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BOOK ONE

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On the Nature of War



## What Is War?

### 1. INTRODUCTION

I propose to consider first the various *elements* of the subject, next its *various parts* or *sections*, and finally *the whole* in its internal structure. In other words, I shall proceed from the simple to the complex. But in war more than in any other subject we must begin by looking at the nature of the whole; for here more than elsewhere the part and the whole must always be thought of together.

### 2. DEFINITION

I shall not begin by expounding a pedantic, literary definition of war, but go straight to the heart of the matter, to the duel. War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his *immediate* aim is to *throw* his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance.

*War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.*

Force, to counter opposing force, equips itself with the inventions of art and science. Attached to force are certain self-imposed, imperceptible limitations hardly worth mentioning, known as international law and custom, but they scarcely weaken it. Force—that is, physical force, for moral force has no existence save as expressed in the state and the law—is thus the *means* of war; to impose our will on the enemy is its *object*. To secure that object we must render the enemy powerless; and that, in theory, is the true aim of warfare. That aim takes the place of the object, discarding it as something not actually part of war itself.

### 3. THE MAXIMUM USE OF FORCE

Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat an enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst. The maximum use of force is in no way incompatible with the simultaneous use of the intellect. If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it

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involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand. That side will force the other to follow suit; each will drive its opponent toward extremes, and the only limiting factors are the counterpoises inherent in war.

This is how the matter must be seen. It would be futile—even wrong—to try and shut one's eyes to what war really is from sheer distress at its brutality.

If wars between civilized nations are far less cruel and destructive than wars between savages, the reason lies in the social conditions of the states themselves and in their relationships to one another. These are the forces that give rise to war; the same forces circumscribe and moderate it. They themselves however are not part of war; they already exist before fighting starts. To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would always lead to logical absurdity.

Two different motives make men fight one another: *hostile feelings* and *hostile intentions*. Our definition is based on the latter, since it is the universal element. Even the most savage, almost instinctive, passion of hatred cannot be conceived as existing without hostile intent; but hostile intentions are often unaccompanied by any sort of hostile feelings—at least by none that predominate. Savage peoples are ruled by passion, civilized peoples by the mind. The difference, however, lies not in the respective natures of savagery and civilization, but in their attendant circumstances, institutions, and so forth. The difference, therefore, does not operate in every case, but it does in most of them. Even the most civilized of peoples, in short, can be fired with passionate hatred for each other.

Consequently, it would be an obvious fallacy to imagine war between civilized peoples as resulting merely from a rational act on the part of their governments and to conceive of war as gradually ridding itself of passion, so that in the end one would never really need to use the physical impact of the fighting forces—comparative figures of their strength would be enough. That would be a kind of war by algebra.

Theorists were already beginning to think along such lines when the recent wars taught them a lesson. If war is an act of force, the emotions cannot fail to be involved. War may not spring from them, but they will still affect it to some degree, and the extent to which they do so will depend not on the level of civilization but on how important the conflicting interests are and on how long their conflict lasts.

If, then, civilized nations do not put their prisoners to death or devastate cities and countries, it is because intelligence plays a larger part in their methods of warfare and has taught them more effective ways of using force than the crude expression of instinct.

The invention of gunpowder and the constant improvement of firearms are enough in themselves to show that the advance of civilization has done nothing practical to alter or deflect the impulse to destroy the enemy, which is central to the very idea of war.

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The thesis, then, must be repeated: war is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes. This is the *first case of interaction and the first "extreme"* we meet with.

### 4. THE AIM IS TO DISARM THE ENEMY

I have already said that the aim of warfare is to disarm the enemy and it is time to show that, at least in theory, this is bound to be so. If the enemy is to be coerced you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make. The hardships of that situation must not of course be merely transient—at least not in appearance. Otherwise the enemy would not give in but would wait for things to improve. Any change that might be brought about by continuing hostilities must then, at least in theory, be of a kind to bring the enemy still greater disadvantages. The worst of all conditions in which a belligerent can find himself is to be utterly defenseless. Consequently, if you are to force the enemy, by making war on him, to do your bidding, you must either make him literally defenseless or at least put him in a position that makes this danger probable. It follows, then, that to overcome the enemy, or disarm him—call it what you will—must always be the aim of warfare.

War, however, is not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass (total nonresistance would be no war at all) but always the collision of two living forces. The ultimate aim of waging war, as formulated here, must be taken as applying to both sides. Once again, there is interaction. So long as I have not overthrown my opponent I am bound to fear he may overthrow me. Thus I am not in control: he dictates to me as much as I dictate to him. This is the *second case of interaction and it leads to the second "extreme."*

### 5. THE MAXIMUM EXERTION OF STRENGTH

If you want to overcome your enemy you must match your effort against his power of resistance, which can be expressed as the product of two inseparable factors, viz. *the total means at his disposal and the strength of his will*. The extent of the means at his disposal is a matter—though not exclusively—of figures, and should be measurable. But the strength of his will is much less easy to determine and can only be gauged approximately by the strength of the motive animating it. Assuming you arrive in this way at a reasonably accurate estimate of the enemy's power of resistance, you can adjust your own efforts accordingly; that is, you can either increase them until they surpass the enemy's or, if this is beyond your means, you can make your efforts as great as possible. But the enemy will do the same; competition will again result and, in pure theory, it must again force you both to extremes. This is the *third case of interaction and the third "extreme."*

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### 6. MODIFICATIONS IN PRACTICE

Thus in the field of abstract thought the inquiring mind can never rest until it reaches the extreme, for here it is dealing with an extreme: a clash of forces freely operating and obedient to no law but their own. From a pure concept of war you might try to deduce absolute terms for the objective you should aim at and for the means of achieving it; but if you did so the continuous interaction would land you in extremes that represented nothing but a play of the imagination issuing from an almost invisible sequence of logical subtleties. If we were to think purely in absolute terms, we could avoid every difficulty by a stroke of the pen and proclaim with inflexible logic that, since the extreme must always be the goal, the greatest effort must always be exerted. Any such pronouncement would be an abstraction and would leave the real world quite unaffected.

Even assuming this extreme effort to be an absolute quantity that could easily be calculated, one must admit that the human mind is unlikely to consent to being ruled by such a logical fantasy. It would often result in strength being wasted, which is contrary to other principles of statecraft. An effort of will out of all proportion to the object in view would be needed but would not in fact be realized, since subtleties of logic do not motivate the human will.

But move from the abstract to the real world, and the whole thing looks quite different. In the abstract world, optimism was all-powerful and forced us to assume that both parties to the conflict not only sought perfection but attained it. Would this ever be the case in practice? Yes, it would if: (a) war were a wholly isolated act, occurring suddenly and not produced by previous events in the political world; (b) it consisted of a single decisive act or a set of simultaneous ones; (c) the decision achieved was complete and perfect in itself, uninfluenced by any previous estimate of the political situation it would bring about.

### 7. WAR IS NEVER AN ISOLATED ACT

As to the first of these conditions, it must be remembered that neither opponent is an abstract person to the other, not even to the extent of that factor in the power of resistance, namely the will, which is dependent on externals. The will is not a wholly unknown factor; we can base a forecast of its state tomorrow on what it is today. War never breaks out wholly unexpectedly, nor can it be spread instantaneously. Each side can therefore gauge the other to a large extent by what he is and does, instead of judging him by what he, strictly speaking, ought to be or do. Man and his affairs, however, are always something short of perfect and will never quite achieve the absolute best. Such shortcomings affect both sides alike and therefore constitute a moderating force.

## 8. WAR DOES NOT CONSIST OF A SINGLE SHORT BLOW

The second condition calls for the following remarks:

If war consisted of one decisive act, or of a set of simultaneous decisions, preparations would tend toward totality, for no omission could ever be rectified. The sole criterion for preparations which the world of reality could provide would be the measures taken by the adversary—so far as they are known; the rest would once more be reduced to abstract calculations. But if the decision in war consists of several successive acts, then each of them, seen in context, will provide a gauge for those that follow. Here again, the abstract world is ousted by the real one and the trend to the extreme is thereby moderated.

But, of course, if all the means available were, or could be, simultaneously employed, all wars would automatically be confined to a single decisive act or a set of simultaneous ones—the reason being that any *adverse* decision must reduce the sum of the means available, and if *all* had been committed in the first act there could really be no question of a second. Any subsequent military operation would virtually be part of the first—in other words, merely an extension of it.

Yet, as I showed above, as soon as preparations for a war begin, the world of reality takes over from the world of abstract thought; material calculations take the place of hypothetical extremes and, if for no other reason, the interaction of the two sides tends to fall short of maximum effort. Their full resources will therefore not be mobilized immediately.

Besides, the very nature of those resources and of their employment means they cannot all be deployed at the same moment. The resources in question are *the fighting forces proper, the country*, with its physical features and population, and its *allies*.

The country—its physical features and population—is more than just the source of all armed forces proper; it is in itself an integral element among the factors at work in war—though only that part which is the actual theater of operations or has a notable influence on it.

It is possible, no doubt, to use all mobile fighting forces simultaneously; but with fortresses, rivers, mountains, inhabitants, and so forth, that cannot be done; not, in short, with the country as a whole, unless it is so small that the opening action of the war completely engulfs it. Furthermore, allies do not cooperate at the mere desire of those who are actively engaged in fighting; international relations being what they are, such cooperation is often furnished only at some later stage or increased only when a balance has been disturbed and needs correction.

In many cases, the proportion of the means of resistance that cannot immediately be brought to bear is much higher than might at first be thought. Even when great strength has been expended on the first decision and the balance has been badly upset, equilibrium can be restored. The point will be more fully treated in due course. At this stage it is enough to



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show that the very nature of war impedes the *simultaneous concentration of all forces*. To be sure, that fact in itself cannot be grounds for making any but a maximum effort to obtain the first decision, for a defeat is always a disadvantage no one would deliberately risk. And even if the first clash is not the only one, the influence it has on subsequent actions will be on a scale proportionate to its own. But it is contrary to human nature to make an extreme effort, and the tendency therefore is always to plead that a decision may be possible later on. As a result, for the first decision, effort and concentration of forces are not all they might be. Anything omitted out of weakness by one side becomes a real, *objective* reason for the other to reduce its efforts, and the tendency toward extremes is once again reduced by this interaction.

### 9. IN WAR THE RESULT IS NEVER FINAL

Lastly, even the ultimate outcome of a war is not always to be regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date. It is obvious how this, too, can slacken tension and reduce the vigor of the effort.

### 10. THE PROBABILITIES OF REAL LIFE REPLACE THE EXTREME AND THE ABSOLUTE REQUIRED BY THEORY

Warfare thus eludes the strict theoretical requirement that extremes of force be applied. Once the extreme is no longer feared or aimed at, it becomes a matter of judgment what degree of effort should be made; and this can only be based on the phenomena of the real world and the *laws of probability*. Once the antagonists have ceased to be mere figments of a theory and become actual states and governments, when war is no longer a theoretical affair but a series of actions obeying its own peculiar laws, reality supplies the data from which we can deduce the unknown that lies ahead.

From the enemy's character, from his institutions, the state of his affairs and his general situation, each side, using the *laws of probability*, forms an estimate of its opponent's likely course and acts accordingly.

### 11. THE POLITICAL OBJECT NOW COMES TO THE FORE AGAIN

A subject which we last considered in Section 2 now forces itself on us again, namely the *political object of the war*. Hitherto it had been rather overshadowed by the law of extremes, the will to overcome the enemy and make him powerless. But as this law begins to lose its force and as this determination wanes, the political aim will reassert itself. If it is all a calculation of probabilities based on given individuals and conditions, the *political object*, which was the *original motive*, must become an essential factor in the equa-

tion. The smaller the penalty you demand from your opponent, the less you can expect him to try and deny it to you; the smaller the effort he makes, the less you need make yourself. Moreover, the more modest your own political aim, the less importance you attach to it and the less reluctantly you will abandon it if you must. *This is another reason why your effort will be modified.*

The political object—the original motive for the war—will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires. The political object cannot, however, *in itself* provide the standard of measurement. Since we are dealing with realities, not with abstractions, it can do so only in the context of the two states at war. The same political object can elicit *differing* reactions from different peoples, and even from the same people at different times. We can therefore take the political object as a standard only if we think of *the influence it can exert upon the forces it is meant to move*. The nature of those forces therefore calls for study. Depending on whether their characteristics increase or diminish the drive toward a particular action, the outcome will vary. Between two peoples and two states there can be such tensions, such a mass of inflammable material, that the slightest quarrel can produce a wholly disproportionate effect—a real explosion.

This is equally true of the efforts a political object is expected to arouse in either state, and of the military objectives which their policies require. Sometimes the *political and military objective is the same*—for example, the conquest of a province. In other cases the political object will not provide a suitable military objective. In that event, another military objective must be adopted that will serve the political purpose and symbolize it in the peace negotiations. But here, too, attention must be paid to the character of each state involved. There are times when, if the political object is to be achieved, the substitute must be a good deal more important. The less involved the population and the less serious the strains within states and between them, the more political requirements in themselves will dominate and tend to be decisive. Situations can thus exist in which the political object will almost be the sole determinant.

Generally speaking, a military objective that matches the political object in scale will, if the latter is reduced, be reduced in proportion; this will be all the more so as the political object increases its predominance. Thus it follows that without any inconsistency wars can have all degrees of importance and intensity, ranging from a war of extermination down to simple armed observation. This brings us to a different question, which now needs to be analyzed and answered.

## 12. AN INTERRUPTION OF MILITARY ACTIVITY IS NOT EXPLAINED BY ANYTHING YET SAID

However modest the political demands may be on either side, however small the means employed, however limited the military objective, can the process

of war ever be interrupted, even for a moment? The question reaches deep into the heart of the matter.

Every action needs a certain time to be completed. That period is called its duration, and its length will depend on the speed with which the person acting works. We need not concern ourselves with the difference here. Everyone performs a task in his own way; a slow man, however, does not do it more slowly because he wants to spend more time over it, but because his nature causes him to need more time. If he made more haste he would do the job less well. His speed, then, is determined by subjective causes and is a factor in the actual duration of the task.

Now if every action in war is allowed its appropriate duration, we would agree that, at least at first sight, any additional expenditure of time—any suspension of military action—seems absurd. In this connection it must be remembered that what we are talking about is not the progress made by one side or the other but the progress of military interaction as a whole.

### 13. ONLY ONE CONSIDERATION CAN SUSPEND MILITARY ACTION, AND IT SEEMS THAT IT CAN NEVER BE PRESENT ON MORE THAN ONE SIDE

If two parties have prepared for war, some motive of hostility must have brought them to that point. Moreover so long as they remain under arms (do not negotiate a settlement) that motive of hostility must still be active. Only one consideration can restrain it: *a desire to wait for a better moment before acting*. At first sight one would think this desire could never operate on more than one side since its opposite must automatically be working on the other. If action would bring an advantage to one side, the other's interest must be to wait.

But an absolute balance of forces cannot bring about a standstill, for if such a balance should exist the initiative would necessarily belong to the side with the positive purpose—the attacker.

One could, however, conceive of a state of balance in which the side with the positive aim (the side with the stronger grounds for action) was the one that had the weaker forces. The balance would then result from the combined effects of aim and strength. Were that the case, one would have to say that unless some shift in the balance were in prospect the two sides should make peace. If, however, some alteration were to be foreseen, only one side could expect to gain by it—a fact which ought to stimulate the other into action. Inaction clearly cannot be explained by the concept of balance. The only explanation is that both are waiting for a better time to act. Let us suppose, therefore, that one of the two states has a positive aim—say, the conquest of a part of the other's territory, to use for bargaining at the peace table. Once the prize is in its hands, the political object has been achieved; there is no need to do more, and it can let matters rest. If the other state is ready to accept the situation, it should sue for peace. If not, it must do something; and if it thinks it will be better organized for action

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in four weeks' time it clearly has an adequate reason for not taking action at once.

But from that moment on, logic would seem to call for action by the other side—the object being to deny the enemy the time he needs for getting ready. Throughout all this I have assumed, of course, that both sides understand the situation perfectly.

### 14. CONTINUITY WOULD THUS BE BROUGHT ABOUT IN MILITARY ACTION AND WOULD AGAIN INTENSIFY EVERYTHING

If this continuity were really to exist in the campaign its effect would again be to drive everything to extremes. Not only would such ceaseless activity arouse men's feelings and inject them with more passion and elemental strength, but events would follow more closely on each other and be governed by a stricter causal chain. Each individual action would be more important, and consequently more dangerous.

But war, of course, seldom if ever shows such continuity. In numerous conflicts only a very small part of the time is occupied by action, while the rest is spent in inactivity. This cannot always be an anomaly. Suspension of action in war must be possible; in other words, it is not a contradiction in terms. Let me demonstrate this point, and explain the reasons for it.

### 15. HERE A PRINCIPLE OF POLARITY IS PROPOSED

By thinking that the interests of the two commanders are opposed in equal measure to each other, we have assumed a genuine *polarity*. A whole chapter will be devoted to the subject further on, but the following must be said about it here.

The principle of polarity is valid only in relation to one and the same object, in which positive and negative interests exactly cancel one another out. In a battle each side aims at victory; that is a case of true polarity, since the victory of one side excludes the victory of the other. When, however, we are dealing with two different things that have a common relation external to themselves, the polarity lies not in the *things* but in their relationship.

### 16. ATTACK AND DEFENSE BEING THINGS DIFFERENT IN KIND AND UNEQUAL IN STRENGTH, POLARITY CANNOT BE APPLIED TO THEM

If war assumed only a single form, namely, attacking the enemy, and defense were nonexistent; or, to put it in another way, if the only differences between attack and defense lay in the fact that attack has a positive aim whereas defense has not, and the forms of fighting were identical; then every advantage gained by one side would be a precisely equal disadvantage to the other—true polarity would exist.

But there are two distinct forms of action in war: attack and defense. As will be shown in detail later, the two are very different and unequal in strength. Polarity, then, does not lie in attack or defense, but in the object both seek to achieve: the decision. If one commander wants to postpone the decision, the other must want to hasten it, always assuming that both are engaged in the same kind of fighting. If it is in A's interest not to attack B now but to attack him in four weeks, then it is in B's interest not to be attacked in four weeks' time, but now. This is an immediate and direct conflict of interest; but it does not follow from this that it would also be to B's advantage to make an immediate attack on A. That would obviously be quite another matter.

### 17. THE SUPERIORITY OF DEFENSE OVER ATTACK OFTEN DESTROYS THE EFFECT OF POLARITY, AND THIS EXPLAINS THE SUSPENSION OF MILITARY ACTION

As we shall show, defense is a stronger form of fighting than attack. Consequently we must ask whether the advantage of *postponing a decision* is as great for one side as the advantage of *defense* is for the other. Whenever it is not, it cannot balance the advantage of defense and in this way influence the progress of the war. It is clear, then, that the impulse created by the polarity of interests may be exhausted in the difference between the strength of attack and defense, and may thus become inoperative.

Consequently, if the side favored by present conditions is not sufficiently strong to do without the added advantages of the defense, it will have to accept the prospect of acting under unfavorable conditions in the future. To fight a defensive battle under these less favorable conditions may still be better than to attack immediately or to make peace. I am convinced that the superiority of the defensive (if rightly understood) is very great, far greater than appears at first sight. It is this which explains without any inconsistency most periods of inaction that occur in war. The weaker the motives for action, the more will they be overlaid and neutralized by this disparity between attack and defense, and the more frequently will action be suspended—as indeed experience shows.

### 18. A SECOND CAUSE IS IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE SITUATION

There is still another factor that can bring military action to a standstill: imperfect knowledge of the situation. The only situation a commander can know fully is his own; his opponent's he can know only from unreliable intelligence. His evaluation, therefore, may be mistaken and can lead him to suppose that the initiative lies with the enemy when in fact it remains with him. Of course such faulty appreciation is as likely to lead to ill-timed action as to ill-timed inaction, and is no more conducive to slowing down operations than it is to speeding them up. Nevertheless, it must rank among

the natural causes which, *without entailing inconsistency, can bring military activity to a halt*. Men are always more inclined to pitch their estimate of the enemy's strength too high than too low, such is human nature. Bearing this in mind, one must admit that partial ignorance of the situation is, generally speaking, a major factor in delaying the progress of military action and in moderating the principle that underlies it.

The possibility of inaction has a further moderating effect on the progress of the war by diluting it, so to speak, in time by delaying danger, and by increasing the means of restoring a balance between the two sides. The greater the tensions that have led to war, and the greater the consequent war effort, the shorter these periods of inaction. Inversely, the weaker the motive for conflict, the longer the intervals between actions. For the stronger motive increases willpower, and willpower, as we know, is always both an element in and the product of strength.

19. FREQUENT PERIODS OF INACTION REMOVE WAR STILL  
FURTHER FROM THE REALM OF THE ABSOLUTE AND MAKE  
IT EVEN MORE A MATTER OF ASSESSING PROBABILITIES

The slower the progress and the more frequent the interruptions of military action the easier it is to retrieve a mistake, the bolder will be the general's assessments, and the more likely he will be to avoid theoretical extremes and to base his plans on probability and inference. Any given situation requires that probabilities be calculated in the light of circumstances, and the amount of time available for such calculation will depend on the pace with which operations are taking place.

20. THEREFORE ONLY THE ELEMENT OF CHANCE  
IS NEEDED TO MAKE WAR A GAMBLE,  
AND THAT ELEMENT IS NEVER ABSENT

It is now quite clear how greatly the objective nature of war makes it a matter of assessing probabilities. Only one more element is needed to make war a gamble—chance: the very last thing that war lacks. No other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance. And through the element of chance, guesswork and luck come to play a great part in war.

21. NOT ONLY ITS OBJECTIVE BUT ALSO ITS SUBJECTIVE  
NATURE MAKES WAR A GAMBLE

If we now consider briefly the *subjective nature* of war—the means by which war has to be fought—it will look more than ever like a gamble. The element in which war exists is danger. The highest of all moral qualities in time of danger is certainly *courage*. Now courage is perfectly compatible with prudent calculation but the two differ nonetheless, and pertain to different

psychological forces. Daring, on the other hand, boldness, rashness, trusting in luck are only variants of courage, and all these traits of character seek their proper element—chance.

In short, absolute, so-called mathematical, factors never find a firm basis in military calculations. From the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry. In the whole range of human activities, war most closely resembles a game of cards.

## 22. HOW IN GENERAL THIS BEST SUITS HUMAN NATURE

Although our intellect always longs for clarity and certainty, our nature often finds uncertainty fascinating. It prefers to day-dream in the realms of chance and luck rather than accompany the intellect on its narrow and tortuous path of philosophical enquiry and logical deduction only to arrive—hardly knowing how—in unfamiliar surroundings where all the usual landmarks seem to have disappeared. Unconfined by narrow necessity, it can revel in a wealth of possibilities; which inspire courage to take wing and dive into the element of daring and danger like a fearless swimmer into the current.

Should theory leave us here, and cheerfully go on elaborating absolute conclusions and prescriptions? Then it would be no use at all in real life. No, it must also take the human factor into account, and find room for courage, boldness, even foolhardiness. The art of war deals with living and with moral forces. Consequently, it cannot attain the absolute, or certainty; it must always leave a margin for uncertainty, in the greatest things as much as in the smallest. With uncertainty in one scale, courage and self-confidence must be thrown into the other to correct the balance. The greater they are, the greater the margin that can be left for accidents. Thus courage and self-confidence are essential in war, and theory should propose only rules that give ample scope to these finest and least dispensable of military virtues, in all their degrees and variations. Even in daring there can be method and caution; but here they are measured by a different standard.

## 23. BUT WAR IS NONETHELESS A SERIOUS MEANS TO A SERIOUS END: A MORE PRECISE DEFINITION OF WAR

Such is war, such is the commander who directs it, and such the theory that governs it. War is no pastime; it is no mere joy in daring and winning, no place for irresponsible enthusiasts. It is a serious means to a serious end, and all its colorful resemblance to a game of chance, all the vicissitudes of passion, courage, imagination, and enthusiasm it includes are merely its special characteristics.

When whole communities go to war—whole peoples, and especially *civilized* peoples—the reason always lies in some political situation, and the

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occasion is always due to some political object. War, therefore, is an act of policy. Were it a complete, untrammelled, absolute manifestation of violence (as the pure concept would require), war would of its own independent will usurp the place of policy the moment policy had brought it into being; it would then drive policy out of office and rule by the laws of its own nature, very much like a mine that can explode only in the manner or direction predetermined by the setting. This, in fact, is the view that has been taken of the matter whenever some discord between policy and the conduct of war has stimulated theoretical distinctions of this kind. But in reality things are different, and this view is thoroughly mistaken. In reality war, as has been shown, is not like that. Its violence is not of the kind that explodes in a single discharge, but is the effect of forces that do not always develop in exactly the same manner or to the same degree. At times they will expand sufficiently to overcome the resistance of inertia or friction; at others they are too weak to have any effect. War is a pulsation of violence, variable in strength and therefore variable in the speed with which it explodes and discharges its energy. War moves on its goal with varying speeds; but it always lasts long enough for influence to be exerted on the goal and for its own course to be changed in one way or another—long enough, in other words, to remain subject to the action of a superior intelligence. If we keep in mind that war springs from some political purpose, it is natural that the prime cause of its existence will remain the supreme consideration in conducting it. That, however, does not imply that the political aim is a tyrant. It must adapt itself to its chosen means, a process which can radically change it; yet the political aim remains the first consideration. Policy, then, will permeate all military operations, and, in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them.

### 24. WAR IS MERELY THE CONTINUATION OF POLICY BY OTHER MEANS

We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means. What remains peculiar to war is simply the peculiar nature of its means. War in general, and the commander in any specific instance, is entitled to require that the trend and designs of policy shall not be inconsistent with these means. That, of course, is no small demand; but however much it may affect political aims in a given case, it will never do more than modify them. The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.

### 25. THE DIVERSE NATURE OF WAR

The more powerful and inspiring the motives for war, the more they affect the belligerent nations and the fiercer the tensions that precede the out-



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break, the closer will war approach its abstract concept, the more important will be the destruction of the enemy, the more closely will the military aims and the political objects of war coincide, and the more military and less political will war appear to be. On the other hand, the less intense the motives, the less will the military element's natural tendency to violence coincide with political directives. As a result, war will be driven further from its natural course, the political object will be more and more at variance with the aim of ideal war, and the conflict will seem increasingly *political* in character.

At this point, to prevent the reader from going astray, it must be observed that the phrase, the *natural tendency* of war, is used in its philosophical, strictly *logical* sense alone and does not refer to the tendencies of the forces that are actually engaged in fighting—including, for instance, the morale and emotions of the combatants. At times, it is true, these might be so aroused that the political factor would be hard put to control them. Yet such a conflict will not occur very often, for if the motivations are so powerful there must be a policy of proportionate magnitude. On the other hand, if policy is directed only toward minor objectives, the emotions of the masses will be little stirred and they will have to be stimulated rather than held back.

### 26. ALL WARS CAN BE CONSIDERED ACTS OF POLICY

It is time to return to the main theme and observe that while policy is apparently effaced in the one kind of war and yet is strongly evident in the other, both kinds are equally political. If the state is thought of as a person, and policy as the product of its brain, then among the contingencies for which the state must be prepared is a war in which every element calls for policy to be eclipsed by violence. Only if politics is regarded not as resulting from a just appreciation of affairs, but—as it conventionally is—as cautious, devious, even dishonest, shying away from force, could the second type of war appear to be more “political” than the first.

### 27. THE EFFECTS OF THIS POINT OF VIEW ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF MILITARY HISTORY AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF THEORY

*First*, therefore, it is clear that war should never be thought of as *something autonomous* but always as an *instrument of policy*; otherwise the entire history of war would contradict us. Only this approach will enable us to penetrate the problem intelligently. *Second*, this way of looking at it will show us how wars must vary with the nature of their motives and of the situations which give rise to them.

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all

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strategic questions and the most comprehensive. It will be given detailed study later, in the chapter on war plans.

It is enough, for the moment, to have reached this stage and to have established the cardinal point of view from which war and the theory of war have to be examined.

### 28. THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THEORY

War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.

The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government. The passions that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people; the scope which the play of courage and talent will enjoy in the realm of probability and chance depends on the particular character of the commander and the army; but the political aims are the business of government alone.

These three tendencies are like three different codes of law, deep-rooted in their subject and yet variable in their relationship to one another. A theory that ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless.

Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets.

What lines might best be followed to achieve this difficult task will be explored in the book on the theory of war [Book Two]. At any rate, the preliminary concept of war which we have formulated casts a first ray of light on the basic structure of theory, and enables us to make an initial differentiation and identification of its major components.

## Purpose and Means in War

The preceding chapter showed that the nature of war is complex and changeable. I now propose to inquire how its nature influences its purpose and its means.

If for a start we inquire into the objective of any particular war, which must guide military action if the political purpose is to be properly served, we find that the object of any war can vary just as much as its political purpose and its actual circumstances.

If for the moment we consider the pure concept of war, we should have to say that the political purpose of war had no connection with war itself; for if war is an act of violence meant to force the enemy to do our will its aim would have *always* and *solely* to be to overcome the enemy and disarm him. That aim is derived from the theoretical concept of war; but since many wars do actually come very close to fulfilling it, let us examine this kind of war first of all.

Later, when we are dealing with the subject of war plans, we shall investigate in greater detail what is meant by *disarming* a country. But we should at once distinguish between three things, three broad objectives, which between them cover everything: the *armed forces*, the *country*, and the *enemy's will*.

The fighting forces must be *destroyed*: that is, they must be *put in such a condition that they can no longer carry on the fight*. Whenever we use the phrase "destruction of the enemy's forces" this alone is what we mean.

The country must be occupied; otherwise the enemy could raise fresh military forces.

Yet both these things may be done and the war, that is the animosity and the reciprocal effects of hostile elements, cannot be considered to have ended so long as the enemy's *will* has not been broken: in other words, so long as the enemy government and its allies have not been driven to ask for peace, or the population made to submit.

We may occupy a country completely, but hostilities can be renewed again in the interior, or perhaps with allied help. This of course can also happen *after* the peace treaty, but this only shows that not every war necessarily leads to a final decision and settlement. But even if hostilities should occur again, a peace treaty will always extinguish a mass of sparks that might have gone on quietly smoldering. Further, tensions are slackened, for lovers of peace (and they abound among every people under all circumstances) will then abandon any thought of further action. Be that as it may, we must

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always consider that with the conclusion of peace the purpose of the war has been achieved and its business is at an end.

Since of the three objectives named, it is the fighting forces that assure the safety of the country, the natural sequence would be to destroy them first, and then subdue the country. Having achieved these two goals and exploiting our own position of strength, we can bring the enemy to the peace table. As a rule, destroying the enemy's forces tends to be a gradual process, as does the ensuing subjugation of the country. Normally the one reacts on the other, in that loss of territory weakens the fighting forces; but that particular sequence of events is not essential and therefore does not always take place. Before they suffer seriously, the enemy's forces may retire to remote areas, or even withdraw to other countries. In that event, of course, most or all of the country will be occupied.

But the aim of *disarming the enemy* (the object of *war in the abstract*, the ultimate means of accomplishing the war's political purpose, which should incorporate all the rest) is in fact not always encountered in reality, and need not be fully achieved as a condition of peace. On no account should theory raise it to the level of a law. Many treaties have been concluded before one of the antagonists could be called powerless—even before the balance of power had been seriously altered. What is more, a review of actual cases shows a whole category of wars in which the very idea of *defeating the enemy* is unreal: those in which the enemy is substantially the stronger power.

The reason why the object of war that emerges in theory is sometimes inappropriate to actual conflict is that war can be of two very different kinds, a point we discussed in the first chapter. If war were what pure theory postulates, a war between states of markedly unequal strength would be absurd, and so impossible. At most, material disparity could not go beyond the amount that moral factors could replace; and social conditions being what they are in Europe today, moral forces would not go far. But wars have in fact been fought between states of *very unequal strength*, for *actual war is often far removed from the pure concept postulated by theory*. Inability to carry on the struggle can, in practice, be replaced by two other grounds for making peace: the first is the improbability of victory; the second is its unacceptable cost.

As we saw in the first chapter, war, if taken as a whole, is bound to move from the strict law of inherent necessity toward probabilities. The more the circumstances that gave rise to the conflict cause it to do so, the slighter will be its motives and the tensions which it occasions. And this makes it understandable how an analysis of probabilities may lead to peace itself. Not every war need be fought until one side collapses. When the motives and tensions of war are slight we can imagine that the very faintest prospect of defeat might be enough to cause one side to yield. If from the very start the other side feels that this is probable, it will obviously concentrate on bringing about *this probability* rather than take the long way round and totally defeat the enemy.

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Of even greater influence on the decision to make peace is the consciousness of all the effort that has already been made and of the efforts yet to come. Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in *magnitude* and also in *duration*. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow.

We see then that if one side cannot completely disarm the other, the desire for peace on either side will rise and fall with the probability of further successes and the amount of effort these would require. If such incentives were of equal strength on both sides, the two would resolve their political disputes by meeting half way. If the incentive grows on one side, it should diminish on the other. Peace will result so long as their sum total is sufficient—though the side that feels the lesser urge for peace will naturally get the better bargain.

One point is purposely ignored for the moment—the difference that the *positive* or *negative* character of the political ends is bound to produce in practice. As we shall see, the difference is important, but at this stage we must take a broader view because the original political objects can greatly alter during the course of the war and may finally change entirely *since they are influenced by events and their probable consequences*.

The question now arises how success can be made more likely. One way, of course, is to choose objectives that will incidentally bring about the enemy's collapse—the *destruction of his armed forces and the conquest of his territory*; but neither is quite what it would be if our real object were the total defeat of the enemy. When we attack the enemy, it is one thing if we mean our first operation to be followed by others until all resistance has been broken; it is quite another if our aim is only to obtain a single victory, in order to make the enemy insecure, to impress our greater strength upon him, and to give him doubts about his future. If that is the extent of our aim, we will employ no more strength than is absolutely necessary. In the same way, conquest of territory is a different matter if the enemy's collapse is not the object. If we wish to gain total victory, then the destruction of his armed forces is the most appropriate action and the occupation of his territory only a consequence. To occupy land before his armies are defeated should be considered at best a necessary evil. If on the other hand we do not aim at destroying the opposing army, and if we are convinced that the enemy does not seek a brutal decision, but rather *fears* it, then the seizure of a lightly held or undefended province is *an advantage in itself*; and should this advantage be enough to make the enemy fear for the final outcome, it can be considered as a short cut on the road to peace.

But there is another way. It is possible to increase the likelihood of success without defeating the enemy's forces. I refer to operations that have *direct political repercussions*, that are designed in the first place to disrupt the opposing alliance, or to paralyze it, that gain us new allies, favorably affect the political scene, etc. If such operations are possible it is obvious

that they can greatly improve our prospects and that they can form a much shorter route to the goal than the destruction of the opposing armies.

The second question is how to influence the enemy's expenditure of effort; in other words, how to make the war more costly to him.

The enemy's expenditure of effort consists in the *wastage of his forces*—our *destruction* of them; and in his *loss of territory*—our *conquest*.

Closer study will make it obvious that both of these factors can vary in their significance with the variation in objectives. As a rule the differences will be slight, but that should not mislead us, for in practice, when strong motives are not present, the slightest nuances often decide between the different uses of force. For the moment all that matters is to show that, given certain conditions, different ways of reaching the objective are *possible* and that they are neither *inconsistent*, *absurd*, nor even *mistaken*.

In addition, there are three other methods directly aimed at increasing the enemy's expenditure of effort. The first of these is *invasion*, that is *the seizure of enemy territory*; not with the object of retaining it but in order to exact financial contributions, or even to lay it waste. The immediate object here is neither to conquer the enemy country nor to destroy its army, but simply to *cause general damage*. The second method is to give priority to operations that will increase the enemy's suffering. It is easy to imagine two alternatives: one operation is far more advantageous if the purpose is to defeat the enemy; the other is more profitable if that cannot be done. The first tends to be described as the more military, the second the more political alternative. From the highest point of view, however, one is as military as the other, and neither is appropriate unless it suits the particular conditions. The third, and far the most important method, judging from the frequency of its use, is to *wear down* the enemy. That expression is more than a label; it describes the process precisely, and is not so metaphorical as it may seem at first. Wearing down the enemy in a conflict means using *the duration of the war to bring about a gradual exhaustion of his physical and moral resistance*.

If we intend to hold out longer than our opponent we must be content with the smallest possible objects, for obviously a major object requires more effort than a minor one. The minimum object is *pure self-defense*; in other words, fighting without a positive purpose. With such a policy our relative strength will be at its height, and thus the prospects for a favorable outcome will be greatest. But how far can this negativity be pushed? Obviously not to the point of absolute passivity, for sheer endurance would not be fighting at all. But resistance is a form of action, aimed at destroying enough of the enemy's power to force him to renounce his intentions. Every single act of our resistance is directed to that act alone, and that is what makes our policy negative.

Undoubtedly a single action, assuming it succeeds, would do less for a negative aim than it would for a positive one. But that is just the difference: the former is more likely to succeed and so to give you more security. What it lacks in immediate effectiveness it must make up for in its use of time,

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that is by prolonging the war. Thus the negative aim, which lies at the heart of pure resistance, is also the natural formula for outlasting the enemy, for wearing him down.

Here lies the origin of the distinction that dominates the whole of war: the difference between *attack* and *defense*. We shall not pursue the matter now, but let us just say this: that from the negative purpose derive all the advantages, all the more effective forms, of fighting, and that in it is expressed the dynamic relationship between the magnitude and the likelihood of success. All this will be gone into later.

If a negative aim—that is, the use of every means available for pure resistance—gives an advantage in war, the advantage need only be enough to *balance* any superiority the opponent may possess: in the end his political object will not seem worth the effort it costs. He must then renounce his policy. It is evident that this method, wearing down the enemy, applies to the great number of cases where the weak endeavor to resist the strong.

Frederick the Great would never have been able to defeat Austria in the Seven Years War: and had he tried to fight in the manner of Charles XII he would unfailingly have been destroyed himself. But for seven years he skillfully husbanded his strength and finally convinced the allies that far greater efforts were needed than they had foreseen. Consequently they made peace.

We can now see that in war many roads lead to success, and that they do not all involve the opponent's outright defeat. They range from *the destruction of the enemy's forces, the conquest of his territory, to a temporary occupation or invasion, to projects with an immediate political purpose, and finally to passively awaiting the enemy's attacks*. Any one of these may be used to overcome the enemy's will: the choice depends on circumstances. One further kind of action, of shortcuts to the goal, needs mention: one could call them arguments *ad hominem*. Is there a field of human affairs where personal relations do not count, where the sparks they strike do not leap across all practical considerations? The personalities of statesmen and soldiers are such important factors that in war above all it is vital not to underrate them. It is enough to mention this point: it would be pedantic to attempt a systematic classification. It can be said, however, that these questions of personality and personal relations raise the number of possible ways of achieving the goal of policy to infinity.

To think of these shortcuts as rare exceptions, or to minimize the difference they can make to the conduct of war, would be to underrate them. To avoid that error we need only bear in mind how wide a range of political interests can lead to war, or think for a moment of the gulf that separates a war of annihilation, a struggle for political existence, from a war reluctantly declared in consequence of political pressure or of an alliance that no longer seems to reflect the state's true interests. Between these two extremes lie numerous gradations. If we reject a single one of them on theoretical grounds, we may as well reject them all, and lose contact with the real world.

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So much then for the ends to be pursued in war; let us now turn to the means.

There is only one: *combat*. However many forms combat takes, however far it may be removed from the brute discharge of hatred and enmity of a physical encounter, however many forces may intrude which themselves are not part of fighting, it is inherent in the very concept of war that everything that occurs *must originally derive from combat*.

It is easy to show that this is always so, however many forms reality takes. Everything that occurs in war results from the existence of armed forces; *but whenever armed forces, that is armed individuals, are used, the idea of combat must be present*.

Warfare comprises everything related to the fighting forces—everything to do with their creation, maintenance, and use.

Creation and maintenance are obviously only means; their use constitutes the end.

Combat in war is not a contest between individuals. It is a whole made up of many parts, and in that whole two elements may be distinguished, one determined by the subject, the other by the objective. The mass of combatants in an army endlessly forms fresh elements, which themselves are parts of a greater structure. The fighting activity of each of these parts constitutes a more or less clearly defined element. Moreover, combat itself is made an element of war by its very purpose, by its *objective*.

Each of these elements which become distinct in the course of fighting is named an *engagement*.

If the idea of fighting underlies every use of the fighting forces, then their employment means simply the planning and organizing of a series of engagements.

The whole of military activity must therefore relate directly or indirectly to the engagement. The end for which a soldier is recruited, clothed, armed, and trained, the whole object of his sleeping, eating, drinking, and marching is *simply that he should fight at the right place and the right time*.

If all threads of military activity lead to the engagement, then if we control the engagement, we comprehend them all. Their results are produced by our orders and by the execution of these orders, never directly by other conditions. Since in the engagement everything is concentrated on the destruction of the enemy, or rather of *his armed forces*, which is inherent in its very concept, it follows that the destruction of the enemy's forces is always the means by which the purpose of the engagement is achieved.

The purpose in question may be the destruction of the enemy's forces, but not necessarily so; it may be quite different. As we have shown, the destruction of the enemy is not the only means of attaining the political object, when there are other objectives for which the war is waged. It follows that those other objectives can also become the purpose of particular military operations, and thus also the purpose of engagements.

Even when subordinate engagements are directly intended to destroy the



opposing forces, that destruction still need not be their first, immediate concern.

Bearing in mind the elaborate structure of an army, and the numerous factors that determine its employment, one can see that the fighting activity of such a force is also subject to complex organization, division of functions, and combinations. The separate units obviously must often be assigned tasks that are not in themselves concerned with the destruction of the enemy's forces, which may indeed increase their losses but do so only indirectly. If a battalion is ordered to drive the enemy from a hill, a bridge, etc., the true purpose is normally to occupy that point. Destruction of the enemy's force is only a means to an end, a secondary matter. If a mere demonstration is enough to cause the enemy to abandon his position, the objective has been achieved; but as a rule the hill or bridge is captured only so that even more damage can be inflicted on the enemy. If this is the case on the battlefield, it will be even more so in the theater of operations, where it is not merely two armies that are facing each other, but two states, two peoples, two nations. The range of possible circumstances, and therefore of options, is greatly increased, as is the variety of dispositions; and the gradation of objects at various levels of command will further separate the first means from the ultimate purpose.

Thus there are many reasons why the purpose of an engagement may not be the destruction of the enemy's forces, the forces immediately confronting us. Destruction may be merely a means to some other end. In such a case, total destruction has ceased to be the point; the engagement is nothing but a *trial of strength*. In itself it is of no value; its significance lies in the outcome of the trial.

When one force is a great deal stronger than the other, an estimate may be enough. There will be no fighting: the weaker side will yield at once.

The fact that engagements do not always aim at the destruction of the opposing forces, that their objectives can often be attained without any fighting at all but merely by an evaluation of the situation, explains why entire campaigns can be conducted with great energy even though actual fighting plays an unimportant part in them.

This is demonstrated by hundreds of examples in the history of war. Here we are only concerned to show that it is *possible*; we need not ask how often it was appropriate, in other words *consistent with the overall purpose*, to avoid the test of battle, or whether all the reputations made in such campaigns would stand the test of critical examination.

There is only one means in war: combat. But the multiplicity of forms that combat assumes leads us in as many different directions as are created by the multiplicity of aims, so that our analysis does not seem to have made any progress. But that is not so: the fact that only one means exists constitutes a strand that runs through the entire web of military activity and really holds it together.

We have shown that the destruction of the enemy's forces is one of the many objects that can be pursued in war, and we have left aside the ques-

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tion of its importance relative to other purposes. In any given case the answer will depend on circumstances; its importance to war in general remains to be clarified. We shall now go into this question, and we shall see what value must necessarily be attributed to this object of destruction.

Combat is the only effective force in war; its aim is to destroy the enemy's forces as a means to a further end. That holds good even if no actual fighting occurs, because the outcome rests on the assumption that if it came to fighting, the enemy would be destroyed. It follows that the destruction of the enemy's force underlies all military actions; all plans are ultimately based on it, resting on it like an arch on its abutment. Consequently, all action is undertaken in the belief that if the ultimate test of arms should actually occur, the outcome would be *favorable*. The decision by arms is for all major and minor operations in war what cash payment is in commerce. Regardless how complex the relationship between the two parties, regardless how rarely settlements actually occur, they can never be entirely absent.

If a decision by fighting is the basis of all plans and operations, it follows that the enemy *can frustrate everything through a successful battle*. This occurs not only when the encounter affects an essential factor in our plans, but when any victory that is won is of sufficient scope. For every important victory—that is, destruction of opposing forces—reacts on all other possibilities. Like liquid, they will settle at a new level.

Thus it is evident that destruction of the enemy forces is always the superior, more effective means, with which others cannot compete.

But of course, we can only say destruction of the enemy is more effective if we can assume that all other conditions are equal. It would be a great mistake to deduce from this argument that a headlong rush must always triumph over skillful caution. Blind aggressiveness would destroy the attack itself, not the defense, and this is not what we are talking about. Greater effectiveness relates not to the *means* but to the *end*; we are simply comparing the effect of different outcomes.

When we speak of destroying the enemy's forces we must emphasize that nothing obliges us to limit this idea to physical forces: the moral element must also be considered. The two interact throughout: they are inseparable. We have just mentioned the effect that a great destructive act—a major victory—inevitably exerts on all other actions, and it is exactly at such times that the moral factor is, so to speak, the most fluid element of all, and therefore spreads most easily to affect everything else. The advantage that the destruction of the enemy possesses over all other means is balanced by its cost and danger; and it is only in order to avoid these risks that other policies are employed.

That the method of destruction cannot fail to be expensive is understandable; other things being equal, the more intent we are on destroying the enemy's forces, the greater our own efforts must be.

The danger of this method is that the greater the success we seek, the greater will be the damage if we fail.

Other methods, therefore, are less costly if they succeed and less damag-

ing if they fail, though this holds true only if both sides act identically, if the enemy pursues the same course as we do. If he were to seek the decision through a major battle, *his choice would force us against our will to do likewise*. Then the outcome of the battle would be decisive; but it is clear—other things again being equal—that we would be at an overall disadvantage, since our plans and resources had been in part intended to achieve other goals, whereas the enemy's were not. Two objectives, neither of which is part of the other, are mutually exclusive: one force cannot simultaneously be used for both. If, therefore, one of the two commanders is resolved to seek a decision through major battles, he will have an excellent chance of success if he is certain that his opponent is pursuing a different policy. Conversely, the commander who wishes to adopt different means can reasonably do so only if he assumes his opponent to be equally unwilling to resort to major battles.

What has been said about plans and forces being directed to other uses refers only to the *positive* purposes, other than the destruction of enemy forces, that can be pursued in war. It pertains *in no way to pure resistance*, which seeks to wear down the opponent's strength. Pure resistance has no *positive* intention; we can use our forces only to frustrate the enemy's intentions, and not divert them to other objectives.

Here we must consider the negative side of destroying the enemy's forces—that is, the preservation of our own. These two efforts always go together; they interact. They are integral parts of a single purpose, and we only need to consider the result if one or the other dominates. The effort to destroy the enemy's forces has a positive purpose and leads to positive results, whose final aim is the enemy's collapse. Preserving our own forces has a negative purpose; it frustrates the enemy's intentions—that is, it amounts to pure resistance, whose ultimate aim can only be to prolong the war until the enemy is exhausted.

The policy with a positive purpose calls the act of destruction into being; the policy with a negative purpose waits for it.

How far such a waiting attitude may or should be maintained is a question we shall study in connection with the theory of attack and defense, whose basic element is here involved. For the moment we need only say that a policy of waiting must never become passive endurance, that any action involved in it may just as well seek the destruction of the opposing forces as any other objective. It would be a fundamental error to imagine that a negative aim implies a preference for a bloodless decision over the destruction of the enemy. A preponderantly negative effort may of course lead to such a choice, but always at the risk that it is not the appropriate course: that depends on factors that are determined not by us but by the opponent. Avoidance of bloodshed, then, should not be taken as an act of policy if our main concern is to preserve our forces. On the contrary, if such a policy did not suit the particular situation it would lead our forces to disaster. A great many generals have failed through this mistaken assumption.

The one certain effect a preponderantly negative policy will have is to

retard the decision: in other words, action is transposed into waiting for the decisive moment. This usually means that *action* is *postponed* in time and space to the extent that space is relevant and circumstances permit. If the time arrives when further waiting would bring excessive disadvantages, then the benefit of the negative policy has been exhausted. The destruction of the enemy—an aim that has until then been postponed but not displaced by another consideration—now reemerges.

Our discussion has shown that while in war many different roads can lead to the goal, to the attainment of the political object, fighting is the only possible means. Everything is governed by a supreme law, the *decision by force of arms*. If the opponent does seek battle, this recourse can never be denied him. A commander who prefers another strategy must first be sure that his opponent either will not appeal to that supreme tribunal—force—or that he will lose the verdict if he does. To sum up: of all the possible aims in war, the destruction of the enemy's armed forces always appears as the highest.

At a later stage and by degrees we shall see what other kinds of strategies can achieve in war. All we need to do for the moment is to admit the general *possibility of their existence*, the possibility of deviating from the basic concept of war under the pressure of special circumstances. But even at this point we must not fail to emphasize that the *violent resolution of the crisis*, the wish to annihilate the enemy's forces, is the first-born son of war. If the political aims are small, the motives slight and tensions low, a prudent general may look for any way to avoid major crises and decisive actions, exploit any weaknesses in the opponent's military and political strategy, and finally reach a peaceful settlement. If his assumptions are sound and promise success we are not entitled to criticize him. But he must never forget that he is moving on devious paths where the god of war may catch him unawares. He must always keep an eye on his opponent so that he does not, if the latter has taken up a sharp sword, approach him armed only with an ornamental rapier.

These conclusions concerning the nature of war and the function of its purposes and means; the manner in which war in practice deviates in varying degrees from its basic, rigorous concept, taking this form or that, but always remaining subject to that basic concept, as to a supreme law; all these points must be kept in mind in our subsequent analyses if we are to perceive the real connections between all aspects of war, and the true significance of each; and if we wish to avoid constantly falling into the wildest inconsistencies with reality and even with our own arguments.

## On Military Genius

Any complex activity, if it is to be carried on with any degree of virtuosity, calls for appropriate gifts of intellect and temperament. If they are outstanding and reveal themselves in exceptional achievements, their possessor is called a "genius."

We are aware that this word is used in many senses, differing both in degree and in kind. We also know that some of these meanings make it difficult to establish the essence of genius. But since we claim no special expertise in philosophy or grammar, we may be allowed to use the word in its ordinary meaning, in which "genius" refers to a very highly developed mental aptitude for a particular occupation.

Let us discuss this faculty, this distinction of mind for a moment, setting out its claims in greater detail, so as to gain a better understanding of the concept. But we cannot restrict our discussion to *genius* proper, as a superlative degree of talent, for this concept lacks measurable limits. What we must do is to survey all those gifts of mind and temperament that in combination bear on military activity. These, taken together, constitute *the essence of military genius*. We have said *in combination*, since it is precisely the essence of military genius that it does not consist in a single appropriate gift—courage, for example—while other qualities of mind or temperament are wanting or are not suited to war. Genius consists *in a harmonious combination of elements*, in which one or the other ability may predominate, but none may be in conflict with the rest.

If every soldier needed some degree of military genius our armies would be very weak, for the term refers to a special cast of mental or moral powers which can rarely occur in an army when a society has to employ its abilities in many different areas. The smaller the range of activities of a nation and the more the military factor dominates, the greater will be the incidence of military genius. This, however, is true only of its distribution, not of its quality. The latter depends on the *general intellectual development* of a given society. In any primitive, warlike race, the warrior spirit is far more common than among civilized peoples. It is possessed by almost every warrior: but in civilized societies only necessity will stimulate it in the people as a whole, since they lack the natural disposition for it. On the other hand, we will never find a savage who is a truly great commander, and very rarely one who would be considered a military genius, since this requires a degree of intellectual powers beyond anything that a primitive people can develop. Civilized societies, too, can obviously possess a warlike character to greater

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or lesser degree, and the more they develop it, the greater will be the number of men with military spirit in their armies. Possession of military genius coincides with the higher degrees of civilization: the most highly developed societies produce the most brilliant soldiers, as the Romans and the French have shown us. With them, as with every people renowned in war, the greatest names do not appear before a high level of civilization has been reached.

We can already guess how great a role intellectual powers play in the higher forms of military genius. Let us now examine the matter more closely.

War is the realm of danger; therefore *courage* is the soldier's first requirement.

Courage is of two kinds: courage in the face of personal danger, and courage to accept responsibility, either before the tribunal of some outside power or before the court of one's own conscience. Only the first kind will be discussed here.

Courage in face of personal danger is also of two kinds. It may be indifference to danger, which could be due to the individual's constitution, or to his holding life cheap, or to habit. In any case, it must be regarded as a permanent *condition*. Alternatively, courage may result from such positive motives as ambition, patriotism, or enthusiasm of any kind. In that case courage is a feeling, an emotion, not a permanent state.

These two kinds of courage act in different ways. The first is the more dependable; having become second nature, it will never fail. The other will often achieve more. There is more reliability in the first kind, more boldness in the second. The first leaves the mind calmer; the second tends to stimulate, but it can also blind. *The highest kind of courage is a compound of both.*

War is the realm of physical exertion and suffering. These will destroy us unless we can make ourselves indifferent to them, and for this birth or training must provide us with a certain strength of body and soul. If we do possess those qualities, then even if we have nothing but common sense to guide them we shall be well equipped for war: it is exactly these qualities that primitive and semicivilized peoples usually possess.

If we pursue the demands that war makes on those who practice it, we come to the region dominated by the *powers of intellect*. War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty. A sensitive and discriminating judgment is called for; a skilled intelligence to scent out the truth.

Average intelligence may recognize the truth occasionally, and exceptional courage may now and then retrieve a blunder; but usually intellectual inadequacy will be shown up by indifferent achievement.

War is the realm of chance. No other human activity gives it greater scope: no other has such incessant and varied dealings with this intruder. Chance makes everything more uncertain and interferes with the whole course of events.

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Since all information and assumptions are open to doubt, and with chance at work everywhere, the commander continually finds that things are not as he expected. This is bound to influence his plans, or at least the assumptions underlying them. If this influence is sufficiently powerful to cause a change in his plans, he must usually work out new ones; but for these the necessary information may not be immediately available. During an operation decisions have usually to be made at once: there may be no time to review the situation or even to think it through. Usually, of course, new information and reevaluation are not enough to make us give up our intentions: they only call them in question. We now know more, but this makes us more, not less uncertain. The latest reports do not arrive all at once: they merely trickle in. They continually impinge on our decisions, and our mind must be permanently armed, so to speak, to deal with them.

If the mind is to emerge unscathed from this relentless struggle with the unforeseen, two qualities are indispensable: *first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead.* The first of these qualities is described by the French term, *coup d'oeil*; the second is *determination*.

The aspect of war that has always attracted the greatest attention is the engagement. Because time and space are important elements of the engagement, and were particularly significant in the days when the cavalry attack was the decisive factor, the *idea of a rapid and accurate decision* was first based on an evaluation of time and space, and consequently received a name which refers to visual estimates only. Many theorists of war have employed the term in that limited sense. But soon it was also used of any sound decision taken in the midst of action—such as recognizing the right point to attack, etc. *Coup d'oeil* therefore refers not alone to the physical but, more commonly, to the inward eye. The expression, like the quality itself, has certainly always been more applicable to tactics, but it must also have its place in strategy, since here as well quick decisions are often needed. Stripped of metaphor and of the restrictions imposed on it by the phrase, the concept merely refers to the quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection.

Determination in a single instance is an expression of courage; if it becomes characteristic, a mental habit. But here we are referring not to physical courage but to the courage to accept responsibility, courage in the face of a moral danger. This has often been called *courage d'esprit*, because it is created by the intellect. That, however, does not make it an act of the intellect: it is an act of temperament. Intelligence alone is not courage; we often see that the most intelligent people are irresolute. Since in the rush of events a man is governed by feelings rather than by thought, the intellect needs to arouse the quality of courage, which then supports and sustains it in action.

Looked at in this way, the role of determination is to limit the agonies of

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doubt and the perils of hesitation when the motives for action are inadequate. Colloquially, to be sure, the term "determination" also applies to a propensity for daring, pugnacity, boldness, or temerity. But when a man has adequate grounds for action—whether subjective or objective, valid or false—he cannot properly be called "determined." This would amount to putting oneself in his position and weighting the scale with a doubt that he never felt. In such a case it is only a question of strength or weakness. I am not such a pedant as to quarrel with common usage over a slight misuse of a word; the only purpose of these remarks is to preclude misunderstandings.

Determination, which dispells doubt, is a quality that can be aroused only by the intellect, and by a specific cast of mind at that. More is required to create determination than a mere conjunction of superior insight with the appropriate emotions. Some may bring the keenest brains to the most formidable problems, and may possess the courage to accept serious responsibilities; but when faced with a difficult situation they still find themselves unable to reach a decision. Their courage and their intellect work in separate compartments, not together; determination, therefore, does not result. It is engendered only by a *mental act*; the mind tells man that boldness is required, and thus gives direction to his will. This particular cast of mind, which employs the fear of *wavering* and *hesitating* to suppress all other fears, is the force that makes strong men determined. Men of low intelligence, therefore, cannot possess determination in the sense in which we use the word. They may act without hesitation in a crisis, but if they do, they act *without reflection*; and a man who acts without reflection cannot, of course, be torn by doubt. From time to time action of this type may even be appropriate; but, as I have said before, it is the *average result* that indicates the existence of military genius. The statement may surprise the reader who knows some determined cavalry officers who are little given to deep thought: but he must remember that we are talking about a special kind of intelligence, not about great powers of meditation.

In short, we believe that determination proceeds from a special type of mind, from a strong rather than a brilliant one. We can give further proof of this interpretation by pointing to the many examples of men who show great determination as junior officers, but lose it as they rise in rank. Conscious of the need to be decisive, they also recognize the risks entailed by a *wrong* decision; since they are unfamiliar with the problems now facing them, their mind loses its former incisiveness. The more used they had been to instant action, the more their timidity increases as they realize the dangers of the vacillation that ensnares them.

Having discussed *coup d'oeil* and determination it is natural to pass to a related subject: *presence of mind*. This must play a great role in war, the domain of the unexpected, since it is nothing but an increased capacity of dealing with the unexpected. We admire presence of mind in an apt repartee, as we admire quick thinking in the face of danger. Neither needs to be exceptional, so long as it meets the situation. A reaction following long and



deep reflection may seem quite commonplace; as an immediate response, it may give keen pleasure. The expression "presence of mind" precisely conveys the speed and immediacy of the help provided by the intellect.

Whether this splendid quality is due to a special cast of mind or to steady nerves depends on the nature of the incident, but neither can ever be entirely lacking. A quick retort shows wit; resourcefulness in sudden danger calls, above all, for steady nerve.

Four elements make up the climate of war: danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance. If we consider them together, it becomes evident how much fortitude of mind and character are needed to make progress in these impeding elements with safety and success. According to circumstance, reporters and historians of war use such terms as *energy*, *firmness*, *staunchness*, *emotional balance*, and *strength of character*. These products of a heroic nature could almost be treated as one and the same force—strength of will—which adjusts itself to circumstances: but though closely linked, they are not identical. A closer study of the interplay of psychological forces at work here may be worth while.

To begin with, clear thought demands that we keep one point in mind: of the weight, the burden, the resistance—call it what you like—that challenges the psychological strength of the soldier, only a small part is the *direct result of the enemy's activity, his resistance, or his operations*. The direct and primary impact of enemy activity falls, initially, on the soldier's person without affecting him in his capacity as commander. If, for example, the enemy resists four hours instead of two, the commander is in danger twice as long; but the higher an officer's rank, the less significant this factor becomes, and to the commander-in-chief it means nothing at all.

A second way in which the enemy's resistance *directly* affects the commander is the loss that is caused by prolonged resistance and the influence this exerts on his sense of responsibility. The deep anxiety which he must experience works on his strength of will and puts it to the test. Yet we believe that this is not by any means the heaviest burden he must bear, for he is answerable to himself alone. All other effects of enemy action, however, are felt by the men under his command, and *through them react on him*.

So long as a unit fights cheerfully, with spirit and elan, great strength of will is rarely needed; but once conditions become difficult, as they must when much is at stake, things no longer run like a well-oiled machine. The machine itself begins to resist, and the commander needs tremendous will-power to overcome this resistance. The machine's *resistance* need not consist of disobedience and argument, though this occurs often enough in individual soldiers. It is the impact of the ebbing of moral and physical strength, of the heart-rending spectacle of the dead and wounded, that the commander has to withstand—first in himself, and then in all those who, directly or indirectly, have entrusted him with their thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears. As each man's strength gives out, as it no longer responds to his will, the inertia of the whole gradually comes to rest on the commander's will alone. The ardor of his spirit must rekindle the flame of purpose in all others;

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his inward fire must revive their hope. Only to the extent that he can do this will he retain his hold on his men and keep control. Once that hold is lost, once his own courage can no longer revive the courage of his men, the mass will drag him down to the brutish world where danger is shirked and shame is unknown. Such are the burdens in battle that the commander's courage and strength of will must overcome if he hopes to achieve outstanding success. The burdens increase with the number of men in his command, and therefore the higher his position, the greater the strength of character he needs to bear the mounting load.

*Energy* in action varies in proportion to the strength of its motive, whether the motive be the result of intellectual conviction or of emotion. Great strength, however, is not easily produced where there is no emotion.

Of all the passions that inspire man in battle, none, we have to admit, is so powerful and so constant as the longing for honor and renown. The German language unjustly tarnishes this by associating it with two ignoble meanings in the terms "greed for honor" (*Ehrgeiz*) and "hankering after glory" (*Ruhmsucht*). The abuse of these noble ambitions has certainly inflicted the most disgusting outrages on the human race; nevertheless their origins entitle them to be ranked among the most elevated in human nature. In war they act as the essential breath of life that animates the inert mass. Other emotions may be more common and more venerated—patriotism, idealism, vengeance, enthusiasm of every kind—but they are no substitute for a thirst for fame and honor. They may, indeed, rouse the mass to action and inspire it, but they cannot give the commander the ambition to strive higher than the rest, as he must if he is to distinguish himself. They cannot give him, as can ambition, a personal, almost proprietary interest in every aspect of fighting, so that he turns each opportunity to best advantage—plowing with vigor, sowing with care, in the hope of reaping with abundance. It is primarily this spirit of endeavor on the part of commanders at all levels, this inventiveness, energy, and competitive enthusiasm, which vitalizes an army and makes it victorious. And so far as the commander-in-chief is concerned, we may well ask whether history has ever known a great general who was not ambitious; whether, indeed, such a figure is conceivable.

*Staunchness* indicates the will's resistance to a single blow; *endurance* refers to prolonged resistance.

Though the two terms are similar and are often used interchangeably, the difference between them is significant and unmistakable. Staunchness in face of a single blow may result from strong emotion, whereas intelligence helps sustain endurance. The longer an action lasts, the more deliberate endurance becomes, and this is one of its sources of strength.

We now turn to *strength of mind*, or of *character*, and must first ask what we mean by these terms.

Not, obviously, vehement display of feeling, or passionate temperament: that would strain the meaning of the phrase. We mean the ability to keep one's head at times of exceptional stress and violent emotion. Could strength of intellect alone account for such a faculty? We doubt it. Of course the

opposite does not flow from the fact that some men of outstanding intellect do lose their self-control; it could be argued that a powerful rather than a capacious mind is what is needed. But it might be closer to the truth to assume that the faculty known as *self-control*—the gift of keeping calm even under the greatest stress—is rooted in temperament. It is itself an emotion which serves to balance the passionate feelings in strong characters without destroying them, and it is this balance alone that assures the dominance of the intellect. The counterweight we mean is simply the sense of human dignity, the noblest pride and deepest need of all: the urge to *act rationally at all times*. Therefore we would argue that a strong character is one *that will not be unbalanced by the most powerful emotions*.

If we consider how men differ in their emotional reactions, we first find a group with small capacity for being roused, usually known as “stolid” or “phlegmatic.”

Second, there are men who are extremely active, but whose feelings never rise above a certain level, men whom we know to be sensitive but calm.

Third, there are men whose passions are easily inflamed, in whom excitement flares up suddenly but soon burns out, like gunpowder. And finally we come to those who do not react to minor matters, who will be moved only very gradually, not suddenly, but whose emotions attain great strength and durability. These are the men whose passions are strong, deep, and concealed.

These variants are probably related to the *physical forces* operating in the human being—they are part of that dual organism we call the nervous system, one side of which is physical, the other psychological. With our slight scientific knowledge we have no business to go farther into that obscure field; it is important nonetheless to note the ways in which these various psychological combinations can affect military activity, and to find out how far one can look for great strength of character among them.

Stolid men are hard to throw off balance, but total lack of vigor cannot really be interpreted as strength of character. It cannot be denied, however, that the imperturbability of such men gives them a certain narrow usefulness in war. They are seldom strongly motivated, lack initiative and consequently are not particularly active; on the other hand they seldom make a serious mistake.

The salient point about the second group is that trifles can suddenly stir them to act, whereas great issues are likely to overwhelm them. This kind of man will gladly help an individual in need, but the misfortune of an entire people will only sadden him; they will not stimulate him to action.

In war such men show no lack of energy or balance, but they are unlikely to achieve anything significant unless they possess a *very powerful intellect* to provide the needed stimulus. But it is rare to find this type of temperament combined with a strong and independent mind.

Inflammable emotions, feelings that are easily roused, are in general of little value in practical life, and therefore of little value in war. Their impulses are strong but brief. If the energy of such men is joined to courage and ambition they will often prove most useful at a modest level of com-

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mand, simply because the action controlled by junior officers is of short duration. Often a single brave decision, a burst of emotional force, will be enough. A daring assault is the work of a few minutes, while a hard-fought battle may last a day, and a campaign an entire year.

Their volatile emotions make it doubly hard for such men to preserve their balance; they often lose their heads, and nothing is worse on active service. All the same, it would be untrue to say that highly excitable minds could never be strong—that is, could never keep their balance even under the greatest strain. Why should they not have a sense of their own dignity, since as a rule they are among the finer natures? In fact, they usually have such a sense, but there is not time for it to take effect. Once the crisis is past, they tend to be ashamed of their behavior. If training, self-awareness, and experience sooner or later teaches them how to be on guard against themselves, then in times of great excitement an internal counterweight will assert itself so that they too can draw on great strength of character.

Lastly, we come to men who are difficult to move but have strong feelings—men who are to the previous type like heat to a shower of sparks. These are the men who are best able to summon the titanic strength it takes to clear away the enormous burdens that obstruct activity in war. Their emotions move as great masses do—slowly but irresistibly.

These men are not swept away by their emotions so often as is the third group, but experience shows that they too can lose their balance and be overcome by blind passion. This can happen whenever they lack the noble pride of self-control, or whenever it is inadequate. We find this condition mostly among great men in primitive societies, where passion tends to rule for lack of intellectual discipline. Yet even among educated peoples and civilized societies men are often swept away by passion, just as in the Middle Ages poachers chained to stags were carried off into the forest.

We repeat again: strength of character does not consist solely in having powerful feelings, but in maintaining one's balance in spite of them. Even with the violence of emotion, judgment and principle must still function like a ship's compass, which records the slightest variations however rough the sea.

We say a man has strength of character, or simply has character, if he sticks to his convictions, whether these derive from his own opinions or someone else's, whether they represent principles, attitudes, sudden insights, or any other mental force. Such *firmness* cannot show itself, of course, if a man keeps changing his mind. This need not be the consequence of external influence; the cause may be the workings of his own intelligence, but this would suggest a peculiarly insecure mind. Obviously a man whose opinions are constantly changing, even though this is in response to his own reflections, would not be called a *man of character*. The term is applied only to men whose views are *stable and constant*. This may be because they are well thought-out, clear, and scarcely open to revision; or, in the case of indolent men, because such people are not in the habit of mental effort and therefore have no reason for altering their views; and finally, because a firm

decision, based on fundamental principle derived from reflection, is relatively immune to changes of opinion.

With its mass of vivid impressions and the doubts which characterize all information and opinion, there is no activity like war to rob men of confidence in themselves and in others, and to divert them from their original course of action.

In the dreadful presence of suffering and danger, emotion can easily overwhelm intellectual conviction, and in this psychological fog it is so hard to form clear and complete insights that changes of view become more understandable and excusable. Action can never be based on anything firmer than instinct, a sensing of the truth. Nowhere, in consequence, are differences of opinion so acute as in war, and fresh opinions never cease to batter at one's convictions. No degree of calm can provide enough protection: new impressions are too powerful, too vivid, and always assault the emotions as well as the intellect.

Only those general principles and attitudes that result from clear and deep understanding can provide a *comprehensive* guide to action. It is to these that opinions on specific problems should be anchored. The difficulty is to hold fast to these results of contemplation in the torrent of events and new opinions. Often there is a gap between principles and actual events that cannot always be bridged by a succession of logical deductions. Then a measure of self-confidence is needed, and a degree of skepticism is also salutary. Frequently nothing short of an imperative principle will suffice, which is not part of the immediate thought-process, but dominates it: that principle is in all doubtful cases *to stick to one's first opinion and to refuse to change unless forced to do so by a clear conviction*. A strong faith in the overriding truth of tested principles is needed; the *vividness* of transient impressions must not make us forget that such truth as they contain is of a lesser stamp. By giving precedence, in case of doubt, to our earlier convictions, by holding to them stubbornly, our actions acquire that quality of steadiness and consistency which is termed strength of character.

It is evident how greatly strength of character depends on balanced temperament; most men of emotional strength and stability are therefore men of powerful character as well.

Strength of character can degenerate into *obstinacy*. The line between them is often hard to draw in a specific case; but surely it is easy to distinguish them in theory.

Obstinacy is *not an intellectual defect*; it comes from reluctance to admit that one is wrong. To impute this to the mind would be illogical, for the mind is the seat of judgment. Obstinacy is *a fault of temperament*. Stubbornness and intolerance of contradiction result from a special kind of *egotism*, which elevates above everything else *the pleasure of its autonomous intellect, to which others must bow*. It might also be called vanity, if it were not something superior: vanity is content with the appearance alone; obstinacy demands the material reality.

We would therefore argue that strength of character turns to obstinacy

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as soon as a man resists another point of view not from superior insight or attachment to some higher principle, but because he *objects instinctively*. Admittedly, this definition may not be of much practical use; but it will nevertheless help us avoid the interpretation that obstinacy is simply a more intense form of strong character. There is a basic difference between the two. They are closely related, but one is so far from being a *higher degree* of the other that we can even find extremely obstinate men who are too dense to have much strength of character.

So far our survey of the attributes that a great commander needs in war has been concerned with qualities in which mind and temperament work together. Now we must address ourselves to a special feature of military activity—possibly the most striking even though it is not the most important—which is not related to temperament, and involves merely the intellect. I mean the relationship between warfare and terrain.

This relationship, to begin with, is a *permanent factor*—so much so that one cannot conceive of a regular army operating except in a definite space. Second, its importance is *decisive in the highest degree*, for it affects the operations of all forces, and at times entirely alters them. Third, its influence may be felt in the *very smallest feature of the ground*, but it can also dominate *enormous areas*.

In these ways the relationship between warfare and terrain determines the peculiar character of military action. If we consider other activities connected with the soil—gardening, for example, farming, building, hydraulic engineering, mining, game-keeping, or forestry—none extends to more than a very limited area, and a working knowledge of that area is soon acquired. But a commander must submit his work to a partner, space, which he can never completely reconnoiter, and which because of the constant movement and change to which he is subject he can never really come to know. To be sure, the enemy is generally no better off; but the handicap, though shared, is still a handicap, and the man with enough talent and experience to overcome it will have a real advantage. Moreover it is only in a general sense that the difficulty is the same for both sides; in any particular case the defender usually knows the area far better than his opponent.

This problem is unique. To master it a special gift is needed, which is given the too restricted name of a *sense of locality*. It is the faculty of *quickly and accurately grasping the topography of any area* which enables a man to find his way about at any time. Obviously this is an act of the imagination. Things are perceived, of course, partly by the naked eye and partly by the mind, which fills the gaps with guesswork based on learning and experience, and thus constructs a whole out of the fragments that the eye can see; but if the whole is to be vividly present to the mind, imprinted like a picture, like a map, upon the brain, without fading or blurring in detail, *it can only be achieved by the mental gift that we call imagination*. A poet or painter may be shocked to find that his Muse dominates these activities as well: to him it might seem odd to say that a young gamekeeper needs an unusually powerful imagination in order to be competent. If so,

we gladly admit that this is to apply the concept narrowly and to a modest task. But however remote the connection, his skill must still derive from this natural gift, for if imagination is entirely lacking it would be difficult to combine details into a clear, coherent image. We also admit that a good memory can be a great help; but are we then to think of memory as a separate gift of the mind, or does imagination, after all, imprint those pictures in the memory more clearly? The question must be left unanswered, especially since it seems difficult even to conceive of these two forces as operating separately.

That practice and a trained mind have much to do with it is undeniable. Puysegur, the celebrated quarter-master-general of Marshal Luxembourg, writes that at the beginning of his career he had little faith in his sense of locality; when he had to ride any distance at all to get the password, he invariably lost his way.

Scope for this talent naturally grows with increased authority. A hussar or scout leading a patrol must find his way easily among the roads and tracks. All he needs are a few landmarks and some modest powers of observation and imagination. A commander-in-chief, on the other hand, must aim at acquiring an overall knowledge of the configuration of a province, of an entire country. His mind must hold a vivid picture of the road-network, the river-lines and the mountain ranges, without ever losing a sense of his immediate surroundings. Of course he can draw general information from reports of all kinds, from maps, books, and memoirs. Details will be furnished by his staff. Nevertheless it is true that with a quick, unerring sense of locality his dispositions will be more rapid and assured; he will run less risk of a certain awkwardness in his concepts, and be less dependent on others.

We attribute this ability to the imagination; but that is about the only service that war can demand from this frivolous goddess, who in most military affairs is liable to do more harm than good.

With this, we believe, we have reached the end of our review of the intellectual and moral powers that human nature needs to draw upon in war. The vital contribution of intelligence is clear throughout. No wonder then, that war, though it may appear to be uncomplicated, cannot be waged with distinction except by men of outstanding intellect.

Once this view is adopted, there is no longer any need to think that it takes a great intellectual effort to outflank an enemy position (an obvious move, performed innumerable times) or to carry out a multitude of similar operations.

It is true that we normally regard the plain, efficient soldier as the very opposite of the contemplative scholar, or of the inventive intellectual with his dazzling range of knowledge. This antithesis is not entirely unrealistic; but it does not prove that courage alone will make an efficient soldier, or that having brains and using them is not a necessary part of being a good fighting man. Once again we must insist: no case is more common than that of the officer whose energy declines as he rises in rank and fills positions that are beyond his abilities. But we must also remind the reader

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that outstanding effort, the kind that gives men a distinguished name, is what we have in mind. Every level of command has its own intellectual standards, its own prerequisites for fame and honor.

A major gulf exists between a commander-in-chief—a general who leads the army as a whole or commands in a theater of operations—and the senior generals immediately subordinate to him. The reason is simple: the second level is subjected to much closer control and supervision, and thus gives far less scope for independent thought. People therefore often think outstanding intellectual ability is called for only at the top, and that for all other duties common intelligence will suffice. A general of lesser responsibility, an officer grown gray in the service, his mind well-blinkered by long years of routine, may often be considered to have developed a certain stodginess; his gallantry is respected, but his simplemindedness makes us smile. We do not intend to champion and promote these good men; it would contribute nothing to their efficiency, and little to their happiness. We only wish to show things as they are, so that the reader should not think that a brave but brainless fighter can do anything of outstanding significance in war.

Since in our view even junior positions of command require outstanding intellectual qualities for outstanding achievement, and since the standard rises with every step, it follows that we recognize the abilities that are needed if the second positions in an army are to be filled with distinction. Such officers may appear to be rather simple compared to the polymath scholar, the far-ranging business executive, the statesman; but we should not dismiss the value of their practical intelligence. It sometimes happens of course that someone who made his reputation in one rank carries it with him when he is promoted, without really deserving to. If not much is demanded of him, and he can avoid exposing his incompetence, it is difficult to decide what reputation he really deserves. Such cases often cause one to hold in low estimate soldiers who in less responsible positions might do excellent work.

Appropriate talent is needed at all levels if distinguished service is to be performed. But history and posterity reserve the name of "genius" for those who have excelled in the highest positions—as commanders-in-chief—since here the demands for intellectual and moral powers are vastly greater.

To bring a war, or one of its campaigns, to a successful close requires a thorough grasp of national policy. On that level strategy and policy coalesce: the commander-in-chief is simultaneously a statesman.

Charles XII of Sweden is not thought of as a great genius, for he could never subordinate his military gifts to superior insights and wisdom, and could never achieve a great goal with them. Nor do we think of Henry IV of France in this manner: he was killed before his skill in war could affect the relations between states. Death denied him the chance to prove his talents in this higher sphere, where noble feelings and a generous disposition, which effectively appeased internal dissension, would have had to face a more intractable opponent.

The great range of business that a supreme commander must swiftly absorb and accurately evaluate has been indicated in the first chapter. We



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argue that a commander-in-chief must also be a statesman, but he must not cease to be a general. On the one hand, he is aware of the entire political situation; on the other, he knows exactly how much he can achieve with the means at his disposal.

Circumstances vary so enormously in war, and are so indefinable, that a vast array of factors has to be appreciated—mostly in the light of probabilities alone. The man responsible for evaluating the whole must bring to his task the quality of intuition that perceives the truth at every point. Otherwise a chaos of opinions and considerations would arise, and fatally entangle judgment. Bonaparte rightly said in this connection that many of the decisions faced by the commander-in-chief resemble mathematical problems worthy of the gifts of a *Newton* or an *Euler*.

What this task requires in the way of higher intellectual gifts is a sense of unity and a power of judgment raised to a marvelous pitch of vision, which easily grasps and dismisses a thousand remote possibilities which an ordinary mind would labor to identify and wear itself out in so doing. Yet even that superb display of divination, the sovereign eye of genius itself, would still fall short of historical significance without the qualities of character and temperament we have described.

Truth in itself is rarely sufficient to make men act. Hence the step is always long from cognition to volition, from knowledge to ability. The most powerful springs of action in men lie in his emotions. He derives his most vigorous support, if we may use the term, from that blend of brains and temperament which we have learned to recognize in the qualities of determination, firmness, staunchness, and strength of character.

Naturally enough, if the commander's superior intellect and strength of character did not express themselves in the final success of his work, and were only taken on trust, they would rarely achieve historical importance.

What the layman gets to know of the course of military events is usually nondescript. One action resembles another, and from a mere recital of events it would be impossible to guess what obstacles were faced and overcome. Only now and then, in the memoirs of generals or of their confidants, or as the result of close historical study, are some of the countless threads of the tapestry revealed. Most of the arguments and clashes of opinion that precede a major operation are deliberately concealed because they touch political interests, or they are simply forgotten, being considered as scaffolding to be demolished when the building is complete.

Finally, and without wishing to risk a closer definition of the higher reaches of the spirit, let us assert that the human mind (in the normal meaning of the term) is far from uniform. If we then ask what sort of mind is likeliest to display the qualities of military genius, experience and observation will both tell us that it is the inquiring rather than the creative mind, the comprehensive rather than the specialized approach, the calm rather than the excitable head to which in war we would choose to entrust the fate of our brothers and children, and the safety and honor of our country.

## On Danger in War

To someone who has never experienced danger, the idea is attractive rather than alarming. You charge the enemy, ignoring bullets and casualties, in a surge of excitement. Blindly you hurl yourself toward icy death, not knowing whether you or anyone else will escape him. Before you lies that golden prize, victory, the fruit that quenches the thirst of ambition. Can that be so difficult? No, and it will seem even less difficult than it is. But such moments are rare; and even they are not, as is commonly thought, brief like a heart-beat, but come rather like a medicine, in recurring doses, the taste diluted by time.

Let us accompany a novice to the battlefield. As we approach the rumble of guns grows louder and alternates with the whirl of cannonballs, which begin to attract his attention. Shots begin to strike close around us. We hurry up the slope where the commanding general is stationed with his large staff. Here cannonballs and bursting shells are frequent, and life begins to seem more serious than the young man had imagined. Suddenly someone you know is wounded; then a shell falls among the staff. You notice that some of the officers act a little oddly; you yourself are not as steady and collected as you were: even the bravest can become slightly distracted. Now we enter the battle raging before us, still almost like a spectacle, and join the nearest divisional commander. Shot is falling like hail, and the thunder of our own guns adds to the din. Forward to the brigadier, a soldier of acknowledged bravery, but he is careful to take cover behind a rise, a house or a clump of trees. A noise is heard that is a certain indication of increasing danger—the rattling of grapeshot on roofs and on the ground. Cannonballs tear past, whizzing in all directions, and musketballs begin to whistle around us. A little further we reach the firing line, where the infantry endures the hammering for hours with incredible steadfastness. The air is filled with hissing bullets that sound like a sharp crack if they pass close to one's head. For a final shock, the sight of men being killed and mutilated moves our pounding hearts to awe and pity.

The novice cannot pass through these layers of increasing intensity of danger without sensing that here ideas are governed by other factors, that the light of reason is refracted in a manner quite different from that which is normal in academic speculation. It is an exceptional man who keeps his powers of quick decision intact if he has never been through this experience before. It is true that (with habit) as we become accustomed to it the impression soon wears off, and in half-an-hour we hardly notice our sur-

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roundings any more; yet the ordinary man can never achieve a state of perfect unconcern in which his mind can work with normal flexibility. Here again we recognize that ordinary qualities are not enough; and the greater the area of responsibility, the truer this assertion becomes. Headlong, dogged, or innate courage, overmastering ambition, or long familiarity with danger—all must be present to a considerable degree if action in this debilitating element is not to fall short of achievements that in the study would appear as nothing out of the ordinary.

Danger is part of the friction of war. Without an accurate conception of danger we cannot understand war. That is why I have dealt with it here.

## On Physical Effort in War

If no one had the right to give his views on military operations except when he is frozen, or faint from heat and thirst, or depressed from privation and fatigue, objective and accurate views would be even rarer than they are. But they would at least be subjectively valid, for the speaker's experience would precisely determine his judgment. This is clear enough when we observe in what a deprecatory, even mean and petty way men talk about the failure of some operation that they have witnessed, and even more if they actually took part. We consider that this indicates how much influence physical effort exerts, and shows how much allowance has to be made for it in all our assessments.

Among the many factors in war that cannot be measured, physical effort is the most important. Unless it is wasted, physical effort is a coefficient of all forces, and its exact limit cannot be determined. But it is significant that, just as it takes a powerful archer to bend the bow beyond the average, so it takes a powerful mind to drive his army to the limit. It is one thing for an army that has been badly defeated, is beset by danger on all sides, and is disintegrating like crumbling masonry, to seek its safety in utmost physical effort. It is altogether different when a victorious army, buoyed up by its own exhilaration, remains a willing instrument in the hands of its commander. The same effort, which in the former case can at most arouse sympathy, must be admired in the other, where it is much harder to maintain.

The inexperienced observer now comes to recognize one of the elements that seem to chain the spirit and secretly wear away men's energies.

Although we are dealing only with the efforts that a general can demand of his troops, a commander of his subordinates, in other words although we are concerned with the courage it takes to make the demand and the skill to keep up the response, we must not forget the physical exertion required of the commander himself. Since we have pursued our analysis of war conscientiously to this point, we must deal with this residue as well.

Our reason for dealing with physical effort here is that like danger it is one of the great sources of friction in war. Because its limits are uncertain, it resembles one of those substances whose elasticity makes the degree of its friction exceedingly hard to gauge.

To prevent these reflections, this assessment of the impeding conditions of war, from being misused, we have a natural guide in our sensibilities. No one can count on sympathy if he accepts an insult or mistreatment because he claims to be physically handicapped. But if he manages to defend or

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revenge himself, a reference to his handicap will be to his advantage. In the same way, a general and an army cannot remove the stain of defeat by explaining the dangers, hardships, and exertions that were endured; but to depict them adds immensely to the credit of a victory. We are prevented from making an apparently justified statement by *our feelings*, which themselves act as a higher judgment.

## Intelligence in War

By "intelligence" we mean every sort of information about the enemy and his country—the basis, in short, of our own plans and operations. If we consider the actual basis of this information, how unreliable and transient it is, we soon realize that war is a flimsy structure that can easily collapse and bury us in its ruins. The textbooks agree, of course, that we should only believe reliable intelligence, and should never cease to be suspicious, but what is the use of such feeble maxims? They belong to that wisdom which for want of anything better scribblers of systems and compendia resort to when they run out of ideas.

Many intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain. What one can reasonably ask of an officer is that he should possess a standard of judgment, which he can gain only from knowledge of men and affairs and from common sense. He should be guided by the laws of probability. These are difficult enough to apply when plans are drafted in an office, far from the sphere of action; the task becomes infinitely harder in the thick of fighting itself, with reports streaming in. At such times one is lucky if their contradictions cancel each other out, and leave a kind of balance to be critically assessed. It is much worse for the novice if chance does not help him in that way, and on the contrary one report tallies with another, confirms it, magnifies it, lends it color, till he has to make a quick decision—which is soon recognized to be mistaken, just as the reports turn out to be lies, exaggerations, errors, and so on. In short, most intelligence is false, and the effect of fear is to multiply lies and inaccuracies. As a rule most men would rather believe bad news than good, and rather tend to exaggerate the bad news. The dangers that are reported may soon, like waves, subside; but like waves they keep recurring, without apparent reason. The commander must trust his judgment and stand like a rock on which the waves break in vain. It is not an easy thing to do. If he does not have a buoyant disposition, if experience of war has not trained him and matured his judgment, he had better make it a rule to suppress his personal convictions, and give his hopes and not his fears the benefit of the doubt. Only thus can he preserve a proper balance.

This difficulty of *accurate recognition* constitutes one of the most serious sources of friction in war, by making things appear entirely different from what one had expected. The senses make a more vivid impression on the mind than systematic thought—so much so that I doubt if a commander ever launched an operation of any magnitude without being forced to repress

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new misgivings from the start. Ordinary men, who normally follow the initiative of others, tend to lose self-confidence when they reach the scene of action: things are not what they expected, the more so as they still let others influence them. But even the man who planned the operation and now sees it being carried out may well lose confidence in his earlier judgment; whereas self-reliance is his best defense against the pressures of the moment. War has a way of masking the stage with scenery crudely daubed with fearsome apparitions. Once this is cleared away, and the horizon becomes unobstructed, developments will confirm his earlier convictions—this is one of the great chasms between *planning and execution*.

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Friction in War

If one has never personally experienced war, one cannot understand in what the difficulties constantly mentioned really consist, nor why a commander should need any brilliance and exceptional ability. Everything looks simple; the knowledge required does not look remarkable, the strategic options are so obvious that by comparison the simplest problem of higher mathematics has an impressive scientific dignity. Once war has actually been seen the difficulties become clear; but it is still extremely hard to describe the unseen, all-pervading element that brings about this change of perspective.

Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war. Imagine a traveler who late in the day decides to cover two more stages before nightfall. Only four or five hours more, on a paved highway with relays of horses: it should be an easy trip. But at the next station he finds no fresh horses, or only poor ones; the country grows hilly, the road bad, night falls, and finally after many difficulties he is only too glad to reach a resting place with any kind of primitive accommodation. It is much the same in war. Countless minor incidents—the kind you can never really foresee—combine to lower the general level of performance, so that one always falls far short of the intended goal. Iron will-power can overcome this friction; it pulverizes every obstacle, but of course it wears down the machine as well. We shall often return to this point. The proud spirit's firm will dominates the art of war as an obelisk dominates the town square on which all roads converge.

Friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper. The military machine—the army and everything related to it—is basically very simple and therefore seems easy to manage. But we should bear in mind that none of its components is of one piece: each part is composed of individuals, every one of whom retains his potential of friction. In theory it sounds reasonable enough: a battalion commander's duty is to carry out his orders; discipline welds the battalion together, its commander must be a man of tested capacity, and so the great beam turns on its iron pivot with a minimum of friction. In fact, it is different, and every fault and exaggeration of the theory is instantly exposed in war. A battalion is made up of individuals, the least important of whom may chance to delay things or somehow make them go wrong. The dangers inseparable from war and the physical exertions war demands can aggravate the problem to such an extent that they must be ranked among its principal causes.



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This tremendous friction, which cannot, as in mechanics, be reduced to a few points, is everywhere in contact with chance, and brings about effects that cannot be measured, just because they are largely due to chance. One, for example, is the weather. Fog can prevent the enemy from being seen in time, a gun from firing when it should, a report from reaching the commanding officer. Rain can prevent a battalion from arriving, make another late by keeping it not three but eight hours on the march, ruin a cavalry charge by bogging the horses down in mud, etc.

We give these examples simply for illustration, to help the reader follow the argument. It would take volumes to cover all difficulties. We could exhaust the reader with illustrations alone if we really tried to deal with the whole range of minor troubles that must be faced in war. The few we have given will be excused by those readers who have long since understood what we are after.

Action in war is like movement in a resistant element. Just as the simplest and most natural of movements, walking, cannot easily be performed in water, so in war it is difficult for normal efforts to achieve even moderate results. A genuine theorist is like a swimming teacher, who makes his pupils practice motions on land that are meant to be performed in water. To those who are not thinking of swimming the motions will appear grotesque and exaggerated. By the same token, theorists who have never swum, or who have not learned to generalize from experience, are impractical and even ridiculous: they teach only what is already common knowledge: how to walk.

Moreover, every war is rich in unique episodes. Each is an uncharted sea, full of reefs. The commander may suspect the reefs' existence without ever having seen them; now he has to steer past them in the dark. If a contrary wind springs up, if some major mischance appears, he will need the greatest skill and personal exertion, and the utmost presence of mind, though from a distance everything may seem to be proceeding automatically. An understanding of friction is a large part of that much-admired sense of warfare which a good general is supposed to possess. To be sure, the best general is not the one who is most familiar with the idea of friction, and who takes it most to heart (he belongs to the anxious type so common among experienced commanders). The good general must know friction in order to overcome it whenever possible, and in order not to expect a standard of achievement in his operations which this very friction makes impossible. Incidentally, it is a force that theory can never quite define. Even if it could, the development of instinct and tact would still be needed, a form of judgment much more necessary in an area littered by endless minor obstacles than in great, momentous questions, which are settled in solitary deliberation or in discussion with others. As with a man of the world instinct becomes almost habit so that he always acts, speaks, and moves appropriately, so only the experienced officer will make the right decision in major and minor matters—at every pulsebeat of war. Practice and experience dictate the answer: "this is possible, that is not." So he rarely makes a serious

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mistake, such as can, in war, shatter confidence and become extremely dangerous if it occurs often.

Friction, as we choose to call it, is the force that makes the apparently easy so difficult. We shall frequently revert to this subject, and it will become evident that an eminent commander needs more than experience and a strong will. He must have other exceptional abilities as well.

## Concluding Observations on Book One

We have identified danger, physical exertion, intelligence, and friction as the elements that coalesce to form the atmosphere of war, and turn it into a medium that impedes activity. In their restrictive effects they can be grouped into a single concept of general friction. Is there any lubricant that will reduce this abrasion? Only one, and a commander and his army will not always have it readily available: combat experience.

Habit hardens the body for great exertions, strengthens the heart in great peril, and fortifies judgment against first impressions. Habit breeds that priceless quality, calm, which, passing from hussar and rifleman up to the general himself, will lighten the commander's task.

In war the experienced soldier reacts rather in the same way as the human eye does in the dark: the pupil expands to admit what little light there is, discerning objects by degrees, and finally seeing them distinctly. By contrast, the novice is plunged into the deepest night.

No general can accustom an army to war. Peacetime maneuvers are a feeble substitute for the real thing; but even they can give an army an advantage over others whose training is confined to routine, mechanical drill. To plan maneuvers so that some of the elements of friction are involved, which will train officers' judgment, common sense, and resolution is far more worthwhile than inexperienced people might think. It is immensely important that no soldier, whatever his rank, should wait for war to expose him to those aspects of active service that amaze and confuse him when he first comes across them. If he has met them even once before, they will begin to be familiar to him. This is true even of physical effort. Exertions must be practiced, and the mind must be made even more familiar with them than the body. When exceptional efforts are required of him in war, the recruit is apt to think that they result from mistakes, miscalculations, and confusion at the top. In consequence, his morale is doubly depressed. If maneuvers prepare him for exertions, this will not occur.

Another very useful, though more limited, way of gaining familiarity with war in peacetime is to attract foreign officers who have seen active service. Peace does not often reign everywhere in Europe, and never throughout the whole world. A state that has been at peace for many years should try to attract some experienced officers—only those, of course, who have distinguished themselves. Alternatively, some of its own officers should be sent to observe operations, and learn what war is like.

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However few such officers may be in proportion to an army, their influence can be very real. Their experience, their insights, and the maturity of their character will affect their subordinates and brother officers. Even when they cannot be given high command they should be considered as guides who know the country and can be consulted in specific eventualities.

