausewitz maintained that the link between war and society should be closer, which was vindicated by the fact that insurrections against French domination were sweeping across Europe showing that war was no longer a matter for only the military.[68] The notion of the nation in arms is relevant for acting against an invader or foreign domination as was the case with French influence in the time of Clausewitz. In Africa the invader and foreign domination were encapsulated in colonial power and apartheid. Again, in Prussia it was possible to bring to fruition the nation under arms in the conventional sense and confront Napoleon on the battlefield, whereas in Africa the levels of available physical force between the opposing sides were disproportionate. Hence, the concept of the nation in arms was relevant as it had to prepare the nation for a people's war – to mobilise and organise everybody for resistance on all levels of society in a protracted multidimensional struggle. In fact, if it was not possible to defeat the occupier or the target government, the cost of the war had to become unacceptable and change had to be forced upon it.

What Clausewitz did not anticipate, also due to the uniqueness of the circumstances of his time, is that guerrilla tactics and the notion of the people's war would become infused with politics. Also, that this new type of war would not only be war waged for political objectives, but that politics would become the war. The people's war in essence became a struggle for the "hearts and the minds" of the people. Revolutionary wars are therefore not decided on the battlefield, but as the Brazilian theorist Abraham Guillen emphasised, "rather by winning the political support of the people".[69]

The struggle for the "hearts and minds" in South Africa was a more complex process than it might seem. For the disenfranchised black masses resistance was a logical choice, but those resisting apartheid were not only black, and from the beginning they included defective voices from other groups. In many senses the dissatisfaction of many white South Africans contributed much towards the eventual political solution. This was evident in a

number of developments. By the 1980s South Africa experienced a "virtual civil war" in many parts of the country and the SA Army occupied the townships in support of the SA Police and retained control through military power, detentions and increased repression. The soldiers that had to perform these tasks were mostly white conscripts who did two years, compulsory military service, fought in the "Border War" and were internally deployed in the townships. Many resented their role – it was not the principle of military service that caused the resentment, but the fact that they were fighting internally. Their lives and schools were also infused with security force propaganda and they were susceptible to various security controls. This did not go unopposed. Objection by conscripted servicemen occurred, while the End Conscription Campaign gained much wider support after the deployment of troops in townships.[70] Furthermore, the spectacle of young soldiers losing their lives in a poorly defined "Border War" raised many questions about its purpose amongst the white electorate. Internationally condemnation also grew, South Africa became a pariah state, sanctions and disinvestment caused economic decline, taxes increased and constant labour unrest disrupted normal economic activities. The cost of the war had simply become unacceptable.

Regarding guerrilla warfare Clausewitz's focus is more on it as a tool in defence within the wider framework of a general war. This is comprehensible against the background of his time as much military effort could be diverted to contain guerrilla forces. However, Clausewitz's recognition of the salient nature of guerrilla warfare as a tactic of choice for the militarily inferior or "the people" and the fact that he emphasises geographic features and warns that guerrilla forces should avoid direct battle with regular forces are important and relevant. In contrast with other parts of the world a rural-based peasant revolt or a guerrilla campaign waged from the countryside, was not successful or the best option in South Africa. A landed peasantry in the Chinese sense did not exist and it was not possible to create base areas in forests and mountain ranges where the guerrillas would have sufficient sanctuary from government forces. Though a countryside approach was initially favoured, the emphasis moved to an urban insurrection with support from rural areas. MK appreciated that the armed forces should not be tackled directly, and the conflict became a politico-socio-economic struggle waged in various dimensions. It was therefore a move from guerrilla warfare, as the most important tool, to a complex popular revolutionary struggle with guerrilla warfare interspersed with acts of terror-

ism as a tool. The armed struggle and urban violence was not of major significance or at all militarily decisive, yet in political terms its impact was vast.

## Conclusion

The model for the liberation struggle in South Africa is not to be found in the literature produced by Clausewitz. In contrast with some of the great wars of the past, the influence of Clausewitz was also not instrumental to the liberation struggle in South Africa. Yet, the contribution Clausewitz made to our understanding of conflict, including this one, was omnipresent.

Certainly, war is not only a continuation of politics in great wars, but those waging irregular wars or conducting revolution must always take cognisance of it. If military actions do not take place to support a clear and legitimate political goal, they are doomed to failure. A common threat therefore visible in the history of colonial wars or wars of national liberation is that military power in itself is not enough; clear political goals must be in place.

In the South African example the struggle waged by the liberation forces had a clear political objective with which the majority identified, while the military actions of the apartheid regime lacked political credibility. It was therefore a revolutionary struggle waged for a desired political outcome, against counterrevolutionary warfare lacking political legitimacy. The liberation forces thus understood the nature of the conflict and mobilised their array of forces quite appropriately, although their military wings remained somewhat peripheral at times. The then South African government also understood the nature of the conflict, but their success with military counter-measures accentuates their failure on the political and socio-economic levels. Not heeding Clausewitz by losing sight of the political imperative to guide the security campaign is the single fatal blunder of the apartheid government.

Clausewitz certainly did not emphasise this type of conflict and it is easier to search for his influence in the great wars of the last two centuries. Yet, applicability exists and the fact that the work of Clausewitz promotes an understanding of a type of conflict that essentially developed and was raised to saliency long after his death, pays testimony to the following: How thorough and deep his understanding of war and conflict as a complex phenomenon was, the inter-relationship of war in its various guises and the fact that Clausewitz still holds supreme as a philosopher of war.

**Notes:**

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[1] See Stuart Kinross, 'Clausewitz and Low-Intensity Conflict', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27(1), (March, 2004); M.L.R. Smith, 'Guerrillas in the Mist: Reassessing Strategy and Low Intensity Warfare, *Review of International Studies*, 29, (2003), p. 21 and Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 6-8.

[2] Colin Gray, Clausewitz rules, OK? The future is the past – with GPS, *Review of International Studies*, 25. (1999), p. 180.

[3] Jan Angstrom, "Introduction" in Isabella Duyvesteyn and Jan Angstrom, *Rethinking the Nature of War*, London: Frank Cass, 2005, p. 9; Kinross, Clausewitz and low-intensity conflict, p. 36.

[4] See Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Introduction, in Strachan and Herberg- Rothe (eds), *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 11.

[5] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 198.

[6] Christopher Daase, "Clausewitz and Small Wars" in Strachan and Herberg-Rothe, (eds) *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 182.

[7] Bernard Brodie, "The continuing relevance of On War" in Peter Paret and Michael Howard, (eds), *On War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 45.

[8] Daase, Clausewitz and Small wars, p. 192.

[9] Gray, 1999, Clausewitz rules, p. 177.

[10] Kinross, Clausewitz and low-intensity conflict, p. 36.

[11] Clausewitz, "The people in arms" in Peter Paret and Michael Howard, (eds), *On War*, Princeton: PUP, 1984, p. 479.

[12] Geofrey Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe*, 1770-1870, Fontana, 1982, pp. 253-254.

[13] Clausewitz, "Interdependence of the elements of war" in Paret and Howard (eds), *On War*, p. 592.

[14] Peter Paret, "Clausewitz", in Peter Paret, (ed), *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Michiavelli to the nuclear age*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 188.

[15] See Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe*.

[16] Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe*, pp. 50-51.

[17] Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe*, p. 157.

[18] Paret, Clausewitz, pp. 192 and 195.

[19] Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe*, p. 159.

[20] Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe*, p. 257.

[21] Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe*, p. 162-163.

[22] Paret, Clausewitz, p. 192.

[23] Hahlweg, Clausewitz and guerrilla warfare in Michael Handel, *Clausewitz in Modern Strategy*, London: Frank Cass, 1986 and Beatrice Heuser, Small wars in the age of Clausewitz: The watershed between partisan war and people's war, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33(1), February, 2010.

[24] Hahlweg, Clausewitz and guerrilla warfare, p. 127.

[25] Heuser, Small wars in the age of Clausewitz, p. 141.

[26] Heuser, Small wars in the age of Clausewitz, p. 146.

[27] Kinross, Clausewitz and low-intensity conflict, p. 37.

[28] Clausewitz, What is war? in Paret and Howard (eds), *On War*, pp. 80-81.

[29] Heuser, Small wars in the age of Clausewitz, p. 148.

[30] Heuser, Small wars in the age of Clausewitz, p. 150.

[31] Kinross, Clausewitz and low-intensity conflict, pp. 37-38.

[32] Clausewitz, Interdependence of the elements of war in Paret and Howard (eds), *On War,* p. 586.

[33] Hahlweg, Clausewitz and guerrilla warfare, p. 129.

[34] Hahlweg, Clausewitz and guerrilla warfare, p. 129.

[35] Clausewitz, People's war in Paret and Howard (eds), *On War,* p. 483.

[36] Hahlweg, Clausewitz and guerrilla warfare, p. 129.

[37] Hahlweg, Clausewitz and guerrilla warfare, pp. 129-130.

[38] Clausewitz, People's War in Paret and Howard (eds), *On War*, p. 480.

[39] Clausewitz, People's War in Paret and Howard (eds), *On War*, pp. 482-483.

[40] Daase, Clausewitz and Small wars, p.182.

[41] Mandela, N.R. Nelson Mandela's statement to the court during the Rivonia trial, 20 April 1964, p. 11.

[42] Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, p. 107.

[43] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard and Paret (trans. and eds.), p. 88.

[44] Nelson R. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom. The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, London: Abacus, 1994, pp. 182 and 194.

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[46] Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, pp. 325-326 and 329.

[47] Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 336

[48] Rocky Williams, 'The Other Armies: Writing the History of MK', in Ian Liebenberg, et al. (eds), *The Long March. The Story of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa*, Pretoria: HAUM, 1994, pp. 25-26.

[49] Joe Mathews as quoted in Ramuhala, Guerrilla Warfare, p. 127.

[50] Kevin O'Brien, 'A Blunted Spear: the Failure of the African National Congress/South African Communist Party Revolutionary War Strategy 1961-1990', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 14 (Summer 2003), pp. 27-70 and 30-32.

[51] Ramuhala, Guerrilla Warfare, pp. 130-131.

[52] See the discussion in Chris Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand. The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State*, London: MacMillan, 1996, pp. 36-41.

[53] *Debates of the House of Assembly,* South Africa: Friday 20 May 1983, cols. 7538-7541.

[54] Department of Defence (DOD), *White Paper on Defence 1977*, South Africa: DOD, 1977, pp. 1-2, 6, 7, 20-24 and 25. See also Rocky Williams, 'The Role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the Re-Professionalisation of the South African Armed Forces', *Strategic Review for Southern Africa,* 21 (1999).

[55] André Beaufre, *Strategy of Action*, London: Faber and Faber, 1967, pp. 111-112. See also Gavin Cawthra, *Securing South Africa's Democracy. Defence, Development and Security in Transition,* London: Macmillan, 1997, pp. 33 and 47-48.

[56] André Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy*, London: Faber and Faber, 1961, p. 13.

[57] André Beaufre, *Introduction to Strategy*, pp. 13-14 and 24.

[58] Worden, *Making of Modern South Africa*, p. 124-125.

[59] See John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War. The Strategy of Counter-Insurgency,* London: Faber and Faber, 1966.

[60] Chris Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*, p. 219.

[61] General Jannie Geldenhuys, former Chief of the SADF, quoted in Anita M. Gossmann, 'The South African Military and Counterinsurgency: An Overview', in Baker and Jordaan, *South Africa and Contemporary Counterinsurgency*, p. 90.

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[64] Worden, *Making of Modern South Africa*, p. 131.

[65] Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 203.

[66] Andre Beaufre, *Introduction to Strategy*, pp. 23-24.

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[70] Worden, *Making of Modern South Africa,* p. 132.