



**STRATEGY  
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**THE ESSENCE OF WARFARE AT THE STRATEGIC LEVEL**

**BY**

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THE ESSENCE OF WARFARE AT THE  
STRATEGIC LEVEL

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## ABSTRACT

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The Army War College was chartered to provide education for the future strategic leaders of the United States Army.<sup>1</sup> The premise being that warfare at the strategic level is somehow different than warfare at the tactical and operational level. While the scale and scope of activities can vary immensely from the tactical to the strategic level, warfare at its essence is the same. Carl Von Clausewitz would agree. When Clausewitz attempted to define warfare, his definition looked at the essence of war. This essence is the same at the squad, platoon, corps and strategic level. The school house at Ft. Leavenworth and at Carlisle Barracks still does not understand Clausewitz's use of the trinity concept in his definition of warfare which, by inference, the Army still struggles with training its leaders, at all levels, what war really is. This paper will examine how the Army as an institution has failed to grasp the essence of war. In addition the paper will introduce the concept of the "identity", the force that forms the cohesive whole of an enemy, to further explain how the Clausewitzian trinity can be an aid in planning and executing warfare, at all levels, against our Nation's enemies.



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## THE ESSENCE OF WARFARE AT THE STRATEGIC LEVEL

### INTRODUCTION

The Army War College was chartered to provide education for the future strategic leaders of the United States Army.<sup>1</sup> The premise being that warfare at the strategic level is somehow different than warfare at the tactical and operational level. While the scale and scope of activities can vary immensely from the tactical to the strategic level, warfare at its essence is the same. Carl Von Clausewitz would agree. When Clausewitz attempted to define warfare, his definition looked at the essence of war, "the individual real or ultimate nature of (war)."<sup>2</sup> This essence is the same at the squad, platoon, corps and strategic level.

The Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth and the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks does not understand Clausewitz's use of the trinity concept in his definition of warfare. As a result, the Army still struggles with training its leaders, at all levels, what war really is. This paper will examine how the Army as an institution has failed to grasp the essence of war. In addition this paper will introduce the concept of the "identity", the force that forms the cohesive whole of an enemy, to further explain how the Clausewitzian trinity can be an aid in planning and executing warfare against our nation's enemies.

Since the centennial class arrived at Carlisle Barracks, the student body has been reminded numerous times that we have been hand-picked to lead our Army through the transformation into the future. A chorus of faculty and guest lecturers have tried to impress on the students that we are here to learn how to think at the strategic leader level, implying that we are now forging into an entirely new field of knowledge. The Army as an institution is still grappling with what exactly war is, what it looks like and how to construct an intellectual framework of this thing called war. Without a clear cut intellectual framework of warfare, any discussion of transformation is pedantic at best. This paper will present how Clausewitz defined war, how the Army as an institution has failed to grasp that definition and present Clausewitz's actual definition of war. This definition can provide a guide for students of strategic level leadership that can lead us to a viable transformation into future warfare.

I will also introduce the concept of identity, those defining bonds that group people together and that can be a fundamental force in conflict, and use the

Clausewitzian trinity to formulate a construct that can assist strategic leaders in analyzing past and future conflict.

## WHAT IS WAR?

To facilitate study and to organize its doctrine, the Army categorizes warfare into the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war. The Chairman of the Joint Chief of staff in his Joint Vision 2020 speaks of “full spectrum dominance”<sup>3</sup> in which our forces can handle not only wars but the full range of operations. This discussion implies that there is a difference in the essence of warfare during national conflicts as opposed to peacemaking operations in Bosnia and Somalia. This is what is wrong with our military education system and why our transformation will probably not prepare us for our future adversaries. As long as Army leadership thinks there is a difference in the essence of warfare between the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war, we will continue to do the wrong transformation.

Carl Von Clausewitz’s revered book On War attempted to answer the basic question “What is war”<sup>4</sup>. At the time of the writing the entire civilized world had experienced a massive transformation in the prosecution of war, how one organizes for war and how war is conducted when entire populations join in the fray. For over two and one-half decades Clausewitz experienced everything from regional conflicts to continental wars that consumed almost the entire known world. His experience included all of the aspects of the Joint Chief’s full spectrum of conflict. Perhaps Clausewitz’s perception of conflict can help us understand how a military force can be properly configured for full spectrum dominance.

In Clausewitz’s intellectual construct on the nature of war, there is no difference between so called levels of war. There is no difference between peacekeeping, peacemaking or all out war. Quite simply “War is thus the act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.”<sup>5</sup> It is obvious from this simple definition it encompasses all levels of conflict. In most cases, all we have to do is to identify what it is we want the enemy to conform to, in regards to our will, and then apply the appropriate force that will compel them to our end. Clausewitz’s simple example is that of wrestlers. Each attempting “to throw his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance.”<sup>6</sup>

Of course it is not that simple. Surely the full range of conflict is far too complex to be summed up in one sentence. Without a clear intellectual foundation on what

warfare, or any conflict for that matter, really is, we will always struggle with how to apply our resources against the enemies we will face. Fortunately, Clausewitz did expound on what warfare really is. An understanding of his intellectual construct will assist any military leader at every level to understand the nature of their profession. Without a grounded understanding of this profession, we will be woefully inadequate in transforming any portion of our military.

Clausewitz described the true meaning of warfare by introducing a trinity:

“War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always makes war a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which is 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 element of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.”<sup>7</sup>

Clausewitz, for purposes of illustration, goes on to assign each one of the tendencies to a specific societal entity to develop his discussion. The tendency of violence and passion he assigned to the people, chance is assigned to the Army and reason is assigned to the government.

## **THE TRINITY MISUNDERSTOOD**

When the term trinity is misunderstood and combined with the three dominant tendencies of the army, government and the people, the Army as an institution inaccurately depicts Clausewitz’s essence of warfare. To the layman, the term trinity sounds like triple and hence the number three. The next failed extension of logic tells us that a triangle has three sides and with three elements, we can use the three-sided triangle to depict the trinity. The layman, and even experts, immediately draws the requisite triangle with government at the apex, with people at a lower corner and the army at the other respective corner as shown in Figure 1.

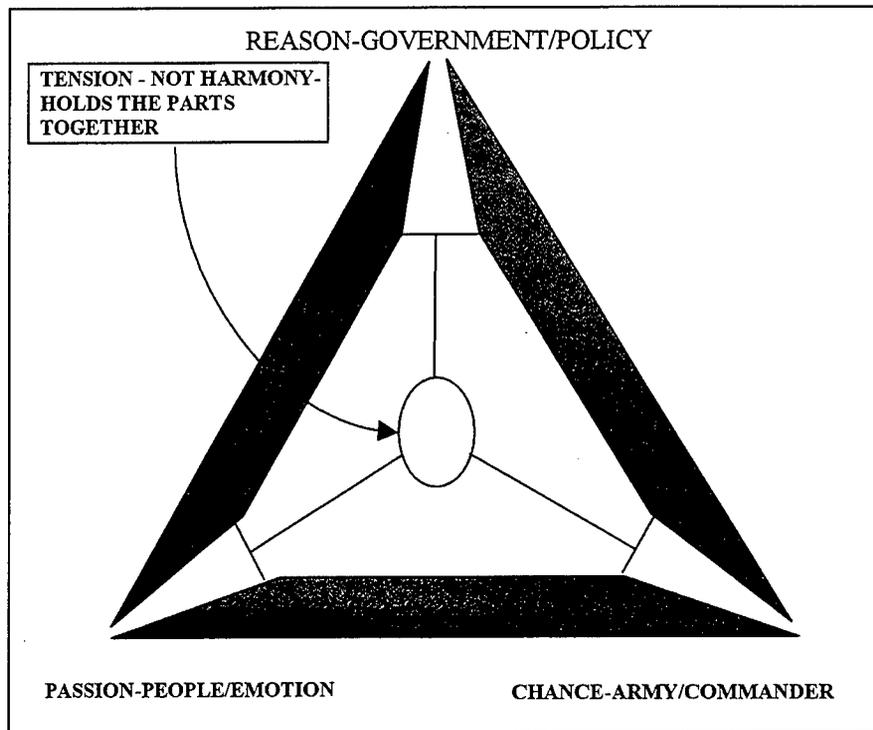


FIGURE 1: COMMON ILLUSTRATION OF THE CLAUSEWITZIAN TRINITY<sup>8</sup>

Instruction at the Command and General Staff College, and at the Army War College uses this triangle depiction to try and explain how such conflict as insurrection, coup d'etat and revolution occur as one side of the triangle become out of balance with the other two sides.<sup>9</sup> In a coup for example, the military becomes out of balance with government interests, plot and execute an overthrow of that government. In revolution, the people become disillusioned with the government, arm themselves, and then take on the army and government. These interactions of the misinterpretations of Clausewitz's trinity are shown in Figure 2.

The basic premise in the argument being that there has to be some form of balance in an equal sided triangle, and when one side or point of the triangle is out of balance, conflict results. This has absolutely no correlation to the Clausewitz trinity and directly misrepresents the "balance"<sup>10</sup> that Clausewitz was talking about in his musings on war.

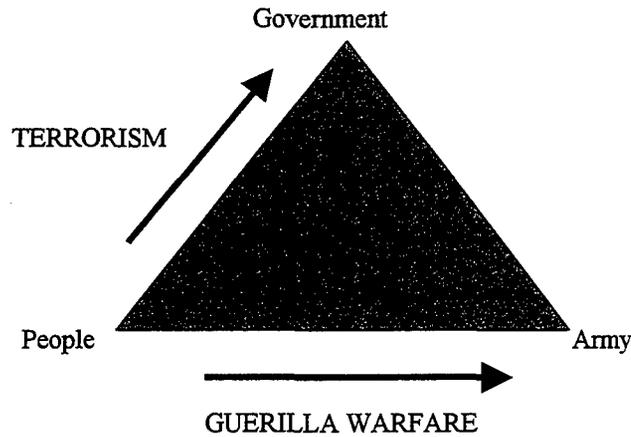


FIGURE 2. TRIANGLE OUT OF BALANCE CAUSING A REVOLUTION <sup>11</sup>

This depiction is also very confusing when the entire range of conflict tries to be explained by this model. Great conflicts and engagements such as the 30 years war, World War I, the British defeat in America, Vietnam, the Soviet war in Afghanistan are far too complex to be explained by such trite statements as the people no longer supported the war effort. There were a vast array of forces and interacting, competing demands that go into such great conflicts to include their final outcome. The triangle depiction simply fails to explain these forces.

Having illustrated how the triangle construct oversimplifies the Clausewitzian trinity and over-prescribes the dominant tendencies in Clausewitz's concept of warfare, we will now return to the trinity and come to grips with what conflict and war truly is. With this illuminated understanding we can then introduce a more thorough understanding of the strategic level of war which, by extension, will better prepare us for strategic leadership.

## **THE REAL TRINITY OF WARFARE AND ITS ROLE IN EXPLAINING CONFLICT**

The first step in understanding Clausewitz is to throw out the triangle in its entirety. Clausewitz would never pit the Army against the government or the people. To entertain such a theory is to ignore his basic premise that warfare is a continuation of politics by other means.<sup>12</sup> There are reasons that armies are put into combat against adversaries. There are also reasons for how the combatants fight. These reasons have to be taken into account when examining past conflicts and planning for future conflicts.

At the same time an Army in combat has to come to grips with the passion that is inherent in such a gory undertaking. Such things as esprit de Corps, valor, bravery, fear and terror are component parts of conflict and again, must be considered when explaining history and when preparing for future combat. The triangle in Figure 1 does nothing to explain these forces so we need a better answer.

The answer is in the proper understanding of Clausewitz's theory on war. To understand his concept we have to come to grips with what Clausewitz meant to illustrate with the trinity. If we look at the dictionary definition we find "The state or condition of being three. Any three parts in union."<sup>13</sup> Anything that is a trinity has three constituents that make up a whole. Removing or separating anyone of the three, changes the whole and one cannot be considered without the other two. Those who are familiar with Christian theology readily recognize this definition which belongs to the Holy Trinity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The three entities are one and inseparable from the other.<sup>14</sup>

To Clausewitz, the trinity of the people, army and government was also inseparable. More important to understanding the basic constituency of war is that the trinity is not the army, people and government to begin with.<sup>15</sup> These institutions only possess the dominant tendencies of the trinity. The actual Clausewitzian trinity is passion, chance and reason. According to Clausewitz, the essence of warfare is the complex interaction of these three things that when taken as a whole, define war. This interaction of chance, passion and reason embodies this complex human endeavor. The army, people and government simply personify the primordial trinity

Clausewitz likens the interaction of the dominant tendencies, (passion, reason and chance), to three magnets in which any theoretical understanding of conflict must be able to be suspended amongst all three magnets.<sup>16</sup> This physical example speaks volumes to the theory. Magnetic fields are continuous and impart influence to any other magnet in close proximity. Unlike the schoolhouse triangle method of explaining conflict in which imbalance is the cause of conflict, an imbalance in these "magnetic" dominant tendencies will cause the theory to fall out of balance. For Clausewitz the elements of the trinity are never in balance. It is the theory that explains conflict that has to be balanced between the primordial trinity. Specifically, Clausewitz states;

"A theory that ignores any one of them (*the three tendencies*) 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.<sup>47</sup> (italic words added by this author)

So we find two errors in the triangle depiction of the trinity. First the people, army and government are not even the trinity that Clausewitz is discussing. Second, it is theory that has to be balanced and not the trinity. Both of these render the schoolhouse use of a triangle depiction as a teaching tool fundamentally flawed. As a final point, the quote above tells us that the mere geometric nature of the triangle establishes an arbitrary relationship between the three elements that Clausewitz specifically tells us is “totally useless”.

Returning to the magnetic analogy to get us to a more useful theoretical construct, as the three elements of the trinity interact, we see that each influences the other. A change in national policy can often lead to change in the conduct of military operations. Similarly, a change in the people’s perception of the conflict can lead to changes in the conduct of the conflict. Likewise, a change in military operations can and usually does effect government policy and the people’s perception of the conflict. The complex interaction of passion, reason and chance is a component part of each of the entities that Clausewitz assigns to the dominant tendencies.

The Army is not the sole owner of chance. It too has reason for its actions. These reasons range from written orders to doctrine to tactics, techniques and procedures and so forth. Of course passion is a critical component of the “spirit of the bayonet”, esprit de Corps and elan which all professional soldiers know is extremely critical in fighting forces and why men fight. The schoolhouse triangle depictions of conflict take none of these inherent combat factors into account.

Similarly, the government, assigned to the reason tendency does not solely function on reason alone. Both passion and chance can often sway governments. In Beirut in 1983 and again Somalia in 1993 we find classic examples where chance and passion led to US military intervention followed by subsequent tactical casualties followed by rapid strategic retreat. The sought after political object, the primordial reason for US presence, was insufficient to sustain US presence once casualties became a part of the operation. The original reasons for these incursions are myriad but most of these were also based on passion rather than reason. The reason factors include UN mandates, but even these mandates were fueled by the passion of civilian

suffering, dead children and the weeping civilian populace that appeared on every nightly newscast. The rapid strategic withdrawals likewise were dominated by the media pictures of hundreds of flag draped coffins in the case of the Marines in Berit<sup>18</sup> and of dead US soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu.<sup>19</sup>

We see then that the Army is influenced by much more than merely chance. Reason and passion are integral components of how and why armies do their missions. We now need a more representative portrayal of the complex interaction of not only the primordial trinity, but also how the trinity impacts each of the dominant tendencies.

Figure 3 gives us one such portrayal.

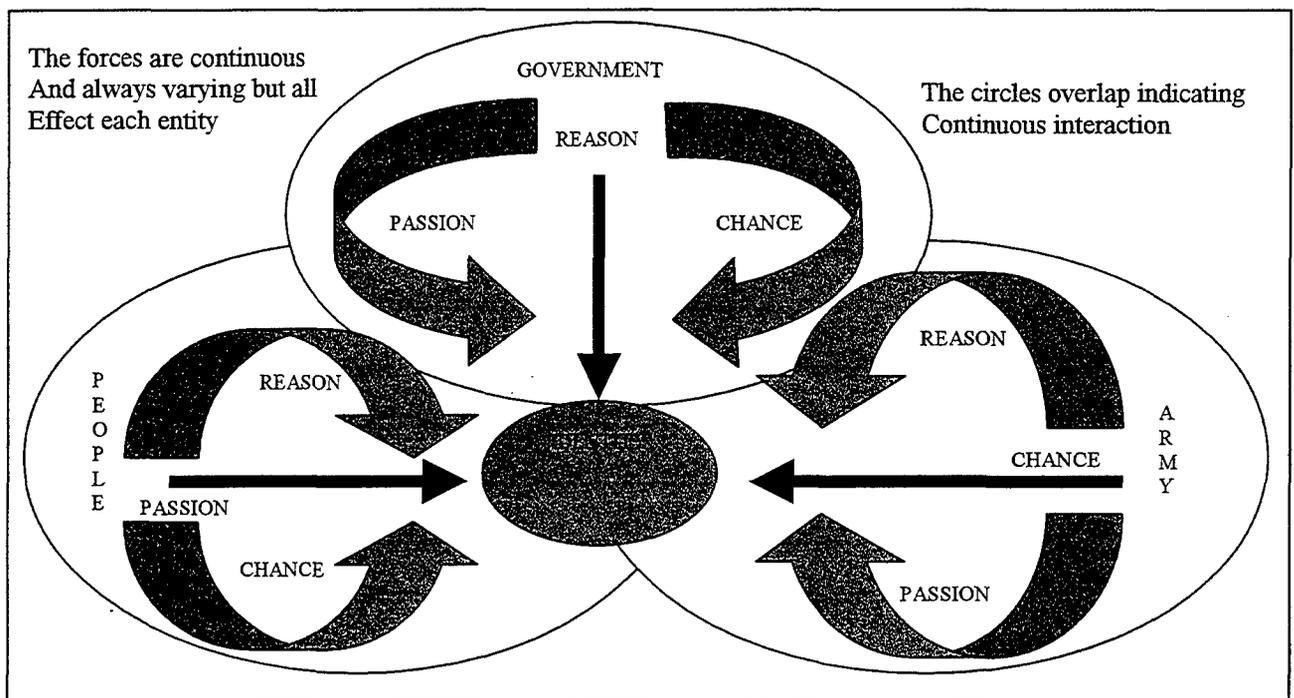


FIGURE 3. A MORE REPRESENTATIVE DEPICTION OF THE INTERACTING TRINITY

Each component of the trinity has passion, reason and chance that form a complex interaction. It is this complex interaction that strategic leaders must come to grips with as the scope of operations increase in complexity. It is interaction of the primordial trinity and interrelationship of passion, reason and chance that can make the tactical actions of a lone soldier in Kosovo reach international, strategic proportions. It is this relationship that caused little more than a company-size tactical action in Somalia to change the entire United Nations strategic effort in that African country.<sup>20</sup> It is this essence of warfare that tells us that at the tactical, operational and strategic level, that

the basic components of conflict are the same. It is only the scale and scope that changes.

There have also been many claims that perhaps technology, media, economics and information are changing the nature of war and that these factors are blurring the levels of war.<sup>21</sup> After all, CNN is now a principal force in the interaction of nations. However, when the true trinity is analyzed at the dominant tendency level, it is plain to see that such forces as money, greed, and the emotions pouring out of the media are only additional factors that feed the dominant tendencies of conflict which are passion, reason and chance.

Also shown in Figure 3, is a central unifying force labeled as the "identity." This is the force that leads gangs, tribes, nation states and even alliances to agree to go into a conflict. This identity is often a central force that defines the adversaries and by extension, must be understood when evaluating how to defeat an opponent or in the case of ourselves, what must be done to strengthen our own. We will develop this thought in more detail in a following section. First let us attempt to define what is really at work at the tactical, operational and strategic level of war.

## **TACTICAL, OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC LEVELS OF WAR REDEFINED**

We can look at Joint Publication 1-02 or Joint Publication 5-0 to find our military definitions of the tactical, operational and strategic level of war. Each definition speaks to military objectives, sequencing of actions, maneuver of elements or formations. To be succinct, the following definitions are provided in their totality.

"Tactical level of war. The level of war at which battles and engagements are planned and executed to accomplish military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces. Activities at this level focus on ordered arrangement and maneuver of combat elements in relation to each other and to the enemy to achieve combat objectives."<sup>22</sup>

"Operational level of war. The level of war at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives with the theaters or areas of operations. Activities at this level link tactics and strategy by establishing operational objectives needed to accomplish the strategic objectives, sequencing events to achieve the operational objectives, initiating actions and applying resources to bring about and sustain these events. These activities imply a broader dimension of time or space than do tactics; they ensure logistics and

administrative support tactical forces, and provide the means by which tactical successes are exploited to achieve strategic objectives.<sup>23</sup>

“Strategic level of war. The level of war at which a nation, often as a member of a group of nations, determines national or multinational (alliance or coalition) security objectives and guidance, and develops and uses national resources to accomplish these objectives. Activities at this level establish national and multi-national military objective; sequence initiatives; define limits and assess risks for the use of military and other instruments of national power; develop global plans and theater war plans to achieve those objectives; and provide military forces and other capabilities in accordance with strategic plans.<sup>24</sup>

There is little wonder that students scratch their heads as they have discourse over the levels of war. Three times in the operational level of war definition, the root word operations is used. Four times the root word tactics is used and four times the root word strategy is used. This obviously implies that the operational level of war has to take into account tactics and strategy, but it does nothing to provide clear definitions of any of the three levels of war. This results in many students of war raising such pedantic questions as ‘do we not use strategy when we plan our tactical operations?’ The answer is most assuredly yes. All the doctrine appears to provide us with these definitions is an arbitrary, though vague distinction to facilitate study and discussion. Perhaps we can simplify these definitions while providing clarity to the levels of war.

We could find a way out by simply stating that strategy involves establishing the ends, ways and means for our upcoming operation since this is so critical to national strategy formulation. However, this solution again becomes argumentative when we come back to Clausewitz who states that both tactics and strategy involve ends and means.<sup>25</sup>

It may be beneficial to look at the dictionary to help us weed through these complex concepts. What we find is that tactics involve strategy and that strategy simply expands the concept of military operations to include economic, political and psychological forces. Operations in the military context involve campaigns.<sup>26</sup> None of these are clear differences that can help the student work his way through the process of categorizing their study.

In Book Two and Book Three Clausewitz conducts a detailed analysis of tactics and strategy. He concludes, “tactics teaches the use of armed forces in the

engagement; strategy, the use of engagements for the object of war.<sup>27</sup> A company commander uses strategy to determine his platoon order of march, placement on the battlefield, order of engagement against the enemy, then he executes tactics to get those forces to their appointed place and time to bring fire on the enemy. Similarly, four star generals determine which forces go to which portions of the theater in what order and engage in what sequence to meet the theater objectives. He is employing forces to meet the theater strategy. The only thing missing is this illusive operational level of war and what really is going on in the mind of the leader as they practice or execute operational art. In the case of the general this is readily apparent as he decides the phasing of operations, intermediate objectives and sequencing of actions, that is to say when and where formations will be brought to bear on the enemy. It should be apparent that the platoon leader can and often does the same thing on a much smaller scale and with much smaller formations.

This discussion has simply pointed out that it is possible that strategy, operational art and tactics often occurs at all levels of warfare and we now ask ourselves what does the Army really teach at Leavenworth and at the Army War College as officers rise in level of responsibility? Proposed definitions of the levels of warfare are now offered for consideration. Tactics is merely the study of the effects of weapons on the enemy. Operational art is merely the study of the effects of formations and sequencing of actions on the enemy. Strategy is merely the study of the effect of resources on the enemy.

Tactics is taught during entry level training and the officer basic and advance courses. It is here that young officers are taught the range of weapons, weapons effects and how to execute tactical movements to close with and destroy the enemy. In the defense we are taught how to array forces, how to use terrain and weapons effects to defeat the enemies advance. Virtually everything broached involves the impact of weapons on the enemy's action. This is true for the rifleman, the smoke platoon leader or the Ground Surveillance Radar section. All are taught how to engage the enemy with the tools of warfare. At the same time, officers are taught various tactical strategies that impact enemy formations and actions. These include which direction to approach the enemy, the timing and impact of the arrival of the reserve on the battlefield, the timing and impact of indirect fires, smoke and other combat multipliers on the enemy. We do not call these topics strategy and/or operational construct, but they should, to alleviate confusion at higher levels of Army schooling.

When officers go to Leavenworth, the biggest block of instruction is tactics with more effort being expended on the combined arms fight. Here we are taught how to maximize all of the available combat capability to bring maximum combat power against enemy formations. Leavenworth also teaches the subject of operational art; how to build campaign plans that meet theater or strategic objectives. Here students analyze the impact of brigades, divisions and even corps on enemy actions and counteractions. The students study the timing and location of deep attacks to create synergistic effects throughout the depth of the enemy and when and how to employ the reserve. All of this is the study of the effects of formations on the enemy. It is also at this point that our institutional understanding of strategy is first taught. Such strategies as air envelopment, aerial attrition, amphibious assaults, and indirect approach are considered to include embargo and sanctions to weaken the enemy prior to ground combat. Those selected officers who stay at Leavenworth and attend the School of Advanced Military Studies earn a degree in Operational Art by spending an entire year mastering how to plan sequential and parallel operations that achieve a theater strategy. In short, Leavenworth teaches how to plan the use of formations to achieve strategic results.

As stated in the introduction, the Army War College is chartered to prepare Army leaders to be strategic leaders. The course of instruction very much mirrors the School of Advanced Military Studies with virtually all of the same topics. The only major difference being a larger focus on the role of other elements of national power, economic, diplomatic, and information on the overall theater strategy. Students are taught how to allocate resources to meet theater and national objectives. Except now the resources are not limited to army formations. The role and use of naval and air forces are brought to the fore and of course the use of economic, diplomatic and information resources take a prominent role. In the final analysis though, the objective for the school is not some grand new body of knowledge that is taught to senior Army leaders. These leaders have been taught how to allocate resources since they were lieutenants. The real topic of instruction at the Army War College is not some abstract level of war called strategy, the new body of knowledge presented to Army War college students is simply the additional considerations required when national resources are a part of the operational and tactical construct.

## THE IDENTITY OF A GROUP, FACTION OR NATION

Thus far we have now reevaluated the essence of warfare and interpreted the role of passion, reason and chance on the levels of war. In addition, we looked at the Army definitions of the levels of war and presented alternative definitions to provide clarity to the student of warfare. We now need to investigate how all of this could be brought together when we plan to defeat an adversary.

Would-be enemies of the United States are identifiable and have form and substance. Often planners isolate strategic planning on how to destroy or influence our enemies in order to compel them to do our will. It is exactly this approach that can lead to the fermenting and production of new enemies to the United States. Ideology is often the unique center of gravity from which all power is derived for many of our would-be enemies whether it is in the Balkans, the Middle East or a global terrorist network. Money, recruitment, support, resourcing and motivation are all derived from the ideology that fuels conflict in these regions and it is this ideology that drives the identity of the various combating forces. In this section, I will evaluate how this ideology leads to the core identity of the pertinent groups and if it is the center of gravity, how strategic planning can address this center of gravity.

When people identify an issue that stirs their emotions, it creates an entity that people either accept or reject. This entity can be in the form of a religious or political issue, a way of life or even a perceived injustice that needs remedy. This entity is what connects people and we can refer to this entity as the identity highlighted in the center of Figure 4. That is to say that people who feel a bond to such an identity develop group traits. "With the stranger one has only certain more general qualities in common, whereas organically connected persons are based on similarity of just those specific traits which differentiates them from the merely universal."<sup>28</sup> These traits, and the accompanying acceptance to them, define what we commonly refer to as cultural characteristics that often get lumped into ethnic groups. But ethnicity encompasses much more than common culture. In Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, ethnic groups can be comprised of those with common language, common customs or common social views of their group.<sup>29</sup> So we see that ethnicity is nothing more than an ideal or norm that people reflect upon as their identity. The basis for this identity can be race, color, religion, patriotism, vocational or ideological.

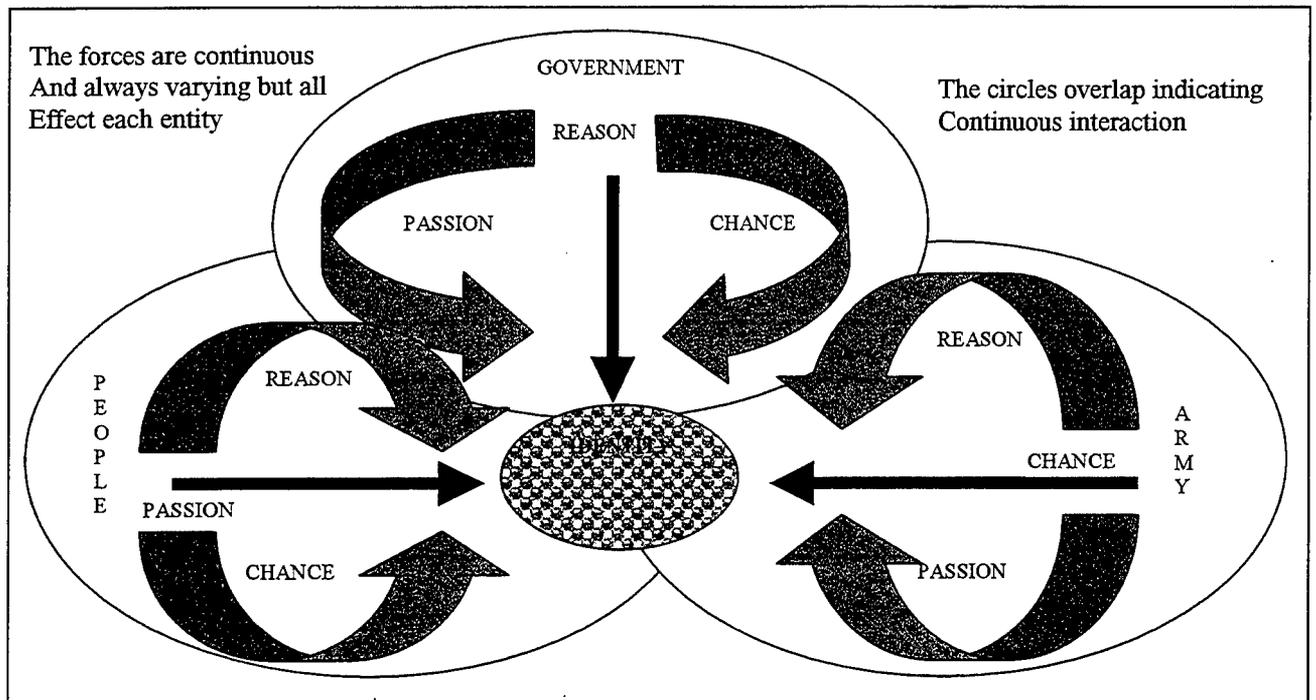


FIGURE 4. A DEPICTION OF THE TRINITY HIGHLIGHTING THE IDENTITY FORCE

Classic examples of ethnic groups include African-Americans, native Americans, Northern Ireland Catholics, Northern Ireland Protestants, Serbian Bosnians, Muslim Bosnians, Catholic Bosnians (Croats), Palestinians, Jews, and Americans. Since September 11, Americans have coalesced as in no other time in our recent American history with Americans of all races, creeds and religions waving flags and sharing a common identity as one people. In the case of Americans, many would argue that the nation is made up of a multitude of distinct ethnic groups. While true, the nation as a whole also forms its own national ethnic group as Americans, sharing not only an American culture, but also a common purpose to support the war on terrorism.

When opposing groups of people, ethnic groups, possess a sufficiently central identity that appears to be threatened, conflict is possible. When nations possess a common identity and one nation feels that its identity or the value that defines that identity is threatened then war is possible. The classic example exists in the Middle East. As long as the Arabs refuse to except the existence of a Jewish state, Israel will

have to protect itself always. Similarly, as long as the Palestinians do not have a homeland, then they will be a source of conflict in the region.

This identity creates the focus and drives the emotions of war. If the identity is sufficiently strong, then simply destroying a nation's fighting force and even occupying the country will not assure victory. This remaining force that continues to supply resistance is the will of the nation.<sup>30</sup> One must defeat this will to truly defeat the enemy. That is why even though the United States physically occupied South Vietnam and defeated the Viet Cong virtually every time they met on the battlefield, we still lost the war. The will of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese to continue the struggle had not been broken. The Viet Cong refused to adopt as their identity the political system that the United States was supporting in South Vietnam. Instead, they adopted an identity base on a united Vietnam and were willing to suffer excruciating losses and deprivations to obtain it. This identity was the true source of their national will, not communism, Soviet aid or the propagation of the domino theory.

This identity is always present in war and conflict. It is why the elusive absolute war is unattainable. Clausewitz recognized that this force would always play a central role in determining both the type and duration of war.

"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 an expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow."<sup>31</sup>

Note that in Clausewitz's discussion the political object he refers to is analogous to a central guiding identity. If one refers back to the primordial trinity of passion, reason and chance, the political object for the conflict produces the reason the nation fights.<sup>32</sup> The political reasons for war determine the amount of passion and resources a nation will expend to obtain the political object. The political object becomes the driving function for the will of the nation, ethnic group, faction or terrorist cell. It then becomes evident that the will is an integral target of war. If an adversary can separate a nation's or ethnic group's passion and emotion from the reason that drives its motivation to fight, then victory is at hand.

Recently at the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon, nineteen thugs with box openers brought the meaning of total war to the American public. The political objective of the terrorist groups was the destruction of the infidels (United States and by

extension Israel) and their removal from the Middle East. The passion driving this group of terrorists is total and complete to the point of self-destruction to obtain the political objective. It was believed by the terrorists that the scale of the human tragedy associated with the September 11 attacks would cause the United States to reevaluate its position in the Middle East and withdraw its forces. Time has yet to determine if the renewed expressed national will of the United States will continue to support a long term political objective of maintaining a presence in the Middle East and the inherent support of Israel. This is a classic struggle of national and ethnic will, driven by their respective identities.

For the terrorists the identity is the formation and sanctity of fundamentalist Islamic nations. For the United States and western democracies, it is the pursuit of democratic ideals with the preservation of individual human rights.<sup>33</sup> In their current form they are diametrically opposed and the conflict will continue until one side or the other retrenches from their stated goals.

#### **THE IDENTITY AS A TARGET FOR WAR AND CONFLICT**

This concept of identity of a nation or ethnic group runs deeper than just the national will to fight. It permeates warfare from strategic to the tactical level. At the lowest level, we find it in cohesion and esprit de corps. These traits form the lowest denominator that causes men to fight. Cohesion can be as simple as two men in a fox hole who fight to survive or it may be a well trained tank crew who continue to function as a team because they do not want to let their crew mates down. One of the most often cited reason for desertion on the battlefield of individual soldiers was a "lack of morale-building factors such as training...general adaptation to army life and discipline, and identification with a given group."<sup>34</sup> The individual soldier must feel identification with the unit he is fighting with or at a minimum, identification with his comrades around him as they attempt to survive the engagement. Both of these items of identification can and have been targets for wars, battles and engagements.

Sun Tzu stated that subduing the enemy without battle is better than a hundred victories in battle.<sup>35</sup> He was referring to attacking the identity, the reason and the strategy that forces act upon in battle. If he is defeated before the first shots are fired then you are guaranteed victory and the role of chance in the conflict is eliminated. Sun Tzu's kernel of truth that a surrounded enemy should be left a way of escape also

speaks to the identity of the enemy.<sup>36</sup> A surrounded enemy knows that the only hope for victory is to invoke unmitigated violence for survival. Survival becomes their identity in lieu of some obscure national object to gain territory, or to enforce a peace plan. The survival identity produces emotion-based actions that invariably produce unwanted death and destruction for both sides.

The terrorist controlled airplane on September 11 that crashed in Pennsylvania is such an example. The terrorist did not tell their passengers that they were on a suicide mission. Instead they allowed them to call loved ones on their cell phone to inform them that they were on a hijacked plane. Sun Tzu would explain the terrorist's treatment of the passengers as an effort to deny the passengers of a feeling of being surrounded, by giving them the impression that they would survive the hijacking. "To surround an enemy you must leave a way of escape."<sup>37</sup> In this case the terrorist's plan backfired. What the terrorists did not account for was that with the timing of the taking of that airplane, some of the loved ones already knew that other hijacked planes had already crashed into national landmarks. The passengers then identified their plight as certain death. This identity resulted in an unbridled passion to thwart the hijacking when all reason would indicate they could not attack armed terrorists and live to tell about it. This passion of reason caused them to attack their captures resulting in the crashing of that plane. This entire scenario is now called heroic, brave and worthy of medals. That is what happens when passion leads to action when reason calls for inaction.

## **HOW THE IDENTITY HAS TO BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF STRATEGY**

Strategy is the science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological and military forces of a nation...to afford the maximum support to adopted policies in peace and war.<sup>38</sup> Clausewitz defines "war is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."<sup>39</sup> The identities of the various factions in the Balkans and the Middle East have not only things that can be attacked with overwhelming force but they have reason and passion for their respective causes. This reason and passion, which fuels their identity, has to be considered in our development of strategy. More importantly, strategy has a direct correlation to the operational construct and even the tactics that will occur in the conflict. For example, if the strategy is not to use ground forces in Kosovo, then placing peacekeeping or peacemaking forces in ethnic neighborhoods is not an available tactic. The Serbian will (identity) was to cleanse

undesired ethnic groups from selected villages and the only tactic we chose to use to stop it was to bomb from the air. In so doing we failed to connect the strategy to the tactics that could mitigate the Serbian identity.

In the Balkans, it simply is not sufficient to want the Serbs, Croats and Muslims to get along with one another. Their hatred and enmity is rooted in a long history that has serious religious overtones. Any strategy that does not take these historical and religious concerns into account will invariably suffer. Similarly, peace in the Middle East will never be obtained until the basic identity of the Jews, Muslims and Christians are addressed. Until a strategy is produced that addresses each party's reason, passion and chance that drives them to action or refusal to come to an agreement, then peace in the Middle East will never exist.

In the ongoing conflict with Afghanistan and Al Qaeda, the United States and her allies appear to be very cognizant of this fact. To date the attacks have been focused and targeted against the perpetrators of terrorism. This mitigates the role of chance by avoiding unnecessary Arab civilian casualties. Indiscriminate bombing of Afghans would simply prove to Muslims throughout the world that the United States does not seek justice, but the destruction of Arabs, which is exactly what Bin Laden has claimed for many years. Many in the US would select a strategy that would level Afghanistan by using a "kill them all" approach. On the other hand, the measured approach (only attacking the Taliban and Al Qaeda) takes away from the radical Islamic position. An alternative strategy would be to flow heavy conventional forces to Uzbekistan, conduct a deliberate attack to the south and pound the Taliban with armor and artillery forces. Obviously this course of action would lead to a totally different set of tactics and operational art than we have seen to date in Afghanistan while still targeting the critical Taliban identity.

## **CONCLUSION**

While Army War College students have been introduced to a new collegiate environment to study strategic leadership, this paper has shown that it may not be some new body of knowledge that students at the Army War College must master to be strategic leaders. A closer analysis of the Clausewitzian trinity indicates that all conflict can be thought of as the complex interaction of passion, reason and chance. While the media, the United Nations, Congress and international agencies are just a few of the

variables that strategic leaders must consider, their only relevancy is in how they effect the interaction of the primordial trinity.

We also looked at the levels of warfare with their inherently confusing definitions. Relating back to Clausewitz we see that our definitions appear to apply at all levels of warfare and result in confusion. The proposed new definitions provide some clarity as to what we are referring to when we attempt to differentiate between tactical, operational and strategic. Tactics involve the effects of weapons, operational art involve the effect and sequencing of formations, strategy involves the allocation and timing of resources.

Finally, we introduced the identity concept and its role in the formulation of strategy. Strategy is the considered use of the political, economic, military and informational elements of national power. Often our efforts to produce strategy only look at concrete items such as financial institutions, armed forces, diplomatic agreements, coalitions and other such tangible activities as the means to a political objective. This paper introduces another critical factor that must be considered. This is the identifiable ideology that forms the basis for action of our adversaries. This ideology is the source of inputs and outputs to the primordial trinity of war, which feeds the will for aggression or feeds the desire for submission. Without a clear understanding of this great force, most strategies will fail before they begin.

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Joint Vision 2001, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 2000, page 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary, page 378.
- <sup>3</sup> Joint Vision 2020, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 2000, page 3
- <sup>4</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War. Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Perot, Princeton, New Jersey. University of Princeton Press. 1976, page 75
- <sup>5</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 75.
- <sup>6</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 75.
- <sup>7</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 89.
- <sup>8</sup> Micheal D. Barbaro, The Iran-Iraq War of Exhaustion: The Result of the Paradoxical Trinity, SAMS Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, Second Term 88-89, p. 41.
- <sup>9</sup> David Jablonsky, lecture on WWI in Bliss Hall, 20 September 2001, he referred to the tension between all three elements of the Clausewitz trinity and that there was an imbalance in all three. This same thought process was seen also during personal observations while attending instruction at Command and General Staff College, the School of Advanced military Studies (SAMS) and seminar and Bliss Hall instruction at the Army War College as well as in Barbero's monograph listed above.
- <sup>10</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 89.
- <sup>11</sup> Figure 2 is taken from class notes on military theory from the 1993-1994 session of the School of Advanced Military studies.
- <sup>12</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 87
- <sup>13</sup> Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary. P. 1235.
- <sup>14</sup> The Holy Bible, The Scofield Study Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized King James Version, Rev R.C. Scofield, D.D. ed, Oxford University Press, New York, 1945, page 1044. Explanatory note 2 expounds on the literal translation of the names given to God the Son, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. It states "The word is in the singular, the 'name,' not names. Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the final name of the one true God. It affirms (1) That God is one. (2) That he subsists in a personality which is threefold...(3) The conjunction in one name of the Three affirms equality and oneness in substance.
- <sup>15</sup> Edward J. Villacres and Christopher Bassford, "Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity", in Parameters, U.S. Army Quarterly, Vol XXV. No 3. Autumn 1995, pp. 9-18. The authors take on the institutional interpretation of the trinity head on with an up front assertion on page 9 that the army, government and the people are not the trinity, but those I listed. They then go on to attempt to interact policy into the equation, which so many theorist have difficulty doing, by introducing a revised trinity of forces they referred to as irrational forces, non-rational forces and rationality. I think if we just stick to reason, then we have a force that act on all three entities of government, people and army as well as squad, platoon, battalions and corps.
- <sup>16</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 89

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<sup>17</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 89

<sup>18</sup> Daniel P. Bolger, Savage Peace. Americans at war on the 1990s, Presido Press, 1995. P, 167-219. The for our placing marines in Beriut, both political and humanitarian are covered in detail as well as a lengthy discussion of the scores of things that happened almost by happenstance are discussed in detail. A classic examination of how passion and chance can impact a military operation.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Allard, Somalia operations: Lessons Learned, National Defense University Press, Ft. McNair. This book goes into lengthy analysis of the various reasons, changes in conditions, missions, roles and responsibility that interacted to cause the loss of 17 soldiers in combat. Another classic military example of the complex interaction of reason, passion and chance.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Allard, Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned, National Defense University Press, Ft. McNair, Washington D.C.1995, page 20.

<sup>21</sup> Jablonsky, US Military Doctrine and the Revolution in Military Affairs, ", in Parameters, U.S. Army Quarterly, Vol XXIV. No 3. Autumn 1994, p24.

<sup>22</sup> Joint Pub 5-0, Joint Chief of Staff, Washington D.C., 13 April 1995. Page GL-12.

<sup>23</sup> Joint Pub 5-0, page GL-10.

<sup>24</sup> Joint Pub 5-0, page GL-11.

<sup>25</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, page 142, 143.

<sup>26</sup> Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, G. & C. Merriam and Company, Springfield MA, 1981, page 1141 for strategy and page 1177 for tactics.

<sup>27</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, page 128

<sup>28</sup> Orlando Patterson, Ethnic Chauvinism, Stein and Day: New York, 1978, page 22.

<sup>29</sup> Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, G. & C. Merriam and Company, Springfield MA, 1981, page 389.

<sup>30</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Perot, Princeton, New Jersey, University of Princeton Press. 1976. Page 90.

<sup>31</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, page 92.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, page 89. The primordial trinity often referred to in U.S. Army text is usually described by the three entities that he assigns to the dominant tendencies, government (reason), people (passion) and Army (chance). These entities are not the trinity, however. The trinity of warfare is the primordial forces of reason, passion and chance.

<sup>33</sup> A National Security Strategy for a Global Age, The White House, U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2000. Page 36.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Kellet, Combat Motivation, Kluwer Publishing: Boston, 1982. Page 107.

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<sup>35</sup> Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Samuel B. Griffith Ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 1963, page 84.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, page 109.

<sup>37</sup> Sun Tzu, page 109.

<sup>38</sup> Webster's, page 1141.

<sup>39</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, page 75.

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