



Clausewitz, Mao and Maoism by T. Derbent*

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Clausewitz, one of the most eminent authors who has dealt with the philosophy of war and military history (...) a writer who had studied the history of wars and had drawn their philosophical lessons from them shortly after Napoleonic era. This author, whose essential ideas have today become without question the heritage of every thinking man....

Lenin, *War and Revolution*¹

1. Preface

"A preface could be titled: lightning rod."

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

The publication of my book on Clausewitz and people's war in 2004 [[Clausewitz et la Guerre Populaire](#) (Bruxelles: Aden, 2004)] left open, for lack of documents, several fields of research. The most important was the possible influence of Clausewitz on Mao Zedong and other theorists and practitioners of protracted Maoist-style people's war.² The present study hopes to fill this gap.

¹ V.I. Lenin, "La guerre et la Révolution" [[War and Revolution](#)]. See *Œuvres Complètes* [Complete Works], Paris-Moscow, 1961, volume 24, pp. 408-409.

² Derbent, T, [Giap et Clausewitz](#) (Aden, 2006, Bruxelles, (Suivi de Contribution à l'histoire de Dien Bien Phu et de Préface au livre du général Giap: guerre du peuple, armée du peuple). ISBN 2930402253. This study relating to the relations between Clausewitz and Giap could be approached only after 2006, thanks to the publication of General Giap's Memoirs: Général Vo Nguyen Giap, *Mémoires* (Éditions Anako, collection Grans Témoins, Fontenay-sous-bois, trois tomes, 2003-2004).

In 2008-2009, I allowed myself to be embarked, following a criticism of my essay, in a controversy on the relationship between Mao and Clausewitz.³ I must admit, ashamedly, the erroneous conclusion to which arrived [at that time]:

I must report having seen three times that Mao had read Clausewitz. First in the Dictionary of Strategy of Thierry de Montbrial and Jean Klein [*Dictionnaire de stratégie*, PUF, 2000. 2nd edition collection “Quadrige,” PUF 2006. Also translated into Arabic.], then in [a study by R. Lynn Rylander](#), and finally in a clearly less serious article by Arthur Conte. Each time, no positive indication supported this assertion. Even Rylander can only “deduce” Mao's reading of Clausewitz by comparing their analyses. But the same situations dictating close analyzes, the argument is moderately convincing. Rylander evokes, among the theses that Mao would have been “looking for” in Clausewitz, the link between war and its social matrix, the primacy of man, the primacy of politics and the dialectical method, but Mao Zedong really had no need to read Clausewitz to design and develop this, and the alleged closeness of the formulas is not convincing. I continue to believe that the Maoist doctrine of protracted people's war was forged independently of any direct influence from Clausewitz's thought. Mao had only a vague second-hand knowledge of Clausewitz. It's through Clausewitz's influence on Leninism that Mao may have been influenced by him.⁴

In fact, as will be seen below, Clausewitz's direct influence on Mao has been firmly and definitively established. I must therefore apologize to my rare readers—especially those, even rarer, who have done me the honor of believing me.

2. Clausewitz and Mao Zedong

2.1. Introduction

For decades, the discussion of Mao's possible reading of Clausewitz was based solely on the comparative study of ideas. The highest Clausewitzian authorities, such as Werner Hahlweg or Raymond Aron, had been reduced to this hypothetical and speculative method. During the 2008-2009 controversy, I stayed with that method. However, as early as 1995, in a thesis in philosophy defended in Germany, a researcher from the People's Republic, Zhang Yuan-Lin,⁵ had indeed established that Mao had read Clausewitz. The only excuse for my ignorance: this thesis had been the subject only of a confidential publication, in German of course, by the University of Mannheim.

³ My essay had been strangled by the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist-Maoist (France), in “Clausewitz ou Mao Zedong? [Clausewitz or Mao Zedong?], published in *Révolution* n°4, December 2008, and in “Le rôle de la France napoléonienne dans la genèse du nazisme (pour en finir avec Clausewitz)” [The role of Napoleonic France in the genesis of Nazism (in order to finish with Clausewitz)] published in *Révolution* n°10, April 2009.

⁴ In my defense, the thesis of my opponents was even worse, which challenged any commonality of idea between Clausewitz and Mao.

⁵ Zhang Yuanlin, “Mao Zedong und Carl von Clausewitz: Theorien des Krieges, Beziehung, Darstellung und Vergleich.” Inauguraldissertation zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie der Universität Mannheim, 1995. [Table of Contents](#), <https://www.clausewitzstudies.org/bibl/Zhang-TOC.pdf>.

Zhang Yuan-Lin's work is relatively late because the documents clarifying the issue were not made public in China until the late 1980s.⁶

Far from being limited to listing the references and listing their content, Zhang Yuan-Lin devoted himself to the study of ideas and carried out this analysis that Raymond Aron called for in the 1970s:⁷ identification of Clausewitz's quotes in Mao's texts by collating them with the Chinese editions of *Vom Kriege*.

My article here, the reader will understand, draws heavily on the Mannheim thesis. The names of people are transcribed in Chinese pinyin (Mao Zedong and not Mao Tse-tung) and the place names in Romanized pinyin (Beijing and not Bejing); when there is a risk of being misunderstood, the retained version will be followed by the other bracketing—the quotations being reproduced in their own transcription.

2.2. Mao reader of Clausewitz

In 1986, Mao Zedong's collection of Lectures⁸ appeared in Chinese in Beijing. In this book, Mao's former secretary, Gao Lu, talks about Mao's reading of Clausewitz in referring to a document which will be published in full—still in Chinese—in 1988 in Mao Zedong's Notes for Philosophical Works:⁹ the agenda in which Mao had undertaken to keep a record of his readings.

Mao writes there that he started *Vom Kriege* on March 18, 1938. He reads a few dozen pages a day (a sign of careful reading): April 1, the last page we have of this diary, it is on page 168. Meticulous research by Zhang Yuan-Lin has established which Chinese edition of *Vom Kriege* (among the four possible) Mao read in 1938—that of Liu Jo-shui published in two volumes in 1934 in Shanghai by Xinken Publishing. However, this translation was not made from the German text, but from the Japanese edition of *Vom Kriege*. We understand that the filter of successive translations could have blurred the references, because to top it all off, if the first two volumes of the Japanese edition were translated from the German original, the last six were from ... from the French translation.

For Zhang Yuan-Lin, there is no doubt that this reading was continued and completed, in particular because soon afterwards Mao organized and directed a seminar on *Vom Kriege* in Yenan.¹⁰ Among

⁶ In 1988, Zhang Yuan-Lin published a study in Beijing on the influence of Clausewitz in China in the Annals of the Military Sciences. He also published a short article in German: Zhang Yuanlin, "[Die chinesischen Ausgaben des Werkes 'Vom Kriege' von Carl von Clausewitz](#)," in: *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* 28 (1990), S.229-230.

⁷ "I do not know if Mao Tse-tung read or studied Clausewitz (...) one should refer to the Chinese characters to know if they correspond to those which are used, or would have been used by the translators of Clausewitz." Raymond Aron, *Clausewitz—Livre deux: L'âge planétaire* [Clausewitz—Book Two: The Planetary Age] (NRF, Bibliothèque des sciences humaines, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1976), p.103.

⁸ Jiong Yuzhi, Jiang Xiaozhi and Shi Zhongquian, *Lectures of Mao Zedong*, Éditions Sanlian, Pékin, 1986.

⁹ Book published by the Research Office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party.

¹⁰ Mao gave at least two training courses to the students of the Research Institute for the War of Resistance against Japan in 1938: this seminar on *Vom Kriege* and a seminar on philosophical questions. Many of Mao's published writings have come from these conferences. For the seminar on *Vom Kriege*, Mao would have used as teaching material, in addition to the Shanghai edition of 1934 already quoted, a 1937 publication of the Military Academy of

the participants in this seminar, who met once a week in Mao's accommodations, were several of the main politico-military officials of the Red Army, such as Xiao Jinguang¹¹ and Luo Ruiqing.¹²

At the start of the anti-Japanese war, Zhou Enlai called Fu Daqing¹³ to act as an interpreter for Soviet military advisers. Seeing that Mao regretted not having a good translation of *Vom Kriege*, Fu offered to translate it from Russian into Chinese. His work was recognized as "the best translation of the text in China" by Zhu De, who had studied in Germany and was the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army. Several chapters, such as "The Culminating Point of the Offensive" (Book VII, Chapter 5) or "War Is an Instrument of Politics" (Book VIII, Chapter 6B), will later be pre-published in the review *Masses Populaires*, and in between July 1939 and August 1941, the Communist politico-military press will publish articles and brochures on Clausewitz and *Vom Kriege*, from which Zhang Yuan-Lin draws up an impressive inventory.

Before his 1938 reading, Mao had been confronted with Clausewitz in several ways. First of all by the good that Lenin said about it. Then, by modern Chinese military studies which were directly influenced by Clausewitz. Jiang Jieshi [Tchang Kai-chek] claimed responsibility for Clausewitz,¹⁴ as did Jiang Baili who had directed the Huangpu Military Academy.¹⁵ The German military advisers who supervised the Kuomintang army were familiar with Clausewitz, even prominent Clausewitzians, starting with their leader, Colonel-General Hans von Seeckt. The result was a deep imprint of Clausewitz's theses on Kuomintang military training and regulations ... which were carefully studied by Red Army cadres.

the Kuomintang [at Huangpu/Whampoa] containing the translation of Clausewitz by Professor Sijing, who had studied in Germany.

¹¹ A member of the CPC in 1922, a student at the Orient University in Moscow, an officer in the Revolutionary National Army having participated in the Northern Expedition, he returned to the USSR in 1927 to 1930 to study military questions. He will assume the highest military responsibilities in the Red Army, participating in the Long March and commanding the 8th Route Army during the anti-Japanese war. Against the Kuomintang, it liberates Beijing and central China. From 1949 to 1979, he commanded the Chinese navy.

¹² Member of the CPC in 1928. He assumed several leading positions in the Red Army, notably ensuring the training of executives. After 1948, he was appointed Minister of Public Security and member of the Central Military Commission. He took part in the Korean War. He was appointed chief of general staff of the PLA but lost this function in 1965 following a disagreement with Mao and Lin Biao. Violently criticized during the Cultural Revolution, he attempted suicide. Rehabilitated by Mao at a meeting of the Central Military Commission in 1975, he returned to high office.

¹³ Member of the Communist Part of China (CPC) [CPC en Français] in 1924. Studied at the Orient University in Moscow and worked for the Sun Yat-sen government in Canton as a translator for Mikhail Borodin. Active at the Huangpu Military Academy, he participated in the Northern Expedition. After a trip abroad, he participated in the anti-Japanese war in the 8th Road Army. In June 1941, he was sent on a mission to Beijing by the CPC Central Committee. He was arrested by the Japanese military police and executed.

¹⁴ Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kaishek; Tchang Kai-chek] wrote an article on Clausewitz in which he recognizes that *Vom Kriege* was one of his main influences and he invited all the executives of the Kuomintang to study it. Clausewitz would have influenced the military line of the Kuomintang in the war against Japan (retreat into the depth of the territory, etc.).

¹⁵ The Huangpu [Whampoa] Military Academy was founded by Sun Yat-sen in 1924 near Canton [Guangzhou]. Thousands of students followed education there, in particular from Soviet advisers, and trained the cadre of the National Revolutionary Army which led the northern expedition. Many Communist military cadres, starting with Lin Biao, trained there. After the breakup between KMT and CPC, the school was moved to Nanjing.

The Communists who studied in Europe and the USSR had also been able to learn about Clausewitz, without forgetting the case of [Otto Braun](#), military adviser of the Comintern to the CPC, who was a great Clausewitzian: he wrote a fine study on the influence of Clausewitz on Lenin.¹⁶

Zhang Yuan-Lin believes he finds an influence on Clausewitz's theses in the 1936 essay, "[Strategic Problems of the Revolutionary War in China](#)." In a lecture given on March 13, 1961 in Canton, Mao said that, for this essay, which is his first great military writing, he had studied bourgeois military science. In the chapter on "The Strategic Defensive" we find this passage:

All military theorists and practitioners in the past have also admitted that this is a principle which a weak army against a powerful adversary must apply in the initial phase of military operations. A foreign military specialist said: 'When we go into strategic defense, we generally start by avoiding the decision under unfavorable conditions and we only seek it when the situation has become favorable.' This is perfectly fair and we have nothing to add to it.¹⁷

Now, this is a typically Clausewitzian thesis, going against the cult of the offensive which reigned everywhere, which we find exposed in *Vom Kriege*' chapter on "Retreat into the Interior of the Country."¹⁸ The famous "foreign military specialist" is therefore, if not Clausewitz, at least one of his disciples. Zhang Yuan-Lin also notes other correspondences of ideas or expression which could indicate an influence of Clausewitz on Mao before the reading of *Vom Kriege* in 1938. We will not repeat them all here, referring the reader to Zhang's thesis at Mannheim.¹⁹

2.3. Clausewitz in *On Protracted War*

¹⁶ This study was published as a preface to Lenin's notes on Clausewitz: Clausewitz' Werk "Vom Kriege"—Auszüge und Randglossen— [von] W.I. Lenin; Mit Vorwort und Anmerkungen von Otto Braun; Besorgt vom Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der SED nach dem Lenin-Sammelband 12 (Verlag des Ministeriums für Nationale Verteidigung, Berlin 1957). A facsimile of this brochure was published as an appendix to the German edition of my *Clausewitz et la guerre populaire (Clausewitz und der Volkskrieg, Zambon Verlag, Frankfurt, 2013)*. Lenin's notes were originally published as V.I. Lenin, "Zamechaniiia na sochineniia Klauzevitsa 'O Voine'" [Notebook of Excerpts and Remarks on Carl von Clausewitz, *On War and the Conduct of War*] in V.V. Adoratskii, V.M. Molotov, M.A. Savel'ev, eds., *Leninskii sbornik* [Lenin Miscellany], (2nd ed., Moscow-Leningrad, 1931), XII, 389-452. In English see Donald E. Davis and Walter S.G. Kohn. "Lenin as Disciple of Clausewitz," *Military Review*, September 1971, 49-55; Lenin, V.I. "[Lenin's Notebook on Clausewitz](#)," ed./trans. Donald E. Davis and Walter S.G. Kohn, in David R. Jones, ed., *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual*, vol.1. Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1977, pp.188-229.

¹⁷ "Strategic problems of the revolutionary war in China," in [Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung](#), Editions in Foreign Languages, Beijing, 1964, p.124 in the French version.

¹⁸ *On War*, Book VI, chapter 25, pp. 469-478 in the Howard/Paret translation.

¹⁹ Zhang Yuan-Lin, "Mao Zedong und Carl von Clausewitz," op. cit. pp.30-33.

Shortly after studying *Vom Kriege* and organizing the seminar on Clausewitz, Mao wrote, still in Yen-an, from May 26 to June 3, 1938, a series of lectures which in May 1938 [CB: Check these dates] became a classic text of Marxist-Leninist military policy: *On Protracted War*.

The chapter "War and Politics" opens, in point 63, with a quotation presented without a reference: "War is the continuation of politics."²⁰ The quotation is of course from Clausewitz²¹ but this reference was never enough until now to establish the [direct] reading of Clausewitz by Mao because this quote had already been put forward by Lenin.²² The quotation is also taken up, more complete, in point 64: "War is simply a continuation of politics by other means."²³

In the same chapter, Mao writes: "It is not possible to separate war for a single minute from politics. Among soldiers in the War of Resistance, any tendency to underestimate politics by isolating war from politics and considering war in absolute terms, is wrong and must be corrected."²⁴ The criticism of the concept of "war in the absolute" is a formula from Clausewitz. There is not only a commonality of ideas, but also a commonality of expressions, of formulation, analyzed by Zhang Yuan-Lin

In the chapter "The Goals of War,"²⁵ Mao writes:

War has no other purpose than 'to keep its forces and to destroy those of the enemy' (to destroy the forces of the enemy is to disarm them , "deprive them of any capacity for resistance," and not to physically annihilate them all (...)) It should be noted that, among the aims of war, the annihilation of the enemy's forces is the main goal, and the conservation of one's own forces the secondary goal, because one can effectively ensure the conservation of one's forces only by massively annihilating the enemy's forces.

This passage contains two quotations without references and the difference in wording (reinforced here by the the additional screen of the French translation) has long prevented its identification. It is by the comparison between Mao's text and the formulation in the translation of *Vom Kriege* by Liu Jo-shui that Zhang Yuan-Lin was able to establish that Mao was quoting directly from Clausewitz:

We must destroy the armed force of the adversary, that is to say, and this is now what we should always hear when we use this expression, that we must reduce it to a situation such that he can no longer continue the struggle. (...) The conservation of armed force

²⁰ From [*On Protracted War*](#), in *Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*, Editions in foreign languages, Beijing, 1964, p.259 in the French version.

²¹ *On War*, Book I, Chapter 1, page 87 in H/P.

²² The bankruptcy of the Second International, Éditions sociales, Éditions du Progrès, Paris-Moscou, 1971, p. 23.

²³ *On Protracted War*, p.260 in the French version. [Find in printed English version.]

²⁴ *On Protracted War*, p.260.

²⁵ *On Protracted War*, p.263.

available to us naturally constitutes the corollary of the destruction of the armed force of the adversary.²⁶

Thus, on the question of objectives in war (the objectives of war being political), Clausewitz and Mao are very close: destroying the enemy's forces and preserving their own, intrinsically linked objectives, of which the first is main and the second secondary. On the merits, however, it seems to Zhang Yuan-Lin that Mao places more emphasis on retaining his strength. However, the abandonment of the Chinese Soviet Republic of Kiang-si [Jiangxi] to start the Long March, a decision taken before Mao's leadership in the CPC, is described in advance in an analysis by Clausewitz that Zhang Yuan-Lin has not noted:

My idea is that we must totally sacrifice a state that cannot be defended, in order to save the army. This is why among the troops that this State can put up, I select a well organized army of fifty to sixty thousand men whose preservation during the whole duration of the war will be my dominant concern, an army which will represent for me the kingdom that I will have lost and, if it has maintained itself in a certain force until the end of the war, which will always be for me a bill of exchange well guaranteed, to be presented against restitution of my kingdom, all the more complete than this army will be even more formidable.²⁷

Another direct influence of *Vom Kriege* in *On Protracted War* is the promotion of the concept of "probability." Mao: "We recognize that it is much more difficult to orient oneself in war than in any other social phenomenon, that it involves less certainty, that is to say that it is even more a question of 'probability'".²⁸ Mao puts the term "probability" in quotes and the term he uses is that of the translation of Liu Jo-shui. Both the term and the concept appear in Mao's speech for the first time at this time—right after his reading of *Vom Kriege*. Its application to the field of military theory was new and striking for China, which explains its use of quotation marks. Clausewitz wrote [that]: "one cannot base the conduct of a war on the alleged absolute rigor of mathematical calculations, and that, once started, it continues through a network of eventualities, probabilities, good and bad luck spreading their nets everywhere."²⁹

This concept of probability is important. Clausewitz and Mao both excel in the dialectic between theoretical elaboration, guide of a resolute and reasoned action, and the recognized part in the unpredictable, at random, in the "fog of war." By their rigorous theoretical work, they oppose subjectivists and empirics, but by taking into account the unpredictable, they oppose dogmas cut off from living reality (Clausewitz against Bülow, Mao against the "28 Bolsheviks").

The putting forward of chance in Clausewitz's theory of war has been grossly caricatured as an admission of ignorance of bourgeois thought. Thus it was written in the USSR: "There are many

²⁶ *On War*, Book I Chapter 2, pages 55-56 and 68.

²⁷ Extract from a memoir probably written between November 1807 and March 1808, cf. Clausewitz, *Clausewitz, De la Révolution à la Restauration – Écrits et lettres*, édition établie par Marie-Louise Steinhauser, NRF Gallimard, Paris, 1976, page 241. It was also Tito's choice when he had the Soviet Union evacuated from Užice in 1941.

²⁸ From *On Protracted War*, page 273.

²⁹ *On War*, Book I, Chapter 1, page 48.

prominent bourgeois military theorists—including Clausewitz—who denied the existence of objective laws of war and military art, claiming that it was the chance of elementary forces who plays in this domain.³⁰ Now, faced with a certain degree of complexity and lack of information, to say that a decision must be based on probability is by no means anti-Marxist.

A command that must fight an enemy command knows that part of its reflections escapes it. These reflections will determine his reaction, and anticipating the likely reaction of the enemy is important. The part of uncertainty does not stop at the reactions of the enemy command, it extends to many factors, such as the fighting spirit of units (friends and enemies). To this is added all the little hazards inseparable from the battle, like an order that does not reach its recipient.

Certain elements can be predicted almost without fail, others can be clarified by means of probabilities, others are, for lack of sufficient information, beyond the scope of a forecast analysis. Clausewitz's comparison between war and the card game is clear: the strategist must make decisions on the basis of a triple bundle of known information (his own cards, for example), inferred (from the way the opponent plays, for example), and ignored (the order of cards in the deck, for example). It is the practical exercise of strategy and tactics to measure the share of uncertainty (after having reduced it as much as possible by study and intelligence) and to provide room for maneuver to counter it. In explaining the share of uncertainty, Clausewitz does not deny the existence of laws; on the contrary: he formulates one that Mao knew how to understand.

Another direct reference by Mao to Clausewitz, hitherto masked by the freedoms taken by Liu Jo-shui in his translation, can be found in Mao's chapter "Initiative, Flexibility and Planning." Where Clausewitz writes "in an area as dangerous as war, mistakes born of kindness are the worst,"³¹ Liu Jo-shui translates and adapts: "In dangerous things like war, mistakes which, like that of Duke Siang of Song, arise from kindness, are simply the worst." Duke Siang's example is of course a contribution from Liu Jo-shui. And Mao writes: "We are not like Duke Siang of Song, we don't need his stupid ethics."³² ...

Clausewitz's profound influence on Mao Zedong is undoubtedly established by the research of Zhang Yuan-Lin, and he has examined (albeit systematically) only the documents available. However, many of Mao's telegrams, letters, speeches, notes etc., have not yet been published. New information about Mao's relationship with Clausewitz may therefore appear in the future.

2.4. Clausewitz, Mao and Philosophy

According to Jean-Paul Charnay, the influence of philosophy on strategy is exercised in four ways:

³⁰ *Lenin and military science*, collective work written under the direction of V. Zakharov, Editions of Progress, Moscow, 1967, pages 195-196.

³¹ *On War*, Book I, Chapter 1, p.75 in H/P.

³² *On Protracted War*, p.276 in the French edition. Here again, I must point out that the French [or English] translations add a double screen between the formulation of *Vom Kriege* and that of *On Protracted War*.

- simple transfer from a diagram of evolution: Gamelin applying to the art of war the law of three states (theological and military, metaphysical and forensic, positive and industrial) of Auguste Comte;
- application to the conflict of a generalizing system of evolution: cyclical theory of empires and civilizations (Ibn Khaldun, Bossuet, Hegel, Toynbee...), Darwinism, historical materialism and dialectical materialism
- implication of the dynamics of a philosophy as a principle of explaining the structure and functioning of war: Kantian conception of the universe for Clausewitz (implicitly); Hegelian dialectic for Willisen;
- general references to the "atmosphere" of the dominant philosophy on the enunciation of a strategic doctrine: Rationalism of the Lights for Guibert, French idealism for Foch, Nietzschean concept of the superman and Pangermanism for the Third Reich... Further: Campanella and Galileo for Montecuccoli...³³

Charnay then explains that a distinction must be made between cases where philosophy is the inspiration for strategy, and those where philosophy only serves to legitimize a given strategic statement a posteriori. This is the first scenario that we face when we examine the modes of strategic development of Clausewitz and Mao Zedong, who have the similarity of having based their theory of war and their strategic doctrine on a basis and according to a philosophical method.

In a note written in 1816, Clausewitz states that he had in mind, while writing *Vom Kriege*, the way in which Montesquieu had treated his subject in *The Spirit of the Laws*. He retains not only the mode of exposure in short chapters (which would allow us to add a fifth modality of influence to those proposed by Charnay: purely formal influence), but also and above all the method, the will to stay within the limits of positive knowledge, to deal with phenomena both in the truth of their own nature and of their various historical manifestations.

This is how Clausewitz takes care above all to develop concepts and formulate definitions. And it is in a philosophical way that he criticizes the definitions of tactics and strategy of his time. For Bülow, the tactics are those that are in the enemy's field of vision and the strategy is those that are outside that field). This is based on a sensitive and not conceptual character. Now Clausewitz judges that the differentiations which arise from the internal structure of the thing studied are founded. To grasp these differentiations, he approaches each phenomenon where it is clearest, where it touches perfection, at its extremes

Clausewitz has practiced this method of seeking extremes all his life as the starting point for conceptual activity. It is not lost on him that the concrete case lies somewhere between the ideal extremes, and is characterized by an extreme only insofar as it approaches it more than the opposite extreme. It is this distinction between concept and reality that allows theoretical activity.

³³ Jean-Paul Charnay, *Critique of Strategy*, Paris: L'Herne, Classiques de la stratégie, 1990, pages 70-71.

The question of whether Clausewitz had read Hegel—Lenin thought so—or whether his dialectical reasoning stems from his frame of mind has been debated for a long time. Clausewitz was teaching at the War School when Hegel reigned over the University of Berlin. It is possible that Clausewitz was simply subjected to the same influences as Hegel: those of Kant and Fichte. *Vom Kriege* never justifies war—as strict Hegelian orthodoxy would command—as a legitimate means of action for the state embodying historical progress. What is certain is that the Clausewitz dialectic differs from the Hegelian dialectic—and thereby of the Marxist dialectic.³⁴ Clausewitz deals with problems by opposing opposites, but these opposites are not resolved in a third term which would be superior to them. However, Mao could not fail to notice (as Lenin did in his reading notes on *Vom Kriege*) the dialectical "twist of mind" of Clausewitz. Engels already, in a letter to Marx, evoked this philosophical singularity of Clausewitz: "I am reading at the moment, among others, Clausewitz, *De la Guerre*. A strange way of philosophizing, but excellent in substance."³⁵

At the beginning of the 19th century, Prussian military thought, stimulated by the desire for an immediate revenge, rose up against the old strategic doctrines, marked by this rationalism denounced as contrary to German genius. Clausewitz is no exception: he assigns reason its limits in the field of war. We therefore find in him the direct influence of Kantianism and this affirmation of German irrationalism which is a reaction against French rationalism of the 18th century. This influence of Kantianism on Clausewitz is not discussed, [and] there are clear differences between their thoughts and the indisputable influence of Kant did not make Clausewitz "a Kantian."

Lenin pointed out that Clausewitz had attended the courses of the Kantian philosopher Kiesewetter. These courses which Clausewitz followed in 1801 at the War School focused on logic. They greatly influenced Clausewitz. Kiesewetter was Kantian but had, as a popularizer, a particular approach to Kant's theses, so much so that he accused him of both plagiarism and betrayal. The courses of Kiesewetter (and therefore to a certain extent Kantianism) shaped the thinking of Clausewitz, who was naturally inclined to philosophical reflection. We can consider that the first methodological bases of *Vom Kriege* are in the teachings of Kiesewetter.

Mao's strategy is based on the Marxist-Leninist/Clausewitzian heritage and on the critique of the mechanistic application of the Leninist heritage, which led to the failure of the Canton, Nachang and Wuhan insurrections in December 1927. He also draws on the revolutionary heritage of

³⁴ Raymond Aron: "the philosophy of history, which makes it possible at the same time to determine the just meaning of a war, and the justice of a cause seems to me foreign to the Prussian officer," *Clausewitz—Book two : The Planetary Age*. NRF, op. cit., page 76.

³⁵ Letter from Engels (from Manchester) to Marx (in London) of January 7, 1858. Marx's response (letter of January 11, 1858) is a little less enthusiastic: "Speaking of Blücher, I've been through Clausewitz a bit. The guy has a good sense that touches the mind." Marx-Engels, *Correspondance*, Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1972. Volume 5 (July 1857–December 1858).

peasant insurrections, notably of the great Taiping Revolt,³⁶ sometimes through classics of Chinese culture like *Au bord de l'eau*, his favorite literary work.³⁷

China had been immersed in this heritage since ancient times, but it kept all its relevance during the years of Mao's formation: from 1901 to 1910, nearly a thousand uprisings, involving tens of millions of peasants, ignited China.

Finally, Mao can base himself on the very rich Chinese strategic culture: between the Qin dynasty (221-206 BC) and the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), more than 2,000 important military works were published in China. Mao often quotes these military historians and classic strategists, starting with the most famous of them: Sun Tzu. In his "Strategic Problems of the Revolutionary War in China,"³⁸ Mao quotes Sun Tzu Mao three times.³⁹ Section V of Chapter V is full of references: the inevitable evocation of the novel *At the Water's Edge*; evocation of the war between the principalities of Lou and Tsi, with a long quote from the ancient historian Tsoukieou Ming; evocation, for example, of the battle of Chengkao between the Chu and the Han, from the battle of Kouenyang between the Sin and the Han, from the battle of Kiouantou between Yuan Chao and Tsao Tsao, from the battle of Chipi Wou and the Wei, from the battle of Yiling between the Wou and the Chou, and from the battle of Feichouei between the Ts'in and the Tsin.⁴⁰

Classical Chinese philosophy wants to be macroscopic and universal, so that each science, each art is only its application to a concrete domain. As the treatises on Chinese philosophy want to concretely interpret reality, they have, like the Book of Changes, a directly military scope. Thus, from the Tang Dynasty (618-907 BC), the Daodejing [Tao To Kings] by Lao Zi [Lao Tzu] was used by strategists, and that the classics of art of the Chinese war have the particularity of being deduced from philosophy: they transpose philosophy to the military field.⁴¹ Thus, the term Xu which has the general meaning of weak, bad, false, empty, has the particular military meaning of badly defended position.

³⁶ An insurrectionary movement which, from 1851 to 1864, raised the peasant masses against the Qing dynasty. The Taiping movement, which counted between one million and three million combatants in its armies, abolished land ownership and slavery, and established equality between men and women. The movement captured Nanjing, which it made its capital, but failed to take Beijing and was drowned in blood.

³⁷ These are ancient epic tales in the manner of *The Iliad* based on real events that took place during the Northern Song dynasty (12th century). *Au Bord de l'Eau* [水滸傳 or *Shuihŭ Zhuàn*, sometimes translated as "Outlaws of the Marsh," one of the "Four Great Classical Chinese Novels"] tells the story of 108 individuals (brigands, notables, brawlers, intellectuals, etc.) who do not tolerate injustice or arbitrariness. They rise up against the emperor and become so powerful that the latter must meet their demands. We should guard the historical record of these outlaws who defied imperial authority and who ended up executed. These stories were recorded in writing in the 14th century.

³⁸ In *Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung*, op. cit., pages 83 et seq.

³⁹ In *Military writings of Mao Tse-Tung*, op. cit., pages 96 and 127. Sun Tzu is transcribed *Souentse*.

⁴⁰ Jiang Jieshi [Tchang Kaï-check] had also read these classics: he recognized that the "blockhouse strategy" which forced the Red Army to leave Kiang-sii (Jiangxi) and to start the Long March was inspired by a Chinese general who used it to crush a peasant rebellion in the 19th century.

⁴¹ This is a fundamental difference with the art of Western warfare which is not deduced from philosophy but from military history, Clausewitz being to a large extent an exception.

The strategic ideal therefore coincides with the philosophical ideal. As Jean Lévi explains:

In the system of Chinese representations, the formless is at the origin of the having-form, it can dominate and control it. The supreme form of a formation will consist, not to lend the flank to an enemy, not to present to him any form, in the manner of water, which responds to forms without ever exhausting its capacities of transformation. Vocabulary plays on a double plane both figurative and literal, it designates real configurations that can be used by battalions. Pien (transformation, reversals) applies in literature to the maneuvering skill of a troop which offers the enemy a body in perpetual movement, like water which provides the transposition of the terrible efficiency of Tao, in the area of forms.⁴²

This is what Sun Tzu writes:

Military training reaches its ultimate peak when it ceases to take shape. As soon as an army has no shape visible, it escapes the surveillance of the best spies and thwarts the calculations of the most sagacious generals,"⁴³ he transposes the formulas of Daodejing to the military domain: "Looking at him, we don't see him: we call him the Invisible. Listening to it, we don't hear it: We call it the Inaudible. Touching it, we don't feel it: We call it the Impalpable. (...) He is the shapeless form, the Sign of nothingness, fleeing, elusive, in front, we can't see his head, behind we can't see his back. Take hold of the ancient Tao, and you will tame the present." An essential feature of this classical Chinese thought is its dialectical character. It is based on interacting conceptual couples, such as "give" and "receive," "strength" and "weakness" or "appearance" and "reality."

The permanent passage from general philosophical to concrete application, often military, which is a feature of Chinese culture, is found even in the philosophical writings of Mao, such as "Practice or Contradiction." Mao regularly uses military examples and parables. So when it comes to the primacy of internal causes over external causes: "Of two armies in combat, one is victorious, the other is defeated: that is determined by internal causes. Victory is due either to the power of the army or to the correctness of its command; the defeat is due either to the weakness of the army, or to the errors committed by its command; it is through internal causes that external causes produce their effect."⁴⁴

This character of Chinese culture, this dialectical philosophical thought as the starting point for any specific reflection, finds itself purified, thanks to Marxism, in Mao, of all its mystical and reactionary dimensions.

The proximity of Mao's and Clausewitz's theses therefore does not only result from the reading of the second by the first.

⁴² Jean Lévi is a translator and commentator for Sun Tzu. Cf. Sun Tzu: *L'art de la guerre* [The Art of War], Hachette Littératures, Paris, 2000, page 38.

⁴³ Sun Tzu: *The Art of War*, op. cit., page 68.

⁴⁴ De la contradiction, *Selected Works by Mao Tse-tung*, Volume I, Beijing, page 351.

Mao and Clausewitz developed similar theses because they had a neighboring method of thinking and theorizing. The Hegelian-Kiezewetterian heritage of Clausewitz and Marxism, nourished by classical Chinese culture of Mao, led them to tackle dialectically the issues that Western military culture treated unilaterally. This is how Mao, like Clausewitz, instead of opposing defensive and offensive, maintains that the first (strongest form of war) must bring about the conditions of the second (most decisive form of war). Raymond Aron, who, while saying he did not know if Mao had read Clausewitz, had noticed this and said: "The Maoist theory of protracted war and strategic defense draws just as well from Book VI [of *Vom Kriege*] as from the 'invincibility' of defense." The oscillation, the complementarity between the opposite terms, the truth at the higher level which would become error at the lower level, all this Clausewitzian dialectic, cannot be recognized in a Mao Tse-tung who did not read the German theorist."⁴⁵

2.5. Convergences and divergences

Mao and Clausewitz therefore both founded a theory of war and a strategic doctrine on a philosophical basis. But they also, both of them:

- intensively studied general history and the history of war in particular (Clausewitz studied 130 campaigns in detail!);
 - actively lived a period of great upheavals, taking part in the struggles which marked them,
 - fought the invader of their country.
- These proximities also explain why we find many theses very close to them. For one as for the other,
- praxis is the decisive criterion for a true theory, they both fought formalism and dogmatism. Practice takes precedence over the "system";
 - War is not an independent thing: it is part of a whole, namely politics, it does not have a nature, but has the nature of politics, it has no logic, but has the logic of politics. Before Clausewitz and a fortiori before Mao, there had been various hypotheses and judgments on the nature of war (expression of human nature, of a "non-philosophical" degree of civilization, divine will, etc.). Some had indeed paved the way for a scientific relationship between war and politics—starting with Machiavelli, but it was Clausewitz who definitively established it. War is a political act, a political instrument, but is not completely identical to politics: it has its own laws, different from that of politics, which arise from the application of military force. For Clausewitz as for Mao finally, war and peace are not absolute opposites, but different manifestations of political relations.

There the comparison ends. Mao is a revolutionary, he is waging a war associating national liberation with social revolution, while Clausewitz is a soldier who, despite his reservations and

⁴⁵ Raymond Aron, *Clausewitz—Livre deux: L'âge planétaire* [Clausewitz—Book Two: The Planetary Age], op. cit., page 115.

criticisms, is in tune with the established order. The difference between the notions of "politics" in Clausewitz and in Mao is important. According to Clausewitz, politics represents the interests of society as a whole, a government worthy of the name having to unite and reconcile special interests. Clausewitz knew that politics could not represent all of these interests, and be only the fruit of a coalition of ambitions and special interests (he denounced Napoleon enough in this sense), but he does not go more far. In his theory, politics is the politics of the state. For Mao, following Lenin, politics is the politics of this or that class, whether or not it has state power. In fact, Mao is a politician who had to wage war as "continuity of politics," Clausewitz a soldier who was concerned with politics as the main determinant of war.

Clausewitz is only fighting a war of national liberation, even if it has taken on a popular dimension. When he speaks of "people's war," he speaks of all cases where the armed struggle is waged not by a regular army, practicing war of movement and war of position, but by the insurgent people fighting in gangs more or less organized where it is. It may very well be a counter-revolutionary people's war, like chouannerie. Mao Zedong studies the people's war as a revolutionary war: then there is the political character, that of the political purpose of the war, namely the historical interests of the popular masses of workers and peasants. Clausewitz conceived of a people's war only as resistance to the invasion, and therefore, its strength had to be combined with that of the state, according to the Spanish and Russian models. The guerrillas and the insurrection to the people, the battles to the army. The political and revolutionary character of the people's war in Mao makes it not a complement to the regular armed forces of the State, but an independent power fighting alone and creating itself and of itself, when the time comes, his regular forces.

Finally, if Mao evokes the laws of war "in general," he flies over this question to take a long look at the specifics of the revolutionary war in China. On the contrary, Clausewitz devoted *Vom Kriege* to the laws of war "in general."

2.6. Clausewitz, Stalin and Mao

I have dealt with Stalin's criticism of Clausewitz in 1946 in his letter to Colonel Razine.⁴⁶ The latter, a Soviet professor and military historian, basing himself on Lenin's esteem for Clausewitz, was astonished at the tendency of Soviet military circles to assimilate Clausewitz's thought to that of Hitler's staffs:

For the most avant-garde Soviet military science in general, and for our historical military science in particular, the essential question turns out to be that of attitude towards the theoretical heritage of the past. In the classics of Marxism-Leninism we have clear and precise directives on this subject: complete assimilation of all that past science has given, critical evaluation of all that has been created by human thought, verification in practice. [...] This also concerns military culture. Therefore, we do not reject the acquisitions of bourgeois culture, for example, for this reason that the fascists, as we know, took advantage of these acquisitions with the aim of the most savage barbarism. We will use the acquisitions of bourgeois culture for socialist construction, for the construction of

⁴⁶ *Clausewitz and people's war*, Édition Aden, Bruxelles 2004, pages 105 et seq.

Communist society. But we do not mechanically assimilate all the sum of the knowledge of bourgeois science, we modify all this in a critical way, and on new socio-economic and political bases, we advance science forward.

There are two proven forms of basic criticism:—the lower form, the search for alterations, idealism, mechanistic, reactionary views, etc., and the rejection of everything, in its entirety;—the superior form, critical evaluation, researching the nuclei of positive content behind an erroneous form, keeping it, and developing it.⁴⁷

Stalin stepped up to the plate and argued thus: "[Lenin] praised Clausewitz above all because, the non-Marxist Clausewitz, authoritative in his time as a connoisseur of military affairs, confirmed in his works the famous Marxist thesis that between war and politics there is a direct relationship, that politics begets war, that war is the continuation of politics by violent means. The reference to Clausewitz was necessary here for Lenin to once again convince Plekhanov, Kautsky and others of social-chauvinism, of social-imperialism.

Second, he praised Clausewitz because Clausewitz confirmed in his works the correct thesis from the point of view of Marxism, that retirement under determined unfavorable conditions is in the same way just as legitimate in the struggle as the offensive. The reference to Clausewitz was necessary here for Lenin to once again convince the left Communists, not recognizing retirement as a legitimate form of struggle.

Therefore, Lenin approached the works of Clausewitz not as a soldier, but as a politician [...]

Do we really have to criticize Clausewitz's military decree?

Yes, we have to. From the point of view of the interests of our cause and of the military science of our time, we are obliged to severely criticize not only Clausewitz, but also Moltke, Schlieffen, Ludendorff, Keitel and other carriers of military ideology in Germany.⁴⁸ In the past thirty years Germany has twice imposed the bloodiest war on the world, and both times it has found itself defeated. Is it by chance? Obviously not. Does this not mean that not only Germany as a whole, but also its military ideology, have not stood the test? Absolutely, that means it. Everyone knows how much respect the soldiers of the whole world, and among them our Russian soldiers, showed to the military authorities of Germany. Should we end this undeserved respect? We must end it. And for that we need criticism, particularly on our side, on the side of the victors of Germany.

⁴⁷ Colonel Razine's letter was published in a note in volume XVI of the *Works of Stalin*, Nouveau Bureau d'Édition, Paris, 1975, note 48, page 453. Colonel Razine's letter was published, with Stalin's response, in the Bolchevik theoretical review n° 3, in 1947.

⁴⁸ The translation of the same text quoted by Paul Rossel (*Karl von Clausewitz and the theory of war*, Les Temps Modernes n°77, March 1952) proposes "German military ideology" instead of "military ideology in Germany." This is probably closer to the spirit of Stalin's intervention, even to his motivation....

With regard, in particular, to Clausewitz, he has obviously aged as a military authority. Clausewitz was, basically, a representative of the era of the manufacturing war. But we are now in the days of mechanized warfare. It is obvious that the machine period demands new military ideologies. It is funny now to take lessons from Clausewitz.

One cannot go ahead and advance science without subjecting to critical examination the theses and the old utterances of known luminaries. This concerns not only the luminaries of military science, but also the classics of Marxism.⁴⁹

This condemnation of Clausewitz by Stalin will become the official position of the international Communist movement. For example, in the theoretical review of the PCB, of which he is the editor, Bob Claessens publishes an introduction to the letter to Colonel Razine who closely espouses, and even accentuates, the position of Stalin.⁵⁰

This position, Mao will attack it head on, and agree with Colonel Razine in a speech delivered in January 1957 to a conference intended for the cadres of the CPC:

They [Marx, Engels and Lenin] applied themselves to studying and deepening the various questions of their time or of the past, and invited others to do the same. It is through studies on the doctrines of the bourgeoisie, namely classical German philosophy, English classical political economy and French utopian socialism, and through struggles waged against them that the three constituent parts of Marxism were able to see the day. Stalin was less strong. For example, classical German philosophy, idealist philosophy, was considered in its time as a reaction of the German aristocracy against the French Revolution. Such a conclusion is a complete negation of classical German philosophy. Stalin completely rejected military science from Germany; according to him, since the Germans lost the war, their military science is no longer worth anything, and therefore, Clausewitz's works no longer deserve to be read.

There is a lot of metaphysics in Stalin, and he has taught many people to practice it. [...]

In the *Little Philosophical Dictionary*, fourth edition, published in the Soviet Union, the article Identity expresses Stalin's point of view. It says: "Phenomena such as war and peace, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, life and death, etc. cannot be identical, because the two aspects are fundamentally opposed and are mutually exclusive. 'other.' This means that, between these fundamentally opposed phenomena, there is no identity in the Marxist sense of the word and that they only exclude each other, without being linked to one another or being able to convert one into the other under given conditions. This is a fundamentally flawed assertion.

⁴⁹ Stalin, *Works*, volume XVI, op. cit., page 201-204.

⁵⁰ Bob Claessens, Introduction to the Letter of Stalin to Colonel Razine on the theses of Clausewitz, In n ° 4 (new series) of April 1947 of *Rénovation*, "Revue de doctrine et de action du Parti Communiste de Belgique." Pages 227 and following.

According to this article, war is war, and peace is peace, two things that only exclude each other, without any connection between them: war cannot be converted to peace, no more than peace to war. Lenin gives this quote from Clausewitz: "War is an extension of politics by other means" Struggle in times of peace is politics, and war is also politics, but with recourse to special means. War and peace are mutually exclusive while remaining linked to each other, and transform into one another under determined conditions. If war is not prepared in times of peace, how can it suddenly break out? If peace is not prepared during the war, how can it be suddenly established? [...]

Stalin did not see the connection between the struggle of opposites and their unity. Some Soviets have a method of metaphysical thinking.⁵¹

3. Clausewitz in the Maoist heritage

3.1. Giap

[The reader will want to refer, concerning the reports in [Giap and Clausewitz](#), to the work that I have already presented on the subject and under this title—work which is accessible online.]

3.2. Gonzalo

Abimaël Guzmán Reynoso, the "President Gonzalo" of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP), is certainly the second great historical figure of Maoism after Mao himself. By orienting and directing the PCP on the path of a people's war which it waged very close to victory, Gonzalo contributed decisively to the revaluation of the Maoist strategy of the protracted people's war. Gonzalo's military training was carried out in 1965, as part of a comprehensive political-military training in mainland China, in Nanjing.

In his 1988 interview with the newspaper *El Diario*, granted when the PCP was at the height of its power, Gonzalo mentions Clausewitz twice.

First when he denounces Gorbachev :

He [Gorbachev] says this: "Classic in its time, Clausewitz's precept that 'war is the continuation of politics by other means' has become irreversibly outdated. It is now owned by libraries." But it is a thesis defended by Lenin and taken up by President Mao during this century and it is a key principle in the military theory of the proletariat to which we refer in popular war. Gorbachev therefore openly confronts Lenin, as Khrushchev confronts him.⁵²

⁵¹ Speeches made at the Conference of Party Committee Secretaries for the Provinces, Municipalities and Autonomous Regions (speech of January 27, 1957). *Selected works* volume V. Editions in foreign languages, Beijing, 1977, pages 398-401.

⁵² Strangely, the French edition of the Interview of President Gonzalo with *el Diario*, (that of the Popular Movement Peru of France, March 1989) ignores the reference to Clausewitz. Instead of being translated, the passage is rewritten as follows: "he [Gorbachev] says that part of this new thought consists in understanding that war is not the continuation of politics by means of weapons. He says: one can no longer walk with thoughts of the last century. What last century?"

Next, Gonzalo tackles this phase of the war where the armed forces undertook to annihilate the PCP with all the dirty means of war: torture, death squads, disappearances, and militias of armed civilians (the rondas). On March 22, 1983, one of these militias assassinated a Maoist cadre. On April 3, a column of guerrillas gathered in the village of Santiago de Lucanamarca 69 militiamen, officials and those close to them, before massacring them in a demonstrably cruel manner (with a machete, with stones). Lucanamarca has the singularity that it was both the expression of the avenging rage of the peasants members of the guerrillas against the militiamen, and a terrorist measure coldly decided at the highest level of the PCP.

Gonzalo explains it and assumes it:

Faced with the use of farm militias and reactionary military action, we responded with a striking action: Lucanamarca, neither they nor we will forget it, of course, because there they saw an answer they did not expect. Here more than 80 of them were wiped out. This is the reality. And we say, there was an excess that we will analyze in 1983. But everything in life has two aspects: our problem was to hit hard to slow them down, to make them understand that things were not so easy.

On some occasions, like this, it was the Central Management itself that planned the action and put things in place. It was so. The main thing is to hit them hard and brake them; they understood that they were facing another type of combatants of the people, that we were not of those whom they had fought before;⁵³ that's what they understood. Excess is the negative aspect. Understanding war and basing ourselves on what Lenin says; when he refers to Clausewitz, the masses, in war, in combat, can overflow and manifest all their hatred, the deep feeling of class hatred, rejection, condemnation that it carries within it, that is what was at the origin of this action.

This was explained by Lenin, very clearly explained. Excesses can be committed, the problem is to reach a point and not to exceed it, because if you exceed it, you deviate, it's like an angle that has a certain degree of openness, no more. If we give the masses a set of restrictions, requirements and prohibitions, basically we don't want the waters to overflow.

What we needed was for the waters to overflow, for a torrent to be unleashed, sure that when it passed it would wreak havoc, but then it would resume its course. I repeat that this is perfectly explained by Lenin and that is how we understand this excess. But, I insist, here the main thing was to make them understand that we were a bone hard to gnaw on, and that we were ready for anything, for anything.⁵⁴

this is Lenin's thesis and Lenin is of this century and Lenin taught us that war is the continuation of politics by other means, by arms. But Gorbachev says it's outdated." Page 96. I have no explanation for this rewrite.

⁵³ Gonzalo alludes to the Guévarist guerrillas of MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria) from 1965-66 which had been quickly destroyed by the army.

⁵⁴ *Interview of President Gonzalo with el Diario*, op. cit. pages 50-51.

Clausewitz's thesis evoked by Gonzalo is twofold; first: in the struggle, a feeling of hostility develops, even if it did not originally exist; secondly, this feeling of hostility present in the people and in the combatants is one of the three constituent parts of war, next to the intellectual activity of the military command, which faces the interlacing of probabilities of war, and the political authority which makes war an instrument of its projects.

Clausewitz:

Although in principle the struggle is the manifestation of a feeling of hostility, in the great struggles of civilized nations it often happens that the intention alone is hostile, and, at least from combatant to combatant, a feeling of hostility is usually lacking. Anyway, however, the fight never continues without some feeling of a similar nature developing there (...), even in the case where no irritation seems to exist at the start, by the mere fact of the fight, a surge of animosity does not take long to occur between the combatants, because any act of violence that, by higher order, our adversary exerts against us, immediately inflames us against him with the desire for reprisals and revenge.⁵⁵

"Subjected like a true chameleon to the influences of external objectives, war is not limited only to changing its nature in each particular case, but, by the tendencies which are specific to it and the phenomena which it produces, it arrives in besides forming a surprising trinity. Natural blind instinct, if we consider only the original violence of its element and the feelings of hatred and hostility which animate it, the play of probability and chance makes it a free activity of the soul, and the political, by directing it, transforms it into an instrument which it subordinates itself, and thereby into an act of reason. By the first of these three characters, war is more particularly in relation to the people, by the second with the general-in-chief and with the army, by the third with the government.⁵⁶

At Lucanamarca, the politico-military authority deliberately unleashed the feeling of hostility from the combatants, who were beyond what it had imagined, but the content of the action, its direction, and ultimately its effects will be those who were wanted.

Lenin repeatedly addressed this problem:

It is only today that we learned at the CC that the workers in Petrograd wanted to respond to the assassination of Volodarski [editor-in-chief of the Bolshevik *Krasnaya Gazeta*] with mass terrorist action and that you [the Party leadership of the city] prevented them. I protest energetically! (...) The moment is extremely serious. We must encourage the energy and mass character of terrorism targeting counter-revolutionaries, particularly in Petrograd, because his example is decisive."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *On War*, Book II, Chapter 2, page 125.

⁵⁶ *On War*, Book I, Chapter 1, page 53.

⁵⁷ Telegram to G. Zinoviev, OC op. cit., volume 35, page 342.

“The unity of will cannot be a sentence, a symbol. We demand it in practice. She expressed herself thus in time of war: whoever put his own interests (those of his village, his group) before common interests was treated as a profiteer, and shot; these executions were justified in the working class by their conscious will to conquer. We spoke aloud about these executions, we declared that we did not hide the violence, because we knew that we could not get out of the old society without exerting coercion on the backward elements of the proletariat.”⁵⁸

"We know that in all countries the furious resistance of the bourgeoisie against the socialist revolution is inevitable and that it will grow as the revolution grows. The proletariat will break this resistance, it will become definitively capable of defeating and exercising power during the very struggle against the recalcitrant bourgeoisie. The venal bourgeois press can trumpet on every roof every fault committed by our revolution. Our faults do not scare us. Men did not become saints because the revolution started. The oppressed, stupid working classes, kept by force in the vice of misery, ignorance, barbarism for centuries, cannot accomplish the revolution without making mistakes."⁵⁹

Contrary to what Gonzalo writes, Lenin never mentioned Clausewitz on this subject. But this little mistake actually reveals how well informed Gonzalo was of both Clausewitz and Lenin: Lenin's reading notes on *Vom Kriege* show a keen interest in the way Clausewitz had dealt with this question. Lenin copied the passages on the correlation between the unleashing of violence and the depth of the political character of war,⁶⁰ on the feeling of hostility among the people as components of the Clausewitzian "trinity" of war⁶¹ and on the development of this feeling of hostility.⁶²

3.3. UCI (Sarbedaran)

On January 25, 1982, the Union of Communists of Iran (Sarbedaran), now the Communist Party of Iran (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist), which practiced guerrilla warfare against the Islamic regime, gathered its forces in the forests surrounding the town of Amol, near the Caspian Sea, and threw them against the town. The offensive benefited from the uprising in the city, which was liberated for two days. But the insurrection could not spread and was crushed. Many UCI (S) executives and activists were killed in action or in the ensuing wave of repression.

In October 1993, the current liquidator of the PCP released a document entitled *Asumir - Combatir por la Nueva Decision y Nueva Definicion*, favorable to a peace agreement with the Peruvian State, aiming to give a theoretical, political and strategic basis to the "letters" attributed to the imprisoned President Gonzalo, and which a large part of the PCP denounced as false. Within the international Maoist movement, the most argued answer to Asumir was written by the UCI (S). In this long

⁵⁸ Speech at the Third Congress of Russian Trade Unions, OC op. cit., volume 30, page 523.

⁵⁹ Letter to American workers, OC op. cit., tome 28, page 67.

⁶⁰ Lenin's notes published as an appendix to Clausewitz and the people's war, op. cit., pages 133-134.

⁶¹ *Notes of Lenin*, op. cit., pages 135-136.

⁶² *Notes of Lenin*, op. cit., page 137.

document (over forty pages) entitled *Marxism consists of a thousand truths, but in the final analysis they are reduced to one: one is right to rebel!*,⁶³ Clausewitz is quoted three times:

Asumir and the prison article [the "letters of peace"] treat war as if it were a game. Well, no! Especially because of its social content, a revolutionary war is a passionate and furious war. As Comrade Gonzalo pointed out, "Marx taught us this: we don't play in the insurrection, we don't play in the revolution; but when someone raises the insurrection, when someone takes up arms, he does not lower the flag, he keeps it victorious until triumph, without ever dropping it; that's what he taught us, no matter the price! (President Gonzalo, interview with El Diarrio, 1988). Our war is judged by its social content. The key point of all wars is = to preserve your forces and destroy the enemy's forces. ' But these laws work in interaction with social content and the context in which war is waged. "The more the motives which lead to war have scope and power, the more the political situation which precedes it is tense, the more the existence of the people which take part in it is engaged, and the more the war itself approaches its abstract form, aims to overthrow the adversary, and seems to evade the authority of politics to follow only its own laws: the military aim and the political objective become identical. (Clausewitz, *De la Guerre*).⁶⁴ For example, when the imperialists fight among themselves, they do not destroy themselves, because it is not in the interests of their capitalist production base. They only impose capitulation to obtain concessions. But when it comes to people's war, they will not rest before annihilation, and their activities for this purpose will cease only when they are defeated and their state power is overthrown. And until a proletarian state is firmly established, the imperialists will try to overthrow it. "When we say: 'imperialism is fierce', we mean that its nature will not change, and that the imperialists will never want to lay down their butcher's cutlery, nor will they ever become buddhas, and that to their ruin" (Mao, *Little Red Book*, "War and Peace")."⁶⁵

(...) It is precisely because of the nature of revolutionary war that once such a war is launched, we cannot return to the fundamentally peaceful struggle. However, this is something that armed revisionists and bourgeois nationalist forces often do. Why and how is it possible for them and not for us? Because of the reformist nature of their "war," because their strategy is not to destroy the old state but to gain a place in it. It is nothing more than a kind of armed struggle or at best a "minimum or limited war," which consists in simply threatening the enemy, for negotiations held in reserve. As soon as there are no more vital interests at stake, there are only concessions and bargains, Clausewitz noted and explained this phenomenon: "The political idea which presides over war also exercises a great authority on how to drive it. When the sacrifice that one wants to demand from the enemy is not considerable, it suffices to seize an object of equivalent value, and one hopes to achieve it by devoting only little effort. The adversary usually makes an almost similar reasoning" (Clausewitz, *De la Guerre*).⁶⁶

⁶³ This text is unpublished in French.

⁶⁴ *On War*, Book I, Chapter 1, page 51.

⁶⁵ *Quotes from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, Beijing, 1966, page 78.

⁶⁶ *On War*, Book VIII, Chapter VIA, page 852.

(...) The enemy also learns. It is an illusion to think that they will refrain from using all their minds and all their reserves to destroy a Maoist war. For them, engaging in peace negotiations is part of their military strategy to annihilate revolutionaries and potential revolutionaries (the mass base). As much as they can, they apply the basic principle of war in the strict sense against a revolutionary war led by the Maoists. This is so because the political aim of the revolutionary war is to destroy the old state and to annihilate forever the reign of the exploiting classes [here a footnote refers to the following quote: "Thus subject to politics, war necessarily takes on its character. The stronger and more powerful the former, the more energetic the latter becomes. There is no limit to this, and war can come to its absolute form in this way" (Clausewitz, *On War*).⁶⁷

These three quotes appear in separate places in the UCI (S) document, they come from different chapters of *Vom Kriege*, but relate to the same Clausewitz thesis: an unleashed and lawless war reveals fundamental political issues.

3.4. Pasang

Nanda Kishor Pun "Pasang," was the main military leader of the people's war in Nepal. Nicknamed the "Giap of Nepal," he participated in almost all major military operations of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Pasang started his activism in the student movement and was arrested and tortured twice. During the period of preparation for the people's war, he presided over the League of Young Communists and directed the military training of the cadres of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Pasang studied in depth Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Marx, Lenin, Mao and Giap, contemporary military publications and the Hindu epics Ramayan and Mahabharat. He became the commander of the first guerrilla unit, the commander of the Guerrilla Task Force in 1999, and ultimately the commander-in-chief of the People's Army.

Pasang created the PLA Foundation which synthesizes and popularizes the strategic and military lessons of the people's war. In addition to the publication of manuals and accounts of the battles in Nepal, she has translated and published half a dozen books deemed important, including the People's War, the People's Army of Giap and the Clausewitz War, the latter having been, Pasang's confession "laboriously translated" in five months before being distributed to all sectors of the PLA. If the influence of Clausewitz, like those of Giap and Mao, are very openly claimed by Pasang, it is difficult to pronounce on the impact of the Clausewitzian theses on it, since the only writings of Pasang translated into English are interviews and general statements, as well as accounts of operations.⁶⁸

Member of the central committee and the political bureau, Pasang belongs to the prachandist current, which stopped the popular war under the terms of the peace agreements to integrate into the system. It approved the disarmament of the PLA, the demobilization of part of the PLA combatants and the integration of the other part into the "national" army. In doing so, Pasang

⁶⁷ *On War*, Book VIII, Chapter VIB, page 856.

⁶⁸ Cf. Pasang (Nanda Kishor Pun): *Red Strides of the History: Significant Military Raids of the People's War*, Agnipariksha Janaprasashan Griha Putalisadak, Kathmandu, 2008.

contributed to the destruction of the PLA which he had helped to build and which he had led from victory to victory....

4. Controversial conclusion

“There are many who discuss war; few do it.”

Malinké proverb

It is surprising to compare the importance of Clausewitz for Lenin, Mao, Giap and Gonzalo, with the few cases that certain Maoist organizations, such as those who attacked my work, make of it.⁶⁹

It is tempting to find meaning in the fact that the Maoist parties which practiced people's war claimed responsibility for Clausewitz, while those which have not fired a gun since their foundation, ten or twenty years ago, find in him all the faults of the world....

⁶⁹ Not only the Parti Communiste Marxiste-Léniniste-Maoïste (France) in the articles already cited, but also the (nuovo) Partito comunista italiano in the “[Lettre ouverte à la rédaction de *Clarté*](#)” [Open Letter to the editorial staff of “Clarté”] of May 2007.