

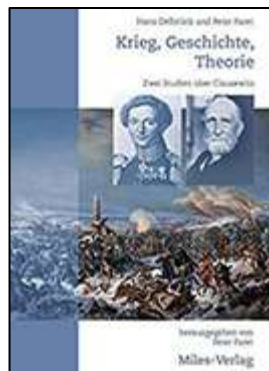


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MIGUEL ALONSO BAQUER, Ph. D., Brigadier General (Ret.). Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (Ministry of Defense of Spain - Madrid). Ph. D. History and Geography (Universidad Complutense - Madrid). He taught History of the Art of War in the Staff College of the Spanish Army, in the Naval War College, in the Army High Studies College and in the Spanish Center for National Defense Studies. He has published numerous books and articles. In relation to Carl Clausewitz, the following publications can be highlighted: "Ideas and believes of Carl Clausewitz", Marie von Brühl, Clausewitz's wife", "Clausewitz and the Mountain Warfare", "Spanish Military Organization during the last three Centuries". E-Mail: ieee@oc.mde.es.

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CLAUSEWITZ, SPAIN, AND THE 21ST CENTURY

Miguel Alonso Baquer

Clausewitz never visited Spain, nor did he study the country's war history. This was not so for Antoine-Henri Jomini of Switzerland, who was a member of Marshal Ney's general staff during our war of independence.

Clausewitz let the opportunity pass to join the King's German Legion, which operated under the command of Wellington since 1809. Those were the months of Napoleon's operations on the Iberian Peninsula (October 1808 to January 1809). And it was the time when Clausewitz returned from Paris via Switzerland to Berlin, eager to enter into marriage with Marie von Brühl.

In the final years of his life he must have come to regret his not taking part in the so-called Peninsular War (1808 to 1814). Even before that time, he had made himself a name as a researcher of the *guerrilla* or "small war" and the supporting role of the town militias.

It took many years before the works of Clausewitz came to the attention of the Spanish military. Quotes of Clausewitz are conspicuously absent from 19th century essays. One way to correct this state of affairs would have been to include in the libraries of the General Staff schools either the original works or translations into other, more accessible languages.

In 1870, the situation improved under conditions marked by the dethroning of Queen Isabel II de Borbón. The strong man during that revolution, General Juan Prim, eventually suggested that Leopold of Hohenzollern should be made king, much to the chagrin of the empire of Napoleon III. At the time, there was a considerable interest in German politics and strategies. The General Staff had accumulated precise studies of the campaigns of the Austro-Prussian War and the Franco-Prussian War in Italy and France. And through Nicolás Marselli, the Italian General, knowledge was received of the enormous reputation enjoyed by Carl von Clausewitz and his masterpiece.

Reflections on the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars written in German focused on the works of Archduke Charles of Austria (1771 to 1847) and the "Principles of Strategy" of the most able commander of operations in mountainous terrain of that era. As early as in 1831, the year Clausewitz died, his four volumes had been translated into Spanish.

A text that was accepted at our military academies of the 19th century was *Die Theorie des großen Krieges: Der russisch-polnische Feldzug des Jahres 1831* (The Theory of Major Warfare: The Russian-Polish Campaign of the Year 1831). The book was written by the Prussian general staff officer Colonel Wilhelm von Willisen (1790 to 1879) – who at the time served as a lecturer at the Prussian War Academy in Berlin – and was published in Barcelona in 1850.

It was translated by Major Ambrosio Garcés de Mantilla of the Spanish Engineer Corps, and dedicated to the scientist and Chief of Engineers Antonio Remón Zarco del Valle. It was fairly successful, yet proved to be detrimental to Clausewitz's reputation. It was directed against everything that had been proposed by the strategist Heinrich von Bülow (1757 to 1805). The most consulted book, after all, probably was *Précis de l'Art de la Guerre: Des Principales Combinaisons de la Stratégie, de la Grande Tactique et de la Politique Militaire* by Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini (1779 to 1869), sent to print in 1839 for the Spanish military, titled *Cuadro Analítico de las principales combinaciones de la guerra*.

Clausewitz was not unknown to the Spanish generals Evaristo San Miguel (1785 to 1862), Manuel Gutiérrez de la Concha (1808 to 1874), and Francisco Villamartín, an infantry major, who were avid readers of essays written in foreign languages. They knew the *Betrachtungen über die Kriegskunst, ihre Fortschritte, ihre Widersprüche und ihre Zuverlässigkeit* (*Observations on the Art of War, Its Progress, Its Contradictions, and Its Reliability*) by Georg Heinrich von Berenhorst (1757 to 1805), and were instrumental in the discreditation of Ernst Wilhelm von Büchel (1754 to 1823). It was only the glorious victories achieved by General Moltke (1800 to 1891) and the critiques by Theodor von Bernhardt (1802 to 1887) that promoted the acceptance of Clausewitz by our military academy, the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (1893 to 1936).

In 1908, two students of that very *Escuela Superior*, first lieutenants Abilio Barbero and Juan Seguí, translated some parts of the treatise *On War* selected by themselves. The printing shop of the *Sección de Hidrografía*, located at Calle de Alcalá No 56 in Madrid, published a book of 268 pages in the quarto format. And there were enough Spanish military authors who – distressed by the so-called “Disaster of 1898” in Cuba and the Philippines – disseminated the teachings of the great Prussian writer of treatises. Yet, they kept looking for what could not be found in the work of Clausewitz: An obsession with infantry tactics and guidelines for colonial warfare and the protectorate wars in Africa.

The complete Spanish text of *On War* was not available until the beginning of the Second World War (though there were paper editions owned by the *Círculo Militar Argentino* in Buenos Aires). References to Clausewitz were made frequently in the lectures given at the academy of the army (*Escuela Superior del Ejército*, established in 1940), the older naval school (*Escuela de Guerra Naval*) and the more recently established academy of the air force (*Escuela Superior del Aire*). Yet, the critical stance taken by the British Liddell Hart and the French André Beaufre was widely spread.

The clearest and most praising attention was bestowed in two volumes of the five-volume edition of the *Historia de la Infantería Española* (History of Spanish Infantry), titled *Entre la Ilustración y el Romanticismo* (Between Enlightenment and Romanticism), dated 1994 (II), and *La época de los ejércitos Nacionales* (The Era of National Armies), dated 1998 (III).

The great thinker Carl von Clausewitz is lauded in chapter I, 'Los tratadistas militares del siglo XVIII' (Military Writers of the 18th Century) of the first volume, and in chapters II 'En la hora de las Academias Militares' (In the Hour of Military Academies) and IV 'Los tratadistas militares del siglo XIX' (The Military Writers in the 19th Century) of the second volume, all edited by General Miguel Alonso Baquer, who coordinated the entire work.

What had already been read were other original works in the French language and collections of private letters which revealed the melancholy condition of the Prussian general, a condition the occurrence of which among other important career officers of various traditions might be a subject worthwhile studying. In Spain, Carl von Clausewitz came to be fully embraced after Raymond Aron's near-encyclopedic study *Clausewitz: Philosopher of War* had been translated for the *Escuela de Guerra Naval*.

Finally, the Spanish Army Staff's Military Publication Service and, somewhat later, the Ministry of Defense (1999) concerned themselves with some excellent translations of *On War*. In 1978, a very precise critical piece was published in the army journal *La Revista Ejército*, with a foreword written by the journal's director, General Juan Cano Hevia. Those were the years of transition from an authoritarian system of government to a formal democracy. In two thick volumes, the Ministry of Defense compiled the translations of the writings of two British authors, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, with an introductory essay by Bernard Brodie.

So, the figure of Clausewitz had finally made its appearance in Spain, entering into the 21st century with ease, while the works of Hans Delbrück (1887), Carl Schwartz (1887), W. M. Schering (1935), H. Hahlweg (1957), Raymond Aron (1976) and Peter Paret (1979) enjoyed new-found appreciation.

In this consolidation of interest, a preeminent role was played by the *Escuela de Estado Mayor* (where I myself lectured as a professor on the history of warfare in the years 1976 to 1983), and I would like to take the liberty to expound on how this actually came to pass.

There was the erroneous impression that the abstract ideas of Clausewitz applied only to major wars, and both during the lectures I gave and in my later works under the auspices of the *Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos* (Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies) (1986 – 2001) his accurate teachings were frequently applied. And, from my viewpoint, I explained what we, Spanish civilian and military researchers alike, should consider to be most impressive.

My contribution is focused on young Clausewitz's deliberations on mountain warfare; the special position he held among the intellectuals of his epoch in his mature years; and on considerations as to his ideas and beliefs. Naturally, differing opinions may be found among my students, but I think that this summary of interpretations of one Spaniard may sufficiently serve to outline the horizon of the 21st century.

On Mountain Warfare

My essay titled *Clausewitz y la guerra de montaña* (Clausewitz and Mountain Warfare) was published in Bulletin No. 211-IV, July/August 1988, under the auspices of the *Centro Superior de Estudios de la Defensa Nacional* (CESEDEN) (Academy of National Defense Studies).

Based on four texts, I explained the thoughts developed intuitively by Clausewitz's mind that showed the traits of a genius:

- Notes on strategy (1804)
- Lectures on the small war (1810-1811)
- Treatise (1818), to include the earliest mention of mountainous terrain

- Study on the campaign of 1799, dedicated to Archduke Charles of Austria, in the form it was published between 1828 and 1830, yet without being disseminated.

My colleagues and students came to the conclusion that, had Clausewitz gained direct insights from the war of independence, this would have been helpful in understanding the vicissitudes Spain experienced in the wake of that conflict.

On his Position among the Intellectuals

The CESEDEN monograph titled *Clausewitz y su entorno intelectual* (Clausewitz and his intellectual surroundings) published in 1990 included the particular attention bestowed on the concepts by Kant, Jacques Hippolyte Guibert, Fichte, Moltke, Schlieffen and Lenin (in this order). While my own contribution shared in this endeavor to elucidate the history of Clausewitz's fame, I garnered the support of German scientist Martin Kutz and Colonel Antonio de Querol Lombardero, a member of the Spanish Marines.

My own views are expressed in four short essays:

- a) *Los intelectuales y la estrategia* (The Intellectuals and the Strategy)
This is a brief article, with some critical allusions to the most prestigious intellectuals of the period from 1898 to 1936, illustrating the deplorable indifference towards the ideas of strategic value of the Spanish military authors.
- b) *Guibert, un oficial progresista al servicio de la revolución* (Guibert, a Progressive Military Officer in the Service of the Revolution)
This essay contrasts Napoleon's (rather cursory) ideas on the nature of the modern state with all that which Clausewitz committed to writing on the subject when he returned from Paris in 1808.
- c) *Nacionalista y místico* (Fichte: Jacobin, Nationalist and Mystical)
This is another essay illustrating Clausewitz's mental autonomy with respect to the great movement of German idealism so as to highlight his approaching the style of Montesquieu, actually on the basis of aphorisms.

d) *Marie von Brühl, esposa de Clausewitz* (Marie von Brühl, the Wife of Clausewitz)

A third essay on the person of Clausewitz, who – having turned more humane since his radical melancholy – is surprised by the ideas and convictions that actually came from the religiosity of Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher.

The attractiveness of the figure of Clausewitz for Spain was already guaranteed in the last decade of the 20th century. There was an obvious risk of his falling into disregard or oblivion, though, because Spanish military men of the 21st century are facing a situation radically different from that of the past. So it was to be anticipated that, after the return of Clausewitz's thoughts to the Spanish centers of study of war and peace, abandon would ensue. And this is exactly what has happened over the past years.

My personal answer to that phenomenon was clear – though one cannot say how accurate – without my selecting other answers provided by my military and scholarly colleagues. For I undertook two complementary interpretative tasks titled the “ideas and beliefs”, seeing in my minds eye the figure of Clausewitz.

On Ideas and Beliefs

What continue to be of interest in Clausewitz are - separately from each other - his ideas and beliefs. In Spain it is not easy to put them in precise terms because, for quite some time now, they have been ascribed to two schools of thought which I think have deviated from the straight line pursued by the evidently melancholic mind of that ingenious German romantic.

Melancholy is a sentiment that usually affects modern-day soldiers, sailors and aviators when they know themselves to be superior or distinguished. It grows as they become aware of the enormous distance between what things are and what they should be like. Melancholy dwells next to informed knowledge but hardly ever next to the hope for salvation. And, in the medium term, the melancholic individual feels himself to be discredited as a leader of his fellow soldiers and their successors in his time. He writes a lot, yet little is published.

In 1986, I published the essay *Las ideas y las creencias de Clausewitz* (The ideas and beliefs of Clausewitz) in RECONQUISTA, the periodical of *Espíritu Militar Español* (a publication the production of which was terminated in 1993

after about fifty years of existence). It was a dialogue between me and Raymond Aron.

The French humanist had written: “How come I feel this deep familiarity, a sympathy towards a man from whom everything should keep me apart?” “Romantic and rational, merciless in his analyses and of a touching sensitiveness, Clausewitz belongs to the lineage of those like Thucydides and Macchiavelli who, through failing in action, found the leisure and sufficient resolve to elevate to the level of clear science the theory of an art which they practiced imperfectly.”

As a Spanish military man who already has entered into the third millennium of the Christian era, I do not consider Clausewitz to be "a man from whom everything should keep me apart". For me, Clausewitz is a being that is rather close. My sympathy with him and with those like him is spontaneous. But my respect for the influence which he accepted from his wife Marie von Brühl goes deeper. In its roots, that influence is of a religious nature.

Rather than as a melancholic military man, I would see Carl in the nostalgia of a chivalry lost in the times of revolution. And that is also how I wish to see the military in the Western Europe of the 21st century.

I agree with Raymond Aron in that Clausewitz pertains to the, still numerous, lineage of those “who, through failing in action, found the leisure and sufficient resolve to elevate to the level of clear science the theory of an art which they practiced imperfectly.”

So it is with tenderness that I pick up a fragment of the letter sent from Paris to his fiancée Marie on 5 October 1807. “Even the most sublime creations of humanity, for as many centuries as they may exist and work in harmony; bear within them the element of their own destruction.” And it is so that the letters of Marie von Brühl, perhaps under the influence of her godfather, F. Schleiermacher, alluded to other creations not necessarily like the works of humanity; for example: Creation.

Conclusion

The short essay on *Las ideas y las creencias de Carl Clausewitz*, takes up the line of interpretation which give him validity for the entire 21st century, also in Spain. I view him steeped in suffering after the violent death of the poet Heinrich von Kleist; I view him in his seeking to understand the mysticism of Fichte (or

Hölderlin) while not abandoning what he admired most in Montesquieu and what he was able to learn from Marqués de Santa Cruz de Marcenado, a Spanish author of the 18th century.

The problem as to the survival of his mastery stems from the intellectual abuse which I studied in my last essay of the CESEDEN monography, *Clausewitz y su entorno intelectual*.

I referred to the two schools of thought deviating from a correct interpretation of his reasoning: The positivistic school of French and German military authors of treatises, which dominated in the period between two major wars (1918- 1939), and the materialistic school of the civilian theoreticians in the service of a different revolution, which pursued a series of armed interventions directed against tradition, especially the armed intervention in Russia in 1917.

It was these two schools of thought, with exceptions, that refused to reflect on the deep roots of the dialectic of hostile will and intention. Clausewitz the thinker was a theoretician of moderation, who was against extremism and in favor of waging a tough war (a defensive war that is) against the spirit of conquest. This was not so for the intellectuals with whom I dealt with in my essay in the monograph *Las dos estirpes desviadas del pensamiento de Clausewitz*.

It is urgent that the work of Clausewitz be extracted from these two trajectories. By preferring to apply maxims over principles, Clausewitz was superior to those who considered strategy as a means of short-term total victory.

Clausewitz recognized that the phenomenon of "war" went beyond the geometric synthesis of things military, mechanical, physical etc.... He immersed himself into the political and cultural aspects, yet without drifting into the transcendent or religious sphere. He was rather an agnostic than a believer. This, however, was not true of his loving and cultivated wife Marie von Brühl.

Also, he avoided the dialectics of a radically violent will as appear in Friedrich Schiller, who was a revolutionary rather than a reformist. He never confounded war and revolution, combat and commotion. He accorded to the phenomenon before him the treatment it deserved, that is, to be treated as "war".

For this reason, he deserves to remain what he has come to be in Spain: a classical author, who should not be forgotten but remembered more every day.