

British Journal for Military History

Volume 8, Issue 2, September 2022

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ISSN: 2057-0422

Date of Publication: 28 September 2022

Citation: Mungo Melvin, 'Revisiting the Translators and Translations of Clausewitz's On War', *British Journal for Military History*, 8.2 (2022), pp. 77-102.

www.bjmh.org.uk



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Revisiting the Translators and Translations of Clausewitz's *On War*

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ABSTRACT

The English translations of Carl von Clausewitz's On War from that of Colonel John James Graham (1873) through Matthijs Jolles (1943) to the most commonly read today by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (1976) differ in readability and reliability. Although the latter is widely considered as the most accessible and has become accepted as the modern 'standard', it contains a number of unfortunate mistranslations. If On War is to reflect more faithfully what Clausewitz meant while remaining relevant for today it demands a new translation of a text that holds many challenges.

Introduction

In 2014 a remarkable little academic spat between two noted scholars of Carl von Clausewitz and of his most famous work, *Vom Kriege (On War)*, took place in the pages of the *Journal of Military History (JMH)*. Jon Sumida, author of the enigmatic *Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to On War (2008)*¹, offered a comprehensive index of Clausewitz's *On War* in the January edition of the *JMH*.² It took the form of a 'concordance', that is, in Sumida's words, a 'list of distinctive phrases or summary statements of particular propositions in Clausewitz's treatise, organized by subject'.³ These watchwords are cross-referenced to the books, chapters and pages of *On War*

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DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v8i2.1636

¹Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to On War*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2008), references in this article are to the updated paperback edition of 2011.

²Jon Sumida, 'A Concordance of Selected Subjects in Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*', *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (January 2014), pp. 271-331.

³As explained by Jon Sumida in an expanded online version of the above article titled 'On Indexing on War', available at <https://www.clausewitzstudies.org/bibl/Sumida-ConcordanceToOnWar.pdf>. Accessed 21 May 2021. p.1.

within the 'standard translation' of Michael Howard and Peter Paret (1976 & 1984).⁴ On a very few occasions Sumida noted 'problems ... where the result [of translation] is text that misrepresents significantly Clausewitz's position'. Specifically, he called out a 'translation error' concerning the phrase 'mit dem Kriegs- und Feldzugsplan', which Howard and Paret had rendered as 'with the plan of campaign', so omitting the aspect of 'war planning' contained in the word 'Krieg'.⁵

In response, Paret submitted a note, 'Translation, Literal or Accurate', published in the July 2014 edition of the *JMH*.⁶ Addressing Sumida's criticism, he stated that Michael Howard and he 'believed that Clausewitz's figurative phrase, which blends war plan and campaign plan, should not be translated verbatim'. Noting that this represented 'a small detail in Clausewitz's long work', it touched nevertheless 'on issues that illustrate some basic realities in the translation of complex texts'.⁷ Hence in addition to defending his translation undertaken with Howard, Paret welcomed the opportunity to offer 'some comments on the nature of translating a text that is intellectually demanding and includes syntactically complicated passages'.⁸ This observation by the author of *Clausewitz and the State* (1976), an essential text to understanding *On War* in its historical context, is surely one of under-statement.⁹

It has long been recognized that Clausewitz's *On War*, a magnum opus of eight books originally published in three volumes in 1832-34, whether in its original German or in translation, is a 'challenging' work, one that needs to be studied carefully rather than simply read. Phillip Meilinger, for example, describes *On War* as 'a difficult read, partly because it has come down to us as a work in progress', and that the 'bulk of this tome is a rough draft'.¹⁰ Thus it is hardly surprising that Clausewitz's unfinished and unrefined text, for all its brilliant erudition, contains many inconsistencies and apparent contradictions, which remain in translation. Furthermore, as with any historical work, *On War* needs to be placed in the political, cultural and social context of the period in

⁴Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976 and 1984). References in this article are to the paperback edition of 2019.

⁵Sumida, 'A Concordance', p. 327; Howard and Paret, p. 180.

⁶Peter Paret, 'Translation, Literal or Accurate', *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (July 2014), pp. 1077-1080.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 1078.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 1077.

⁹Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State: The Man, His Theories and His Times*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). References in this article are to the Princeton University Press paperback edition of 2007.

¹⁰Phillip S. Meilinger, 'Busting the Icon: Restoring Balance to the Influence of Clausewitz', *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall 2007), pp. 118-119.

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which it was written, generally assumed to be 1818-30. After nearly two centuries, it remains open to many questions, interpretations and judgements concerning meaning, purpose and influence. An enduring fascination in this work, not least amongst an international academic and military readership, has generated a vast literature.

Lengthy introductions have been added to *On War*, both in German and in foreign language editions. For example, in addition to five pages of 'preliminary remarks', the introduction to the standard German text, edited by Werner Hahlweg, runs to 172 pages.¹¹ Titled 'A View of Clausewitz Then and Now', it provides a detailed description and analysis of the historical context of, and reaction to, *On War* since its first publication in three volumes in 1832-34 to 1972, the year of publication of the 18th edition. For the 19th edition published in 1980, Hahlweg added an eighty-seven page-long afterword of 'Further Developments and Changes in the View of Clausewitz since 1972'.¹² He also provides sixty-three pages of detailed notes on the text. Hence for those who can read German, the Hahlweg edition remains an essential resource for the detailed study of *On War*.

The Howard-Paret translation is prefaced with three essays, 'The Genesis of *On War*', 'The Influence of Clausewitz' and 'The Continuing Relevance of *On War*' by Peter Paret, Michael Howard and Bernard Brodie respectively, amounting to fifty-five pages.¹³ Sumida's monograph *Decoding Clausewitz* is devoted to offering a 'new approach' to interpreting Clausewitz, one in which 'propositions that at first appear to be contradictory or otherwise anomalous cease to be problematical when they are related to other elements of Clausewitz's wider analysis'.¹⁴ Thus it would appear that *On War* demands an extraordinary amount of elucidation. This requirement may reflect not only the enduring importance and influence of the work, but also, perhaps, indicate the inherent difficulties of the text, such as complexity and a lack of coherence, and those of its translations.

Christopher Bassford's *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America* (1994) provides, *inter alia*, a comprehensive account of Clausewitz's translators and translations. Unsurprisingly, the present article refers to Bassford's scholarship. Amongst the more recent literature on Clausewitz and *On War*, Beatrice

¹¹General von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 19th ed., ed. Werner Hahlweg, (Bonn: Ferd. Dümmlers Verlag, 1980). Unless otherwise stated, all references to the German-language text of *On War* are to this edition.

¹²*Ibid.*, Werner Hahlweg, 'Das Clausewitzbild Einst und Jetzt mit textkritischen Anmerkungen', pp. 1-172; and 'Nachrede zur 19. Auflage: Weiterentwicklung und Differenzierung des Clausewitzbildes seit 1972', pp. 1253-1340.

¹³Howard and Paret, pp. 3-26; 27-44; 45-58.

¹⁴Sumida, *Decoding Clausewitz*, p. xiv.

Heuser has helped countless students with *Reading Clausewitz* (2002) and in her introduction to an abridgement (2007) of the Howard-Paret translation of *On War*.¹⁵ Helpfully, the condensed edition includes a set of explanatory notes which are notably absent in the complete Howard-Paret translation. Rather surprisingly, although being remarkably well qualified for the task, Heuser offers few comments on, let alone improvements to, this translation. Yet inaccuracies and infelicities remain. Several of these are analysed by Jan Willem Honig in his insightful chapter in *Clausewitz in the Twentieth-First Century* (2007), edited by Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe.¹⁶ In particular, Honig highlights the 'liberal approach to translating terms' in the Howard-Paret translation, a matter alluded to by Sumida above, and one we shall return to later in more detail.¹⁷ Significantly, in his foreword 'A History of the Howard-Paret Translation' to Strachan's and Herberg-Rothe's work, Michael Howard conceded graciously that 'there still remained problems of translation that we had failed to iron out'.¹⁸

In his commendably succinct biography of Clausewitz (2008), Hew Strachan added a useful prefatory note on translations before addressing in his main text some of the problems in translating and interpreting *On War*.¹⁹ Donald Stoker's lengthier *Clausewitz: His Life and Work* (2014) not only adds much to our knowledge of Clausewitz's military career, but also provides some valuable commentary on his writing, and specifically on the principal elements of his thinking expressed in *On War*.²⁰ Stoker, however, does not provide any new opinions on the quality of the translations of Clausewitz's work into English. In a deftly-argued article 'A Criterion for Settling Inconsistencies in Clausewitz's *On War*' (2014), Eugenio Diniz and Domício Proença Júnior, while offering a few observations on translation, focus on another issue.²¹ They make a detailed case for dating Clausewitz's *undated* prefatory note to *before* the dated

¹⁵Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz*, (London: Pimlico, 2002); and Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, abridged with an Introduction and Notes by Beatrice Heuser, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁶Jan Willem Honig, 'Clausewitz's *On War*: Problems of Text and Translation' in Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, eds., *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 57-73.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁸Strachan and Herberg-Rothe, p. vi.

¹⁹Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War: A Biography*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007), see pp. ix-xi for 'A Note on Translations and Editions'.

²⁰Donald Stoker, *Clausewitz: His Life and Work*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), see pp. 262-277 for a summary of the principal precepts of *On War*.

²¹Eugenio Diniz and Domício Proença Júnior, 'A Criterion for Settling Inconsistencies in Clausewitz's *On War*', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 37, Nos. 6-7 (2014), pp. 879-902.

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one of 1827, thereby establishing a 'hierarchy of revision' by Clausewitz of his unfinished text. Hew Strachan returned to the fray with the King's College London Annual Michael Howard Lecture for 2020, 'Michael Howard and Clausewitz', which stimulated much of the thinking of the present author.²²

With this brief bibliographic discourse in mind, this article seeks to offer some observations on the text, translators and translations of Clausewitz's *On War*, noting some of the challenges faced in turning complex early nineteenth-century German into readable modern English. After summarising some of the generic challenges of translating, and more specifically those from German into English, it highlights the accomplishments, differences between, and not least a number of outstanding difficulties in the three main translations still in print. Other than Howard-Paret, these are by Colonel James John Graham (1873), lightly revised by Colonel Frederic Natusch Maude in 1908, and by Professor Otto Jolie Matthijs Jolles (1943). It is necessary to note, however, that these translations are *not* based on the same German edition of *On War*.²³ As Howard and Paret observe, upward of 'several hundred alterations of the text' were introduced in the second (1853) edition of *On War*.²⁴ As we shall see later, at least one of these emendations adjusted Clausewitz's sense and purpose. It was not until the sixteenth (1952) German-language edition that Clausewitz's *Urtext* (original wording) was restored in full by Werner Hahlweg.

Accepting this important caveat, this article offers some comparative tables of translation, inviting readers to judge for themselves which text offers the best balance between literal accuracy and comprehension. In particular, it demonstrates that the most famous quotation of *On War* – 'War is merely the continuation of policy by other means' – reflects two apparently minor but nonetheless significant mistranslations. By way of a further case study, the article examines a specific term of Clausewitz, namely *Hauptschlacht* (main battle), described in Chapters 9-11 in Book 4 of *On War*, and discusses why Howard and Paret may have missed some of the author's meaning and intention here. The article concludes with a plea for a new translation of *On War*.

²²Delivered online on 19 November 2020; see the derived article, Hew Strachan, 'Michael Howard and Clausewitz', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2022), pp. 143–160.

²³See Hahlweg, pp. 1362–64, for a comprehensive list of the nineteen editions of *Vom Kriege* published from 1832–34 to 1980.

²⁴Howard and Paret, p. 608, fn 1. Examples of altered (emended) text are to be found in the 4th Edition of *Vom Kriege*, edited by Oberst [Colonel] W. von Scherff, published in Berlin by F. Schneider & Co. in 1880. This useful reference edition of *On War* is available courtesy of the HathiTrust Digital Library at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015014748928&view=1up&seq=1>. Accessed 4 July 2022.

The Challenges of Translation

Within the study of linguistics, the field of translation studies has become a specialist academic discipline and a course subject available at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. As with any other branch of study, it has developed its own particular methodology and terminology.²⁵ While much of this corpus of learning may be unfamiliar to the general reader of Clausewitz in translation, some of its most important considerations are helpful in describing the difficulties that translators face and in explaining the variations that may exist between different translations of the same text.

The fundamental tests of any translation are its reliability and readability: achieving balance and harmony between both is the goal of the translator. In general, translation can best be viewed as a two-stage process rather than as a singular product. It rests on a translator comprehending the original (source) text and then rendering it into the desired foreign language (target) text.²⁶ Throughout it requires interpretation and judgement as to how both message and meaning can be transferred as seamlessly as possible from one language to another. Translators seek both *semantic* and *pragmatic* equivalence, addressing content and style respectively, giving due regard to the aspirations of the original author and expectations of the intended readership in translation.²⁷ Yet, as one specialist work on translation acknowledges, a 'crucial point' lies in 'deciding what constitutes the necessary degree of equivalence or resemblance' between the original and translated texts. Moreover, 'different translation tasks and genres require different degrees of equivalence'.²⁸ While all serious translators seek to remain as close as possible to the original text, there is a degree of latitude in what represents a 'faithful' or 'loyal' translation, usually expressed as being as either 'literary' (very close or 'conservative') or 'free' (less close or 'liberal').

Translators, however, are torn typically in a Janus-faced manner, drawn backwards towards the source text while simultaneously looking forward to the translation. Hence there are inevitably dilemmas and difficult choices to be made in respecting the original while meeting the demands of the new in all but the simplest of translations. In sum, to produce a 'good' translation, translators need to have 'knowledge of the two languages involved ... and of the subject matter, stylistic competence and

²⁵The following observations are largely, but not exclusively, based on Sonia Colina, *Fundamentals of Translation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Juliane House, *Translation: the Basics*, (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018).

²⁶Colina, p. 4 and House, p. 10.

²⁷House, p. 10.

²⁸Colina, p. 18.

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knowledge of the original author's intention'.²⁹ Imparting both the sense and spirit of the original author places great demands on the translator's accuracy and fluency in the languages concerned, and due consideration for, if not empathy with, the reader in translation. Any translation, however, is also shaped by function, or what is the translator trying to accomplish. In turn, the process of translation can be guided by 'extra-linguistic' or 'situational' factors, such as the anticipated audience to be addressed, and the motives of the translator(s) for undertaking the translation in the first place.³⁰ Hence both the source text and the work of translating must be viewed in the contexts of aim, time and place. Thus challenges abound in translating a complex theoretical historical work such as *On War*.

Historically, two Germans have made important contributions to the theory and practice of translation, one from the Protestant Reformation, the other a contemporary of Carl von Clausewitz. In 1530, Dr Martin Luther (1483–1546) published his views on translations. In his famous 'Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen' (Open Letter on Translating) he defended his translation of the New Testament from Latin and Greek into High German against his 'papist' critics who had complained about his liberal approach. While striving to 'take great care to keep close to the [original] text and not to stray so far from it', Luther was not afraid to render his translation into understandable and sensible German vernacular, avoiding a more traditional word-for-word method.³¹

Nearly three centuries later, on 24 June 1813, the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher gave a long address in the prestigious Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin. In his 'Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens' (On the Different Methods of Translating), he articulated many of the problems facing translators. In particular, he described the challenge facing 'the genuine translator', who wants to bring those two completely separated persons, his author and his reader, truly together, and who would like to bring the latter to an understanding and

²⁹House, p. 13.

³⁰Colina, pp. 43-45.

³¹From a facsimile and English translation by Howard Jones of Luther's 'Open Letter on Translating' available at <https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/taylor-reformation/an-open-letter-on-translating/>. Accessed 17 May 2022. For an alternative translation by Jennifer Tanner and an explanation of the significance of Luther's approach to translation, see Daniel Weissbort & Astradu Eysteinnsson (eds.), *Translation—Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) pp. 57-67. For the German original text, see Hans Joachim Störig, *Das Problem des Übersetzens*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), pp. 14-32.

enjoyment of the former as correct and as complete as possible without inviting him to leave the sphere of his mother tongue—what roads are open to him?³²

In response, Schleiermacher explored how might the reader of the translation understand, if not empathise with, the original author. He offered two methods: 'Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible, and moves the author towards him'.³³ In other words, does the translator associate him or herself more with the author's original syntax and style or with that of his or her reader? Schleiermacher offered two complementary approaches in resolving this dichotomy. The first is to *paraphrase* the source text by expressing the meaning using different words to achieve greater clarity. While this process is presumed often to be one of condensing and simplifying, it is not necessarily so: the translator may also need to expand on the original text in order to make better sense of it in another language. The other approach is to *imitate*: copying as far as possible the cadence and style of the source text in the translation.³⁴ Both methods require careful interpretation of the original and typically a degree of re-wording in translation.

To the present writer, a crude, but it is to be hoped helpful, analogy comes to mind here. In a similar manner to that observed on stage and in film drama, is a 'foreign' person given an appropriately distinctive accent in the common language being spoken to impart some added authenticity to the character being portrayed? Or do we prefer to hear the spoken word untainted? For all the gaps in context, language and time, can we hear the author such as Clausewitz speaking to us today in translation? Does it sound – or read – 'right' in chosen lexicon, rhythm and tone? Answering that question must depend to some extent on the knowledge of the contemporary reader with

³²This translation is taken from André Lefevere, *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig*, (Assen and Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), pp 67-89, considerable extracts of which are reproduced in Weissbort & Eysteinsson, pp. 206-209. This quote is taken from the latter, p. 207. Comparison with the German original reproduced in Störig, *Das Problem des Übersetzens*, p. 47, however, reveals an interesting example of mistranslation. Schleiermacher declared: 'Aber nun der eigentliche Uebersetzer [sic], der diese beiden ganz getrennten Personen, seinen Schriftsteller und seinen Leser, wirklich einander zuführen, und dem letzten, ohne ihn jedoch aus dem Kreise seiner Muttersprache heraus zu nöthingen [sic], zu einem möglichst richtigen und vollständigen Verständniß und Genuß des ersten verhelfen will, was für Wege kann er hiezu [sic] einschlagen?' In this text Lefevere has translated 'nöthingen' (*nötigen* in modern German spelling) as 'inviting' in English, instead of 'forcing', so changing Schleiermacher's original emphasis quite significantly.

³³Weissbort & Eysteinsson, p. 207; Störig, p. 47.

³⁴Weissbort & Eysteinsson, p. 207; Störig, pp. 46-47.

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regard to the background and intentions of the author of the source work. Arguably, the greater this understanding, coupled with some awareness of the original language and terminology (particularly for a specialist text), the more familiar and 'friendly' the translated work will appear.

Yet the degree of difficulty in translating also rests on the width and depth of the 'translation gap' to be bridged. Although two languages can be close genealogically, that does not mean necessarily that the grammars, idioms and vocabularies concerned are proximate enough to facilitate an easy literal translation. Both languages may have developed in a divergent manner during the intervening period between the composition in the original language and reading in translation. Translating literary German into English presents its own particular problems. As one specialist teaching text advises, although the two languages share 'many lexical roots as members of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family', German and English are 'syntactically rather different and [one] should be prepared to make a number of grammatical changes in ... translations, particularly in relation to word order'.³⁵ A more liberal translation, however, may involve some more profound deviations from the original that affect adversely its reliability. Therein lies the debate as to what constitutes a really 'good' translation, one, ideally, that is equally sympathetic and 'true' to author and reader alike.

Before we examine the translations of *On War* in any detail, we also need to consider the necessary proficiency or skills required of its translators. Within the field of translation studies, this has become a rather complex area, one based on three 'competencies'. Apart from the obvious and fundamentally necessary linguistic ability, both 'knowledge competence' (understanding the subject matter and background of the source text) and 'transfer competence' (understanding the contextual requirements of the specific translation task at hand) are required.³⁶ An ideal translator needs to combine a specialist knowledge of the source language, text and context with a more general ability to render it in a readable form for the target audience in another language. Thus to translate *On War* effectively, one should expect the translator concerned to be not only very proficient in German and well-practised in the process of translation, but also to be cognizant of the art and terminology of war. As much has evolved since Clausewitz's period of writing, one largely reflecting Napoleonic warfare, the latter requirement demands both historical and contemporary understanding of military affairs.

³⁵Margaret Rogers and Michael White, *Thinking German Translation. A Course in Translation Method: German to English*, (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 3rd edn., 2020), p. 21.

³⁶This is a much simplified summary of the topic, one based on Colina, pp. 31-33.

Principal Translators and Translations of Clausewitz's *On War*:

JJ Graham (1873) and F. N. Maude (1908)

The first complete translation of *Vom Kriege* to appear in English was that of Colonel John James Graham (1808–83) in 1873, based on the third German edition of 1867/69. Published in London by N. Trübner & Co., all three volumes of *On War* were contained in one work, together with an appendix containing Clausewitz's earlier 'Summary of Instruction' (also known as the 'Principles of War').³⁷ Apart from a 'Brief Memoir of General Clausewitz' and a few, very brief, footnotes, Graham offered nothing else to guide his readers. One might well ask why and how did this translation come about? Graham's qualifications in German, his previous experience in translation, and prior interest in Clausewitz's work, if any, are unknown. From entering Sandhurst in 1822 until going on half pay twenty years later, his military career, largely as an infantry officer, was undistinguished. He achieved some temporary prominence during the Crimean War when he served in 1855 as the military secretary to the commander of the British 'Turkish Contingent', Lieutenant General Robert John Hussey Vivian. On selling his commission in 1858, Graham left the Army for good.³⁸ As Christopher Bassford has noted, other than timing, 'which may well be coincidental', there is 'no contemporary evidence ... that the translation of *Vom Kriege* was motivated by [recent] German military successes' in the Wars of Unification (1864–71), or through 'the praise of Clausewitz' by Moltke the Elder.³⁹ Perhaps Graham thought that a translation of Clausewitz would build on his two previous major works, *Elementary History of the Progress of the Art of War* (1858) and *Military Ends and Moral Means* (1864), and so enhance his reputation. While Graham's motivation remains a matter of conjecture, surely he must have been disappointed by the sales of his translation. These were exceedingly small and slow: of the 254 copies printed in 1873 and a further 440 in a reprint of 1877, 572 remained unsold in 1885.⁴⁰

Colonel F N Maude (1854–1933) was another obscure, and now largely forgotten, British Army officer. Commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1870 via the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, he graduated from the Army's Staff College at Camberley in 1891. A more prolific author than Graham, he wrote extensively on military matters. His historical works included a series of studies of the Napoleonic

³⁷The first three volumes of Clausewitz's posthumously published work constituted *On War. Vom Kriege*, Volume I: Books 1–4; Volume II: Books 5–6; Volume III: Books 7–8 and the 'Summary of Instruction given by the Author to His Royal Highness the Crown Prince in the Years 1810, 1811, and 1812'. All this material was first made available in English in General Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Colonel J. J. Graham, (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1873).

³⁸Biographical details from Bassford, *Clausewitz in English*, p. 56.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 57.

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Wars, namely regarding the Ulm, Jena and Leipzig campaigns of 1805, 1806 and 1813 respectively. Among his more contemporary books, he wrote: *Voluntary Versus Compulsory Service* (1897); *Cavalry: Its Past and Future* (1903); *Notes on the Evolution of Infantry Tactics* (1905) and *War and the World's Life* (1907). As Brian Holden Reid has noted, Maude's 'prime concern lay in gauging the impact of scientific modes of thought and organization not only on the conduct of war but also on the training of soldiers for it'.⁴¹ Significantly, he acted as a mentor to the young J F C Fuller (1878-1966), later to become one of the United Kingdom's leading military thinkers of the twentieth century, encouraging him to read Clausewitz.⁴²

Maude is remembered chiefly for his 1908 edition of *On War*. It is not known, however, what drew him to this subject other than a desire to highlight the importance of Clausewitz's thinking, method and influence at a time of increasing tensions in Europe. In his polemical introduction to *On War*, for example, Maude claimed that Clausewitz's work 'reveals "War" stripped of all accessories, as the exercise of force for the attainment of a political object, unrestrained by any law save that of expediency, and thus gives the key to the interpretation of German political aims, past, present and future'.⁴³

In his 'new and revised edition' of *On War*, Maude decided to revert to three separate volumes, thus losing the convenience of Graham's original translation in one. While retaining Graham's memoir about Clausewitz, other than his new introduction he added a set of notes. While the former is only of historical interest today, Maude's observations on Clausewitz's text, although many of which are now dated, do provide the odd flash. For example, in response to Clausewitz's view whether 'combat is to be avoided for want of sufficient force' at the close of *On War*, Book 3, Chapter 8, 'Superiority of Numbers', Maude noted '... we have not yet, in England, arrived at a correct appreciation of the value of superior numbers in War, and still adhere to the idea of an Army just "big enough", which Clausewitz has so unsparingly ridiculed'.⁴⁴ Writing only six years before the outbreak of the First World War, Maude's comment was remarkably prescient.

⁴¹Brian Holden Reid, "'A Signpost That Was Missed'?: Reconsidering British Lessons from the American Civil War", *Journal of Military History*, 70, 2 (April 2006), p. 394. Biographical details of Maude are taken from Holden Reid, *ibid*, pp. 394-395; bibliographic details are from Bassford, *Clausewitz in English*, pp. 56-58 & 81-82.

⁴²Coincidentally, Fuller was introduced to Maude around 1908. For Maude's influence on Fuller, See Brian Holden Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker*, (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 20-22 & 89-90.

⁴³F. N. Maude, 'Introduction', Gen. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Colonel J. J. Graham, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1908), vol. i, p. v.

⁴⁴*Ibid*, vol i., p. 198.

For all its merits, an anonymous British Army General Staff reviewer in the *Journal* of the Royal United Services Institution, criticised the Maude edition as a ‘hurried reprint of Colonel Graham’s work’, which ‘reproduces even his errors of spelling’.⁴⁵ At first sight, apart from differences in layout and typography, the translation looks identical to that of Graham. In fact, this is not entirely the case. A close examination of Chapter I (What is War?) of Book I (On the Nature of War), perhaps the most important and widely read text of *On War*, for example, reveals a number of changes. Admittedly, some of these are very minor, such as those concerning punctuation and the capitalisation of the first letters of proper nouns such as War, Will and Commander, and the substitution of ‘viz.’ for ‘that is’. Yet Maude was not afraid to modify the text more significantly on occasion, as shown in Table I below.

No.	Vom Kriege Hahlweg (1980) ⁴⁶	Translations of <i>On War</i> into English	
		Graham (1873)	Maude vol. i (1908)
1.1	Der Kampf zwischen Menschen besteht eigentlich aus zwei verschiedenen Elementen, dem <i>feindseligen</i> Gefühl und der <i>feindseligen</i> Absicht. (p. 193)	The fight between men consists really of two different elements, the hostile feeling and the hostile view. (p. 2)	Two motives lead men to War: instinctive hostility and hostile intention. (p. 3)
1.2	Wir haben gesagt: den Feind <i>wehrlos</i> zu machen sei das Ziel des kriegerischen Aktes, und wir wollen nun zeigen, daß dies wenigstens in der theoretischen Vorstellung notwendig ist. (p. 194)	We have already said that the aim of the action in war is to disarm the enemy, and we shall now show that this in theoretical conception at least is necessary. (p. 3)	We have already said that the aim of all action in War is to disarm the enemy, and we shall now show that this, theoretically at least, is indispensable. (p. 4)
1.3	Jede Veränderung dieser Lage, welche durch die fortgesetzte kriegerische Tätigkeit hervor-gebracht wird, muß also zu einer <i>noch nachteiligeren</i> führen, wenigstens in der Vorstellung. (p. 194)	Every change in this position which is produced by a continuation of the war, should therefore be a change for the worse, at least in idea. (p. 3)	Every change in this position which is produced by a continuation of the War, should therefore be a change for the worse. (p. 5)
1.4	Anders aber gestaltet sich alles, wenn wir aus der Abstraktion in die Wirklichkeit übergehen. (p. 196)	But everything takes a different form when we pass from abstractions to reality. (p. 4)	But everything takes a different shape when we pass from abstractions to reality. (p. 7)

⁴⁵Anon., ‘Recent Publications of Military Interest’ [compiled by the General Staff, War Office], *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, vol. 52, no. 362 (April 1908), p. 585.

⁴⁶A detailed check confirms that the German text of the 4th (Sherff) edition of 1880 remains unchanged in the 19th (Hahlweg) edition of 1980 quoted here except for some updates in German spelling. Hence it is safe to use the latter.

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1.5	20. Es fehlt also nur noch der Zufall, um ihn zum Spiel zu machen, und dessen entbehrt er am wenigsten. (p. 207)	20. It therefore now only wants the element of chance to make of it a game, and in that element it is least of all deficient. (p. 10)	20. Therefore, the element of chance only is wanting to make of war a game, and in that element it is least of all deficient. (p. 19)
1.6	21. Wie durch seine objektive Natur, so wird der Krieg auch durch die subjektive zum Spiel. (p. 207)	As war is a game through its objective nature, so also is it through its subjective. (p. 10)	War is a game both objectively and subjectively. (p. 20)
1.7	Die Politik also wird den ganzen kriegerischen Akt durchziehen und einen fortwährenden Einfluß auf ihn ausüben, soweit es die Natur der in ihm explodierenden Kräfte zuläßt. (p. 210)	Policy therefore is interwoven with the whole action of war, and must exercise a continuous influence upon it as far as the nature of the forces exploding in it will permit. (p. 12)	Policy, therefore, is interwoven with the whole action of War, and must exercise a continuous influence upon it, as far as the nature of the forces liberated by it will permit. (p. 23)
1.8	Der Krieg ist also nicht nur ein wahres Chamäleon, weil er in jedem konkreten Falle seine Natur etwas ändert, ... (p. 212)	War is, therefore, not only a true chameleon, because it changes its nature in some degree in each particular case, ... (p. 13)	War is, therefore, not only chameleon-like in character, because it changes its colour in each particular case, ... (p. 25)

Table 1 – A Comparison of Clausewitz’s German with the English Texts of Graham and Maude

While Maude has ‘tinkered’ with Graham’s text, his paraphrasing would appear from this particular selection of Clausewitz’s text to have added little overall value to the translation. Hence the criticism by the same reviewer in 1908 that Maude had not attempted to ‘attract readers by redrafting Colonel Graham’s somewhat heavy and closely-following-the-German periods [sic]’ seems fair.⁴⁷ Notwithstanding the limited scope of Maude’s revisions to Graham’s work, the English edition of 1908 perhaps should be more properly referred to as ‘Graham-Maude’. It is easy to under-rate it as an overly literal and outdated translation that has been superseded by the more recent ones of Matthijs Jolles and Howard-Paret. While Christopher Bassford notes it has ‘some obscurities and errors’, he observes too that ‘at some points it also more accurately reflects the sometimes lurid language of the German original’.⁴⁸ Jan Willem Honig is more fulsome in commending the Graham-Maude translation. In his introduction to its latest edition published by Barnes & Noble in 2004, he avers that ‘its age makes it nearest in time to the original and thus it most closely approximates the intellectual climate of Clausewitz’s world’. Moreover, in his view, the translation is ‘faithful to the original in the sense of being literal and consistent in the rendering of Clausewitz’s terminology. As a result, the structure and coherence of Clausewitz’s

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Bassford, *Clausewitz in English*, p. 58.

thought come through more clearly than tends to be the case with the more modern translations.⁴⁹ Howard and Paret, however, disagree, stating that Graham's translation 'apart from its dated style, contains a large number of inaccuracies and obscurities'.⁵⁰ In so doing, however, they posted a hostage to fortune as their own translation is open to such critique.

Matthijs Jolles (1943)

Another major English translation of *On War* did not appear until 1943. Both its translator and timing are significant. Otto Jolle Matthijs Jolles (1911–1968) was responsible for the first American translation of *On War*. Of Dutch-German parentage, he was brought up in Germany and studied at the universities of Leipzig, Hamburg and Heidelberg, receiving a doctorate in literature from the latter institution in 1933. As Christopher Bassford notes, 'his anti-Nazi politics got him into trouble'.⁵¹ In consequence, Jolles emigrated to the United States via France and the United Kingdom, taking up a teaching position at the University of Chicago in 1938, now married with a British wife. As the Second World War threatened to engulf his new country, the university established an Institute of Military Studies in April 1941. Trusting that a new translation of *On War* would help burnish the university's credentials as a 'key defence industry', Jolles was entrusted with the task. His work was published by Random House in 1943, republished by the Infantry Journal Press in 1950. In 2000 the Modern Library of New York republished it, bundling *On War* with Sun-Tzu's *The Art of Warfare* under the cover title of *The Book of War*. It remains in print.⁵²

Although opinions vary as to the quality of the Matthijs Jolles translation, it is generally held to be a distinct improvement over its predecessor. While remaining a literal translation, a simple comparison with that of Graham-Maude indicates it as both more accurate and readable. The Clausewitz Studies website considers Jolles's work to be

⁴⁹Jan Willem Honig, 'Introduction to the New Edition', in Gen. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Colonel J. J. Graham, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), p. xxiv. Unless otherwise stated, page references to Graham's translation, modified by Maude, are from this edition and referred to as 'Graham-Maude (2000)'.

⁵⁰Howard and Paret (1984), p. xi. On the same page Howard and Paret date J. J. Graham's translation as 1874 when it was 1873, and likewise date incorrectly its republishing in 1909 rather than in the correct year of 1908 – omitting, incidentally, any reference to its editor, F. N. Maude.

⁵¹Bassford, *Clausewitz in English*, pp. 183-184, on which this biographic summary of O. J. Matthijs Jolles is based.

⁵²Unless otherwise stated, all references to Matthijs Jolles's translation are to this 2000 edition.

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'by far the most accurate translation of *On War* available in English'.⁵³ Hew Strachan is equally admiring, declaring it the 'most faithful to the original German'.⁵⁴ Yet it is understood that Jolles based his work on the fourth (1880) edition of *Vom Kriege* rather than that of the first. Using a modified version of Clausewitz's text such as this can cause specific problems, as noted by Howard and Paret in the following example, taken from Chapter 6B 'War Is an Instrument of Policy' of Book 8 'War Plans'.

Clausewitz 4th Edition (Scherff, 1880), pp. 569-570	Matthijs Jolles (2000), p. 937	Clausewitz 19th Edition (Hahlweg, 1980), pp. 995-996	Howard-Paret (1984), p. 608
Soll ein Krieg ganz den Absichten der Politik entsprechen und soll die Politik den Mitteln zum Kriege angemessen sein, so bleibt, wo der Staatsmann und der Soldat nicht in einer Person vereinigt sind, nur ein gutes Mittel übrig, nämlich den obersten Feldherrn zum Mitglied des Kabinetts zu machen, <i>damit er in den wichtigsten Momenten an dessen Berathungen [sic] und Be-schlüssen Theil [sic] nehme.</i>	If war is to correspond entirely with the intentions of policy, and policy is to accommodate itself with the means available for war, in a case in which the statesman and the soldier are not combined in one person, there is only one satisfactory alternative left, which is to make the commander-in-chief a member of the cabinet, <i>that he may take part in its councils and decisions on important occasions.</i>	Soll ein Krieg ganz den Absichten der Politik entsprechen, und soll die Politik den Mitteln zum Kriege ganz angemessen sein, so bleibt, wo der Staatsmann und der Soldat nicht in einer Person vereinigt sind, nur ein gutes Mittel übrig, nämlich den obersten Feldherrn zum Mitglied des Kabinetts zu machen, <i>damit dasselbe teil und den Hauptmomenten seines Handelns nehme.</i>	If war is to be fully consonant with political objectives, and policy suited to the means available for war, then unless statesmen and soldier are combined in one person, the only sound expedient is to make the commander-in-chief a member of the cabinet, <i>so that the cabinet can share in the major aspect of his activities.</i>

Table 2 – An Example of a Significant Emendation of Clausewitz's Text

It can be seen that the change in wording – italicised here in both editions and translations for emphasis – between Clausewitz's original, restored by Hahlweg, and that printed in the second and subsequent editions, reverses the sense of the author. It would appear clear that Clausewitz wished to stress the cabinet's involvement in military matters, and not the commander-in-chief's participation in political ones.

⁵³'Which translation of Clausewitz's *On War* do you have and which one should you have?', available at <https://www.clausewitzstudies.org/mobile/whichtrans.htm>. Accessed 17 June 2021.

⁵⁴Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War*, p. x.

Howard and Paret (1976 & 1984)

Unlike the Graham-Maude and Matthijs Jolles translations, which were derived from the third and later editions of *On War*, Howard and Paret returned to the first edition of 1832-34, 'supplemented by the annotated German text published by Professor Werner Hahlweg in 1952'.⁵⁵ So we can regard the Howard-Paret translation as being based on, if not necessarily 'true' to, the original German. Although the now 'standard' English translation of *On War* is attributed to Howard and Paret, another now largely forgotten individual is also associated with it. As the two acknowledged in their 'Editors' Note', the translation was 'initially undertaken by Mr. Angus Malcolm [1908-1971] of the British Foreign Office'. Although he died during the project, Malcolm 'had ... already done much valuable preliminary work, for which we are greatly in his debt'.⁵⁶ The actual extent of Malcolm's contribution, however, is not known. As he had served as a minister (deputy ambassador) in Austria (1953-1956) it is safe to assume that Malcolm was highly proficient in German and, as Hew Strachan has noted, as 'a retired diplomat [he] had already translated Karl Demeter's *The German Officer Corps in Society and State, 1650-1945*'.⁵⁷ Originally published in 1930, this work had gone through several iterations, with the 1962 version forming the source of the English edition of 1965, to which Michael Howard added a foreword.⁵⁸ Thus while it safe to assume that Howard and Malcolm worked closely together in translating *On War*, the latter's familiarity with Clausewitz remains open to speculation.

Both Michael Howard and Peter Paret possessed impressive credentials with which to embark on a new translation of Clausewitz. Paret was born in Berlin and a native German speaker before he moved to America in his youth. Michael Howard's mother was German, and combined with his schooling, he too had a good familiarity with the language of Clausewitz. Serving as an infantry officer in the Second World War, and earning a Military Cross for gallantry, Howard had experienced war at its visceral 'sharp end'. In his monumental history of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, published in 1961, Howard had not only referred to 'the Clausewitzian element of friction in war', but also extended his analysis of that conflict beyond its purely military dimension to narrate the resultant peace, judging it to be a 'precarious' and 'uncertain'

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. xii.

⁵⁷Hew Strachan, 'Michael Howard and Clausewitz', p. 145.

⁵⁸Dr. Karl Demeter, *Das deutsche Offizierkorps in seiner historischen-soziologischen Grundlagen*, (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1930), updated and re-titled as *Das deutsche Offizierskorps in Gesellschaft und Staat, 1650-1945*, (Frankfurt/Main: Bernard & Graefe, 1962). The English edition was published in New York by Frederick A. Praeger in 1965.

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one at that.⁵⁹ Paret's work *Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform, 1807–1815* (1966) was derived from his doctoral thesis written at King's College London when supervised by Michael Howard, the founding head of the Department of War Studies (1962–68). With their combined knowledge of German, of the development of the Prussian military and state, and of the nature of war more generally, Howard and Paret were ideally placed to generate a definitive translation of Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege* into English, one designed to be both comprehensive and highly readable.

Translations Under Test

An obvious starting point at which to compare and test the three main translations of Clausewitz's *On War* is his most famous pronouncement 'War is merely the continuation of policy by other means'. Yet this much-quoted ten-word translation contains two significant errors and one further difficulty. Clausewitz wrote: 'Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln' as the heading to Section 24 of Chapter I of Book I. He then augmented this statement in the first sentence of the following paragraph, which is far less quoted. This German text (heading and amplification) is compared with the three translations in Table 3 below.

No.	Clausewitz (Hahlweg, p. 210)	Graham-Maude (p. 17)	Matthijs Jolles (p. 280)	Howard-Paret (p. 87)
3.1	Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln.	War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.	War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.	War is merely the continuation of policy by other means.
3.2	So sehen wir also, daß der Krieg nicht bloß ein politischer Akt, sondern ein wahres politisches Instrument ist, eine Fortsetzung des politischen Verkehrs, ein Durchführen desselben mit anderen Mitteln.	We see, therefore, that War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means.	We see, therefore, that war is not merely a political act but a real political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, a carrying out of the same 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.

Table 3 – Translations of the Opening of Book I, Chapter I, Section 24 of *On War*

The first matter to note is that while Graham-Maude and Matthijs Jolles both translate the German correctly to read 'War is *a* [present author's emphasis] mere continuation of policy', Howard-Paret write 'War is merely *the* [present author's emphasis]

⁵⁹See Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870–1871*, (London: Rupert Hart–Davis, 1961), p. 214, for his observation on Clausewitzian friction; for the nature of the peace, see pp. 454–456.

continuation of policy'. In so doing, the latter wording reinforces the following mistranslation of 'mit anderen Mitteln' (with other means). Notably, each of the three translations translate the German 'mit' with the English 'by' in the heading to Section 24. While Graham-Maude and Matthijs Jolles repeat the error in the following sentence, Howard-Paret does not. This matter, however, remains highly important: substituting 'by other means' for 'with other means' in the heading changes its meaning significantly and surely alters how Clausewitz has been interpreted in English. The present writer claims no originality in identifying this inconsistency for many hundreds, if not thousands, of readers of Clausewitz in German and English must have spotted it since Graham's translation first appeared in 1873. James R. Holmes, for example, is a recent critic in this respect. In his article 'Everything You Know About Clausewitz Is Wrong' (2014), he claims a 'botched translation of Clausewitz has had an enduring impact on our thinking of warfare'.⁶⁰ Holmes is surely correct in arguing that stating 'war is a mere continuation of policy "by", as opposed to "with" other means', implies that the politics stop as war takes over. Such a 'discontinuity' separating 'war from peace', in his view, 'turns the concept Clausewitz wants to convey on its head'.⁶¹

Indeed, Clausewitz was at pains to explain that political activity should not be suspended on the outbreak of war. In the same chapter of *On War*, he observed in Section 27 that 'war should never be thought of something *autonomous* but always as an *instrument of policy*; otherwise the entire history of war would contradict us'.⁶² More particularly, Clausewitz expanded on this theme in Chapter 6B of Book 8, introduced above. Several key passages in this chapter are worth quoting at some length to underline Clausewitz's thinking on the continuity between politics and the conduct of war, and not least the primacy of the former over the latter. For reasons of space, only the Howard-Paret translation is shown here together with the German in Table 4 below.

⁶⁰ James R. Holmes, 'Everything You Know About Clausewitz is Wrong: a botched translation of Clausewitz has had an enduring impact on our thinking on warfare', *The Diplomat*, November 12, 2014 <https://thediplomat.com/2014/11/everything-you-know-about-clausewitz-is-wrong/>. Accessed 13 June 2021.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶² Howard-Paret, p. 88, which in translation paraphrases the German original considerably: 'Wir sehen also *erstens*: daß wir uns den Krieg unter allen Umständen als kein *selbständiges* Ding, sondern als ein politisches Instrument zu denken haben; und nur mit dieser Vorstellungsart ist es möglich, nicht mit der sämtlichen Kriegsgeschichte in Widerspruch zu geraten.' (Hahlweg, p. 212).

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No.	Clausewitz (Hahlweg)	Howard-Paret Translation
	Sechstes Kapitel. B Der Krieg ist ein Instrument der Politik	[Chapter 6]B. War Is an Instrument of Policy
4.1	... der Krieg nur ein Teil des politischen Verkehrs sei, also durchaus nichts Selbständiges. (p. 990)	... war is only a branch of political activity; that is in no sense autonomous. (p. 605)
4.2	Wir behaupten dagegen, der Krieg ist nichts als eine Fortsetzung des politischen Verkehrs mit Einmischung anderer Mittel. Wir sagen Einmischung anderer Mittel, um damit zugleich zu behaupten, daß dieser politische Verkehr durch den Krieg selbst nicht aufhört, nicht in etwas ganz anderes verwandelt wird, sondern daß er in seinem Wesen fortbesteht, wie auch seine Mittel gestaltet sein mögen, deren er sich bedient ... (pp. 990-991)	We maintain, on the contrary, that war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means. We deliberately use the phrase "with the addition of other means" because we also want to make it clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different. In essentials [sic] that intercourse continues, irrespective of the means it employs. (p. 605)
4.3	Daß der politische Gesichtspunkt mit dem Kriege ganz aufhören sollte, würde nur denkbar sein, wenn die Kriege aus bloßer Feindschaft Kämpfe auf Leben und Tod wären; wie sie sind, sind sie nichts als Äußerungen der Politik selbst, wie wir oben gezeigt haben. Das Unterordnen des politischen Gesichtspunktes unter den militärischen wäre widersinnig, denn die Politik hat den Krieg erzeugt; sie ist die Intelligenz, der Krieg aber bloß das Instrument, und nicht umgekehrt. Es bleibt also nur das Unterordnen des militärischen Gesichtspunktes unter den politischen möglich. (p. 993)	That the political view should wholly cease to count on the outbreak of war is hardly conceivable unless pure hatred made all wars a struggle for life and death. In fact, as we have said, they are nothing but expressions of policy itself. Subordinating the political point of view to the military would be absurd, for it is policy that has created war. Policy is the guiding intelligence and war is only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political. (p. 607)
4.4	Also noch einmal: der Krieg ist ein Instrument der Politik; er muß notwendig ihren Charakter tragen, er muß mit ihrem Maße messen; die Führung des Krieges in seinem Hauptumrissen ist daher die Politik selbst, welche die Feder mit dem Degen vertauscht, aber darum nicht aufgehört hat, nach ihren eigenen Gesetzen zu denken. (p. 998)	Once again: war is an instrument of policy. It must necessarily bear the character of policy and measure by its standards. The conduct of war, in its great outlines, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think according to its own laws. (p. 610)

Table 4 – War described by Clausewitz as an ‘Instrument of Politics’

The examples highlighted above also show the extent to which the Howard-Paret translation favours the word ‘policy’ over ‘politics’, as in ‘War is merely the continuation of policy by other means’, quoted in Table 3. Whereas in modern English the two terms can be distinguished broadly as *official* – that is governmental – thinking on one hand, and *party-political* activity on the other, in German, whether in Clausewitz’s times or today, the expression *Politik* subsumes both. It remains open to debate whether Howard and Paret (and indeed their two earlier translators) should have used the word ‘politics’ rather than ‘policy’. Yet the context of the work and its

times should inform whether the distinction in translation is relevant and important – after all, the policy, and indeed strategy, of a state (whether that of Prussia or of any other for that matter) is informed by both national (faction or party) and international politics. On balance, one can conclude that Howard and Paret were largely correct in rendering *Politik* as governmental policy in *On War*, as Clausewitz was not referring in that work to party politics.⁶³

The crux of the issue here, however, is that the military, and hence either the threat or the application of lethal force, is only one of several potential instruments of power that can be applied in the interaction of nations.⁶⁴ In confrontations between, or within, states and peoples, diplomatic, information and economic measures alone may suffice to serve interests and to preserve peace. Ultimately, on occasions war may be determined *politically* as the only viable course ahead. Yet even in conflicts of national survival, there must remain a political rationale for war; and furthermore, its conduct must be subject to overriding political requirements. Clausewitz surely meant this interpretation for he uses Chapter 6B of Book 8 to make precisely this argument. That said, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which he has been misinterpreted either through mistranslation or, perhaps as likely, through selective reading as well.

If the popular ‘headline’ or leitmotif for Clausewitz’s *On War* is in error, then what hope will the author’s (let alone any translator’s) amplification be read and understood to correct it? Hence let Clausewitz be re-stated in translation in his original sense: ‘War is a mere continuation of policy with other means’.

Main Battle: A Case Study of Mistranslation and Misinterpretation?

Book 4 of *On War*, and more particularly its chapters on ‘battle’, provides fertile ground for identifying a number of significant problems of translation into English. Although the simple German title of the book, *Gefecht*, appears innocuous enough, Clausewitz’s translations vary. While Graham-Maude interpret this as ‘The Combat’, both Matthijs Jolles and Howard-Paret state ‘The Engagement’.⁶⁵ There is some difficulty, however, in substituting ‘engagement’ for ‘combat’. Whereas combat – fighting – constitutes the basic act of war, an engagement means usually something more specific, either a local action bound in time and space that forms part of a larger and wider battle, or a particular type of tactical action or manoeuvre. One example of the latter is the ‘meeting engagement’, when two advancing forces, neither of which

⁶³The author is grateful to Hew Strachan for his advice on this point and other related issues.

⁶⁴Modern strategies embrace four instruments of power, namely diplomacy, information, military and economics; hence the acronym ‘DIME’.

⁶⁵Graham-Maude (2004), p. 187; Matthijs Jolles (2000), p. 451; Howard-Paret (1984), p. 223.

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may be fully deployed, collide and clash.⁶⁶ It could be argued that imposing a modern hierarchy of military terms in interpreting *Gefecht* has no place in examining the merits of any historical translation. Yet this example is illustrative of the point that seemingly simple (mis)translations may mask further complexities of the text.

As already trailed, Clausewitz devotes much of Book 4 of *On War* to a detailed description of 'The Battle: Its Decision', as in Chapter 9, and in its continuations, 'The Effects of Victory' and 'The Use of Battle' in Chapters 10 and 11 respectively. Yet he does not only use the word '*Schlacht*' for battle, but also refers repeatedly to '*Hauptschlacht*', which Howard-Paret translate as 'major battle'. Yet anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of German would recognise the term *Hauptschlacht* as 'main battle', similar in form to *Hauptbahnhof* meaning main railway station. So how did the term 'main battle' get lost in translation, and what might be the significance of this lacuna, for surely 'main' is more important than 'major' within the context of a particular campaign or war? Interestingly, when one compares Graham's original translation with Maude's later edition of *On War*, the former translates *Hauptschlacht* neither as 'battle' nor as 'main battle', but rather as 'general action'.⁶⁷ Although this term, implying a principal event in a campaign or war, had much to commend it, Maude amended Graham's wording to 'battle'.

In a detailed note to the title of Chapter 9, Maude justified not using the term 'main battle'. As neither Matthijs Jolles nor Howard-Paret address the matter, Maude's explanation is worth reproducing in full:

Clausewitz still uses the word "die Hauptschlacht" but modern usage employs only the word "die Schlacht" to designate the decisive act of a whole campaign—encounters arising from the collision of troops marching towards the strategic culmination of each portion of the campaign are spoken of either as "Treffen," i.e., "engagements" or "Gefecht," i.e., "combat" or "action." Thus technically, Gravelotte was a "Schlacht," i.e., "battle," but Spicheren, Woerth, Borny, even Vionville were only "Treffen".⁶⁸

Maude assumes here that his readers possess a good knowledge of the principal actions of the Franco-Prussian War, noting that 'Treffen' means 'meeting', 'encounter', or 'echelon'. Strangely, however, he does not mention the battle of Sedan (1-2 September 1870), which resulted in the surrender and abdication of Emperor

⁶⁶NATO defines a meeting engagement as 'a combat action that occurs when a moving force, incompletely deployed for battle, engages an enemy at an unexpected time and place' (*Glossary of Terms and Definitions*, AAP-06, Edition 2019, p. 82).

⁶⁷*On War*, trans. Colonel J. J. Graham (1873), p. 141.

⁶⁸Graham-Maude (2000), *On War*, Book IV, Note 12, p. 835.

Napoleon III. Hence most historians would argue that this action was the decisive act of the war rather than the preliminary but largest battle of Gravelotte (18 August 1870). Does Maude's claim with regard to German military terminology stand up? It would appear to do so, as one can search in vain for a reference to '*Hauptschlacht*' in relation to Sedan, or to any other major battle, in Moltke the Elder's History of the Franco-Prussian War (*Geschichte des Deutsch-französischen Krieges von 1870–1871* (1895)).⁶⁹

Returning to translations of *Hauptschlacht* in Chapters 9-11 of Book 4, Matthijs Jolles uses 'battle', 'great battle' and 'main battle' rather inconsistently, noting that while Clausewitz uses the three terms '*Schlacht*', '*große Schlacht*' and '*Hauptschlacht*' respectively, he does so more deliberately and according to context. The question then is how closely does the translator follow the original text and meaning of *Hauptschlacht*. In Chapter 10 of Book 4 Clausewitz is at pains to explain the significance of 'main battle', and its consequences in either victory or defeat, as the following six examples in German show alongside their translations into English by Howard-Paret. Interestingly in Chapter 10 Howard-Paret translate *Hauptschlacht* on one occasion as 'major battle', while in Chapter 11 they adopt another term, 'great battle'. For clarity in this comparison, *Hauptschlacht*, 'main battle', 'major battle' and 'great battle' have been italicised in Table 5 below. The first quotation is taken from Clausewitz's description of the cumulative psychological effect of victories, even modest ones, by the winner against the losing opponent.

No.	Clausewitz (Hahlweg)	Howard-Paret Translation
	<i>10. Kapitel</i>	<i>Chapter 10</i>
5.1	Und nun die Wirkung außer dem Heer bei Volk und Regierung; es ist das plötzliche Zusammenbrechen der gespanntesten Hoffnungen, das Niederwerfen des ganzen Selbstgefühls. An die Stelle dieser vernichteten Kräfte strömt in das entstandene Vakuum die Furcht mit ihrer Expansivkraft und vollendet die Lähmung. Es ist ein wahrer Nervenschlag, den einer der beiden Athleten durch den elektrischen Funken der <i>Hauptschlacht</i> bekommt. (p. 464)	The effect of all this outside the army—on the people and on the government—is a sudden collapse of the most anxious expectations, and a complete crushing of self-confidence. This leaves a vacuum that is filled by a corrosively expanding fear which completes the paralysis. It is as if the electric charge of the <i>main battle</i> has sparked a shock to the whole nervous system of one of the contestants. (p. 255)
5.2	Hier, wo wir es mit einer <i>Hauptschlacht</i> an sich zu tun haben, wollen wir dabei stehen bleiben, zu sagen: daß die geschilderten Wirkungen eines Sieges niemals fehlen, daß sie steigen mit der intensiven Stärke des Sieges, steigen, je	What concerns us here is only the battle itself. Our argument is that the effects of victory that we have described will always be present; that they will increase in proportion to the scale of the victory; and that they

⁶⁹See the description in Graf Helmuth von Moltke, *Geschichte des Deutsch-französischen Krieges von 1870–1871*, (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1895) of the 'Schlacht von Sedan' (Battle of Sedan), pp. 63-73.

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	mehr die Schlacht <i>Hauptschlacht</i> , d.h. je mehr in ihr die ganze Streitkraft vereinigt, je mehr in dieser Streitkraft die ganze Kriegsmacht und in der Kriegsmacht der ganze Staat enthalten ist. (p. 465)	increase the more the <i>battle is a major one</i> – that is, the more the army's full strength is committed, the more this strength represents the total military force, and the more the latter represents the whole state. (p. 256)
5.3	Eine andere Frage ist es, ob durch den Verlust einer <i>Hauptschlacht</i> nicht vielleicht Kräfte geweckt werden, die sonst gar nicht ins Leben gekommen wären. Dieser Fall ist allerdings denkbar, und er ist bei vielen Völkern wirklich schon vorgekommen. (p. 466)	It is another question whether defeat in a <i>major battle</i> may be instrumental in arousing forces that otherwise would have remained dormant. That is not impossible; it has actually occurred in many countries. (p. 256)
	<i>II. Kapitel</i>	<i>Chapter II</i>
5.4	Nur in einer <i>Hauptschlacht</i> regiert der Feldherr das Werk mit eigenen Händen, und es ist in der Natur der Dinge, daß er es am liebsten den seinigen anvertraut. (p. 467)	Only in a <i>great battle</i> does the commander-in-chief control operations in person; it is only natural he should prefer to entrust the direction of the battle to himself. (p. 258)
5.5	... aber im allgemeinen bleibt es vorherrschend wahr, daß <i>Hauptschlachten</i> nur zur Vernichtung der feindlichen Streitkräfte geliefert, und daß diese nur durch die <i>Hauptschlacht</i> erreicht wird. (p. 468)	But in general it remains true that <i>great battles</i> are fought only to destroy the enemy's forces, and that the destruction of these forces can be accomplished only by a <i>major battle</i> . (p. 258)
5.6	Die <i>Hauptschlacht</i> ist daher als der konzentrierte Krieg, als der Schwerpunkt des ganzen Krieges oder Feldzuges anzusehen. (p. 468)	The <i>major battle</i> is therefore to be regarded as concentrated war, as the centre of gravity of the entire conflict or campaign. (p. 258)

Table 5 – Examples of Differing Translations of *Hauptschlacht* in Book 4, Chapters 10 & 11 [Italicisation by the present author]

Apart from displaying varying translations of *Hauptschlacht*, these short quotations also demonstrate how the Howard-Paret edition departs from Clausewitz's original in some of his most important statements as to the role of battle in war. Most notably, and rather confusingly, the translation of the second quotation in the table above renders '*Hauptschlacht*' in the first instance as merely 'battle', while stating 'major' battle in the second. Throughout Chapters 10 and 11 of Book 4, and as exemplified by the final quotation in Table 5, Clausewitz is referring to the principal battle of an entire war (*Krieg*) or of a campaign (*Feldzug*), two terms which should not be elided as the latter is a component of the former. Hence there is little doubt in the present author's opinion that *Hauptschlacht* should be translated accurately and consistently as 'main battle'. To do otherwise is to take a careless if not distorting liberty with the original text and meaning, however accessible a translator strives to make his or her work.⁷⁰

⁷⁰A similar point is made by Hew Strachan, 'Michael Howard and Clausewitz', p. 146.
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Conclusion

This article sought initially no more than to scratch the surface of the English translations of Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege* in an exploratory effort to compare and contrast them. It has revealed, however, various inconsistencies and some mistranslations, not least in the most popular, that of Howard-Paret. Yet there are also a number of interesting differences between the earlier translations of Graham and Maude, often supposed to be essentially the same work. Matthijs Jolles' version, while closer to Clausewitz in many places than Howard-Paret, is not without its own limitations. Thus it might appear reasonable to conclude that no translation to date hits the mark. Yet such an observation would be grossly unfair to the translators of Clausewitz who in their own ways have met the diverse challenges of translating a complex and challenging text, one replete with its own difficulties as it was never fully revised and finalised by the author. Furthermore, a successful translation requires not only building a bridge between two languages, but often, as in the case of *On War*, also spanning an arc of changing context between the original author and a modern reader. Hence translations (and, equally, their translators) are very much the products of their times. The success of the Howard-Paret work speaks for itself: for all its imperfections, it has revealed Clausewitz's *On War* to a large audience in the English-speaking world, stimulating widespread interest and a vast literature in the process.

That said, it is important to stress that Clausewitz's most famous work, arguably one of the most important contributions to military thought ever conceived, demands a new translation – one that is not only readable, reliable and relevant, but also one that corrects the most basic errors of translation. It would also be very helpful if a new translation were to be accompanied by comprehensive notes on the text of *On War* in the manner of Hahlweg's German editions, thus filling a significant gap in the work of Howard-Paret. While many readers may not care about whether the translation of *Hauptschlacht* is either 'major battle' or 'main battle' (although the present author does), it is surely imperative to translate '*Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln*' as 'War is a mere continuation of policy with other means'. This simple example epitomises why rendering the German correctly and consistently matters, and fundamentally so. To do otherwise risks the widespread misinterpretation, if not misuse, of Clausewitz.

To re-quote Clausewitz, 'it is policy that has created war'.⁷¹ Taking one contemporary case in point, arguably the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is but a manifestation of a much wider and potentially longer confrontation between the Russian Federation and the West, driven by President Vladimir Putin's political quest – continuing the execution of a policy crafted over many years – not only to redraw international boundaries,

⁷¹*On War*, Book 8, Chapter 6B; Howard-Paret, p. 607.

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unifying Russia and Ukraine, but also to restore Russia's place in the world.⁷² In so doing, the world order is being upset, and most probably irretrievably so. Ultimately, international politics as much as the outcome of battle will bring an end to the conflict, of which we have only witnessed the opening campaign. Furthermore, Clausewitz surely would have recognized its early dynamics: Russia's initial onslaught aroused bitterness and defiance within the Ukrainian people in equal measure. Hence for Ukraine, rather than for Russia, in many respects it is becoming a people's war (*Volkskrieg*) in which resistance to the foreign invader and occupier may grow with each engagement and every atrocity, whether alleged or proven.⁷³ Hence if there was ever a time over the last half century to revisit Clausewitz since the publication of the Howard-Paret translation, then it is the present.

Ideally, a new translation of *On War* would be the product of a small multinational partnership building on the model of Howard and Paret, blessed not only with the necessary linguistic skills and academic prowess to undertake such a work, but also with sufficient military exposure to appreciate the nature and nuances of conflict. After all, it should be recalled that Clausewitz was the epitome of a soldier-scholar. He was a General Staff-trained officer with considerable operational experience during the Napoleonic Wars who thought, taught and wrote about his profession of arms. He was an individual who had witnessed war first-hand with all its proximate dangers, frictions, uncertainties and vagaries from battlefield bivouac through march column to bayonet point. Yet Clausewitz was as much at home with the higher direction of war and campaign from the cabinet table to the general's planning map at field headquarters. While the technologies and tactics of war have evolved considerably over the past two centuries, the fundamentals of strategy and the policy considerations that drive it have largely endured. That is why *On War* remains so relevant for the present day, and why it demands careful study and application, recalling that war is but 'an instrument of policy'.⁷⁴

Moreover, the abiding value of *On War* lies not as much in the answers it gives, but much more so in the issues it raises and the questions it poses as to the planning and conduct of war within a policy context and continuum. There would be no more timely tribute to Carl von Clausewitz, and indeed to both Michael Howard and Peter Paret,

⁷²See Vladimir Putin, 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians' (July 12, 2021), available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>. Accessed 3 June 2022.

⁷³Although a discussion of 'People's War' – or 'The People in Arms' – lies outside the scope of this article, it is worth noting that Clausewitz devotes considerable attention to the subject in an eponymous chapter in *On War*, namely Chapter 26 of Book 6, Defense.

⁷⁴C.f. *On War*, Chapter 6B of Book 8, War Plans.

than the appearance of a new English translation of *Vom Kriege* for the twenty-first century. It should form an essential primer for a new generation of politicians, generals and students of war while being read and appreciated by a wider public. Captain Professor Sir Michael Howard would surely have wished it so.⁷⁵

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to express his sincere thanks to Professor Brian Holden Reid and to Professor Sir Hew Strachan for their advice and encouragement in researching and writing this article.

⁷⁵See Michael Howard, *Captain Professor: a Life in War and Peace*, (London: Continuum, 2006) – his remarkable autobiography.