

*Carl von Clausewitz and the Invention of the Conservative
Nation-State: Retrieving Instrumental Reflexivity in the Strategic
Tradition*

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The chap has a common sense that borders on brilliance.

– Marx on Clausewitz²

Every social science scholar and military officer has heard of Carl von Clausewitz. He is probably the most renowned strategist of the Western world. His axioms, such as *war is the continuation of politics by other means*, are as common as they are faultily comprehended. As argued herein there is much more in Clausewitz's legacy than what could be inferred at first view from the simplified portrait that is being imparted in most military curriculum. Through his active participation in the

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² Marx to Engels, 11 January 1858, Marx-Engels Werke, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1963), XXIX, 252 (quoted in Bernard Semmel, *Marxism and the Science of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 66.

intellectual and institutional construction of the modern nation-state, Clausewitz produced a body of texts that position him arguably as a key representative of what could be labelled as a 'suppressed reflexive tradition in strategic studies.' Through retrieving the theoretical cornerstone of this hidden tradition, this article contends that Clausewitz is a forbearer of instrumental reflexive thinking applied to the production of innovative strategic knowledge—a feature too often lacking in contemporary critical scholarships about war and social reforms.

What were the specificities of Clausewitz strategic knowledge? Why was it so efficacious in fighting Revolutionary France and subversive within the Prussian polity? Answering those questions allows for better understanding how some exceptionally innovative practitioners used reflexivity to produce powerful knowledge capable of reshaping the social world.

To answer those questions this paper points at key elements that characterised the outstandingly innovative strategic thought of the few officers who oversaw the creation and organisation of the first conservative nation-state—that is, the radical reformation of Prussia after its appalling defeat in the face of Napoleon's Grande Armée in 1807. Prussia not only developed and organised modern warfare, it also served as an initial prototype for the dissemination of national states around the globe. Studying this specific case from a contextualist historical perspective is especially heuristic as it allows for problematising radical innovation by state reformers and strategists. Indeed, the strategic thought of the officers involved in this *revolution from above* of the Prussian State is accessible to us in great detail through Carl von Clausewitz's prolific writings. As such, a revisionist analysis of his life and writings will allow us to bring about the central contribution of this article—that is, to highlight the central role of reflexivity in radically innovative strategic thought and in the construction of the first conservative nation-state.³

³ The argument is developed from an examination of highly informed contextualist studies of Clausewitz's participation in the reforms of the Prussian polity *circa* 1807. See: Antulio Echevarria II, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); Peter Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War: Prussia 1806* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); Hew Strachan and Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, 2007); Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle: The Political Theory of War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Hew Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz's On War: A Biography* (London: Atlantic, 2007). Those authors have presented authoritative understandings of

Our analysis outlines how some officers instrumentalised the subversive ideas of early liberalism in order to save their antiquated dynastic State from geopolitical threats. The analysis focuses on key elements of Clausewitz's life and work that allowed him to think beyond the *spirit of his time* and to participate in developing a knowledge powerful enough to shape the western world through the victory of the conservative states of Europe over the international ambitions of Revolutionary France. Reformer officers, such as Clausewitz, conceptualised and supervised the Prussian 'conservative revolution' of 1807 that allowed the dynastic order to repel the armed revolution arriving from France and, ultimately, to generate the global inter-national order. Out of an ambition to defeat Napoléon's Grande Armée a couple of men created original social forms that ultimately gave birth to the first conservative nation-state. As such, the Prussian strategists who were part of Clausewitz's circles not only foresaw the future of war and global politics; they produced the knowledge that actively participated in shaping the emerging order.

The article first examines how, after the complete defeat of Prussia by Napoleon's Grande Armée in 1806, Clausewitz, and other Prussian officers, gained a deep understanding of (un)changing politics' determining influence on war's character by appraising the contrast between the rapid evolution of Revolutionary France versus the rigid Prussian dynastic State. The article then presents how Clausewitz dedicated his best years to impulse social and military reforms from within the institutions of the Prussian State. The article concludes by underscoring why state institutions (and their organic academic literature) seem to remain so inimical to the critical practices here identified in spite of their clear advantages in contentious times.

Clausewitz's ideas by considering them in their own environment. The works of Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle: The Political Theory of War*; Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*; Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*; and Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz's On War* are the leading secondary sources used for this paper's analysis. They considered the battles of Jena/Auerstedt (1806), the Russian Campaign (1812) and Waterloo (1815) as the key references that principally influenced Clausewitz. This paper focuses on the six years that followed the Jena/Auerstedt battles during which Clausewitz was working among a reformer faction of the Prussian military.

Clausewitz's Reading of the Great Catastrophe of Jena-Auerstedt (1806)

To the young Clausewitz, who witnessed the confrontation between the armies of the new and old orders, the battles at Jena and Auerstedt in 1806 proved that the Prussian forces' main problem was the inadequacy of the rigidified mind-set of the senior Prussian generals who remained incapable of adopting their tactics and strategies to the changing form of warfare.⁴ When analysing Prussian strategy, the first problem confronting Clausewitz was the impact of conservative ideology at the tactical level and how it impeded a society-centred study of warfare. In these battles "[t]wo systems of warfare clashed and a conventional, time-tested way of raising troops, of training and fighting, was not only defeated", but "demolished."⁵ In Clausewitz's view, the *great catastrophe*—as he referred to the battles of Jena-Auerstedt—incontestably marked the defeat of Frederick the Great's intractable military tradition in the face of Napoleon's flexible method of waging warfare.⁶

After considering the events surrounding Jena-Auerstedt—which resulted in Prussia becoming a French satellite—Clausewitz concluded that there were two critical factors at work.⁷ The first factor was the social changes brought about by the French Revolution. These changes were exploited by Napoleon, he considered, and created the necessary conditions for the far-reaching transformations in warfare. The second factor was the Prussian military and political leadership's failure to understand the socio-historical importance of the changes brought by the French Revolution. The military problem of Prussia had deep roots. He argued in his assessment of the defeat's causes that "the creative force of Frederick the Great had disappeared from the forms he gave to the State since a long time; the essence had faded away and the government's gaze was uniquely directed towards those forms."⁸ Instead of reacting creatively with transformations of their own, their myopia ultimately led the Prussians to hold fast to Frederick the Great's outmoded dogmas. Clausewitz later recounted this episode in his

⁴ See: Gordon Alexander Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 26; Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*, p. 17; Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 10; and Charles Edward White, *The Prussian Army, 1640-1871* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), p. 174.

⁵ Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

⁷ Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*, p. 17.

⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *Clausewitz: Notes sur la Prusse dans sa Grande Catastrophe 1806* (Paris: Champ libre, 1976), p. 3.

analysis of the *Great Catastrophe*: “some old men, shrivelled in spirit during a long peace, with some ideas bound up with red tape, could find no solution.”⁹ Conformism in the management of the State ultimately led to disaster in battle as he explains in *On War*:

When in 1806 the Prussian general [...] plunged into the open jaws of disaster by using Frederick the Great’s oblique order of battle, it was not just a case of a style that had outlived its usefulness but the most extreme poverty of the imagination.¹⁰

Clausewitz’s analysis of the Prussian defeat at Jena and Auerstedt pointed him towards an examination of ideology, strategy and their constituent politics. Through the experience of the Napoleonic Wars, he noted, many strategists throughout Europe understood that “the art of war, long accustomed to a narrow range of possibilities, had been surprised by options that lay beyond this range.”¹¹ As noted in the passages above, Clausewitz was primarily interested in how flexible and creative a commander could be when adapting to changes in the forms of States and their impacts on warfare. In sum, Clausewitz’s paying of attention to the socio-political underpinnings of military thought was already observable in his early writings.

The relationship between ideology and strategy was not the only idea germinating in Clausewitz’s thoughts after his Jena-Auerstedt experience. His direct observation of the revolutionary French polity prompted him to question the influence of society over the changing character of war. Indeed, after his capture by the French Army, Clausewitz had to accompany Prince August during a year of captivity in France. This journey took him from Nancy to Soissons and finally to Paris. Clausewitz observed that the French mobilisation did not only concern young men fit for service in the army. All French citizens were called upon for permanent military service, as decreed in the *levée en masse* [mass mobilisation]. Women and married men mobilised in the production of supplies, and invalids and elders publicly shouted their hatred of the Republic’s enemies, reinforcing enthusiasm.¹² His observation of the *levée en masse*

⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *Excerpts from Notes on Prussia in Her Grand Catastrophe of 1806*, trans. Col. Conrad H. Lanza (Fort Leavenworth: The General Service Schools Press, 1922), p. 599.

¹⁰ Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 16.

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 609.

¹² Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 18.

underlined the inseparability of moral strength and its ideological and emotional underpinnings.¹³ Moral strength—rooted in a deeply felt identity—emerged as equally important for both war preparation and material assets. Clausewitz observed that a revolutionised polity interlocked recruitment, morale and nationalism.

During this period, Clausewitz realised that if he were to have his revenge, it would have to come through a nascent German nation, since the unappealing and rigid Prussian State would not adapt to defeat a post-Revolutionary French Army.¹⁴ It was not the disaster of Jena-Auerstedt as such that pushed Clausewitz to shift his attention away from the dynastic Prussian State towards the “German nation as a subject waging war”.¹⁵ Rather, it was his deduction that Napoleon’s victories rested on mobilising the French nation as *soldats-citoyens* [citizen soldiers]; a conclusion that motivated Clausewitz to study ways to construct a German nation. Considered as a means to intensify the war effort, this instrumental nationalist ideology became a key element of his strategic thought.

Indeed, Clausewitz’s stay in France convinced him of the need for a theory of war that could prepare the Prussian State and the Prussian society to wage a new form of warfare. Clausewitz saw in Napoleon’s method of warfare the first socio-historical instance of an ‘absolute war’; this was, for Clausewitz, a war that had been freed from political, diplomatic and social constraints.¹⁶ During the following years of reforms, Clausewitz tried to construct the necessary conditions, from within the Prussian State, to replicate what he first observed in 1793 during his first battle experience against the French: “the colossal weight of the whole French people, unhinged by political fanaticism, [which] came crushing down us.”¹⁷ Defining the military ideal as an unrestricted form of warfare, Clausewitz identified the causes of defeat in his later *Observations* as “social and cultural conditions and attitudes as much as inadequate military and civil institutions.”¹⁸ He accepted the need for a collective ontological shift towards some of the key ideas of liberalism not among military commanders but also within the political leadership and the Prussian populace. He considered different

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See: Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*; and Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 18.

¹⁵ Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 18. See also: Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz’s On War*, p. 47.

¹⁶ Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 139.

¹⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 518 as quoted in Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz’s On War*, p. 37.

¹⁸ Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 75.

possible strategies to bring about this new military potential within the Prussian/German polity. As it was, the traditional socio-political, economic and military order remained unable to bring about this success, encountering only defeat when confronted with the new warfare methods emanating from the transformed French polity. Thus, Clausewitz reflected on a 'German revolution'—not because he was fundamentally motivated by the people's emancipation or by drafting a constitution but rather as a means to create military success.

Clausewitz endeavoured in problematizing Prussian institutions, the accepted dynastic ideology and other social norms in order to increase the military power of his State.

On the whole, his visceral enmity against France caused Clausewitz to embrace an extremely radical—if not paradoxical—position for a Prussian officer. He remained loyal and attached to the King whilst understanding the necessity of Prussian revolutionary transformations in order to prevail in geopolitical contentions. In May 1809 he wrote "In this great and general revolution (which, it must be said in passing, need not be a French Revolution) [...] only kings able to grasp the true spirit of this great reform could retain power."¹⁹

As Aron²⁰ stated, this was "the contradiction felt by the conservative in a revolutionary epoch." Although Clausewitz instrumentally embraced revolutionary liberal ideas, he remained motivated by a desire for revenge against the French. It was the forces that stemmed out of revolutionary socio-historical transformations that interested him, not revolutionary ideals *per se*. Based on his reading of Jena, Clausewitz focused his attention on German society and achieving military victory through liberal institutional transformations (e.g. doctrinal and social reforms). His reflexive intellect brought him to realise the necessity to constitute a new collective self against the French other. In consequence, his ideal and practical objective became to give free rein to the latent

¹⁹ Raymond Aron, *Clausewitz: Philosopher of War*, trans. Christine Booker and Norman Stone (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

energy of the German nation to materialise an absolute war against the French invaders.²¹

Nevertheless, Clausewitz was not the only one to develop innovative ideas as a result of his experiences. Before Clausewitz was ever heard of in Berlin, a faction of the Prussian *intelligentsia* had banded together because they believed that “military reform went hand-in-hand with political reform.”²² The Revolutionary Wars had convinced Clausewitz’s intellectual mentor, Gerhard Johan David Scharnhorst, of the need for revisiting dynastic dogma and for societal reforms rooted in Enlightenment ideas. As early as 1798, General Scharnhorst had published an article—*The General Reasons for the Successes of the French in the Revolutionary Wars*—which reflected this mind-set. This document laid out the context surrounding the French Army’s institutional transformation and declared it a product of social change.²³

To Scharnhorst, the future success of the Prussian military depended on giving the “people rights before the law,” “emancipating the serfs” and “providing universal systems of education.”²⁴ Scharnhorst’s strategic vision “had imbibed the ideas of the Enlightenment in a military context.”²⁵ Reformers believed that “[l]iberalizing Prussia

²¹ Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, pp. 26, 147. Jena, and the shock it provoked in Prussia, taught him that war could spur the transformations which were absolutely necessary to defeat France (Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz’s On War*, p. 76). Clausewitz regarded war as an instrumental step to revolutionise society and prepare it for the confrontation against the *Grande Armée*. In a letter from late 1806, Clausewitz exposed his favoured path for bringing about change in the Prussian State, its society and in the rest of Germany: “You want a Revolution. I am not opposed to this, but will it not be much easier to bring about this revolution in the civic constitution, and in the constitution of the state, in the midst of the movement and vibration of all parts that is occasioned by war?” (Clausewitz quoted in Herberg-Rothe *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 19). Here Clausewitz expressed an *existential understanding of war*; that is, war as a means to transform, or indeed constitute, the identity of his polity. Not only did Clausewitz consider national and revolutionary ideals as means to be used towards the end of military victory against Napoleon, but he also believed that war could facilitate these deep societal transformations. Clausewitz identified the unlimited generative power of war in its dialectical movement with its constituting polities; changing societies shape war but warfare also transforms their constituent polities. For a contemporary analysis of the generative power of war, see: Charles Tilly, “Comment La Guerre Fait l’État et Inversement,” *Contrainte et Capital Dans La Formation de l’Europe* (Paris: Aubier, 1992), pp. 118–162; and Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton, “Powers of War: Fighting, Knowledge, and Critique,” *International Political Sociology* 5, 2 (2011): pp. 126–43.

²² White, *The Prussian Army*, p. 193.

²³ Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, pp. 80–81.

²⁴ White, *The Prussian Army*, p. 193.

²⁵ Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz’s On War*, p. 40.

would save it through reinvigoration, and the pay-off would be on the battlefield.”²⁶ Scharnhorst, for example, was not a democrat but believed that democracy “made military sense” as “citizens with individual rights would fight to protect those rights.”²⁷ Scharnhorst revealed this instrumental view of liberalism when he argued in favour of independent skirmisher units:

The conservatives asked, what would keep soldiers from running away? The response came in the form of political freedom. Soldiers would remain at their posts, the reformers argued, not only as a result of discipline but because they were loyal to the state, the state that guaranteed their political freedom. The argument polarised the reformers and the conservatives. Reformers embraced democracy not as a Jeffersonian ideal but because it increased military effectiveness. Conservatives rejected increased military effectiveness in the name of political stability. It was most ironic.²⁸

This irony was shared by an isolated few. The same paradox was at the heart of most social reforms being considered by Prussian political and military circles during these years.²⁹ Clausewitz held these paradoxical views himself and the years of institutional reforms they brought in Prussia, were critically important in his life and writings.³⁰ This paradox, it is here argued, is a clear illustration of the intrinsic subversive power of a reflexive approach to society and ideas from an instrumental perspective. As the next section shows, the reformer officers—changed into ‘conservative revolutionaries’—produced a body of strategic knowledge that both questioned the traditional ideas and social forms while offering most efficacious advice to protect them in the volatile geopolitical context of early-19th-century Europe.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ White, *The Prussian Army*, p. 196.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 202.

²⁹ Guy Stanton Ford, *Stein and the era of Reform in Prussia, 1807-1815* (Gloucester: Smith, 1965), pp. 137-145.

³⁰ Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*, p. 80.

The Years of Reforms: Revolution from Above

After the defeats at Jena and Auerstedt, the conservative officers lost influence over the Prussian King whilst the reformers gained the upper hand at court.³¹ In October 1807, the King created a Ministry of Reform and put Baron Karl vom und zum Stein—well-known to the King for his unbendable advocacy for significant reforms—at the head of this enterprise. From October 1807 until November 1808, this institution remained under Stein’s leadership. During this period, the Ministry of Reform was composed of three main committees. One was the Immediate Commission, which served as an interim government and oversaw the reform process. Second was the Commission for Completion of the Peace, which was responsible for finalising the ‘peace’ terms with the French. Third was the Military Reorganisation Commission (MRC), which was responsible for preparing military reforms.³² During the Stein government’s short tenure, reformers attempted to provoke a profound and radical socio-economic transformation of Prussia—in other words, a *revolution from above*.³³

Clausewitz’s early writings reflected the spirit of those Prussian intellectual officers (turned into bureaucrats) who attempted to reform their State, army and society in the first decades of the 19th century. Having participated in previous campaigns against the French Revolutionary State, they understood many of the challenges posed by the Napoleonic era, such as the swift development regarding the tactical use of light infantry. General Scharnhorst led this small group of officers that constituted Stein’s Military Reorganisation Commission (MRC). Scharnhorst explained his purpose to Clausewitz regarding the MRC in a letter of November 1807: “To destroy the old forms, remove the ties of prejudice, guide and nurture our revival without inhibiting its [the nation’s] free growth—our work cannot go further than that.”³⁴ It could be argued that this intent to brush away past political and military ontologies situates his in the reflexive tradition. The fact that three of the six commission members had no documented noble background “did not turn them into radical innovators, but it was

³¹ White, *The Prussian Army*, p. 227.

³² See: Marion W. Gray, “Prussia in Transition: Society and Politics under the Stein Reform Ministry of 1808,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society New Series* 76, 1 (1986): pp. 75-76; Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, pp. 85-87.

³³ See: Gray, “Prussia in Transition,” p. 8; Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003).

³⁴ Quoted in: Peter Paret, *Yorck and the Era of the Prussian Reform, 1807-1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 119.

hardly without influence.”³⁵ These men were outsiders within the officer corps still composed of a vast majority of noblemen and had personally experienced the restrictions of the dynastic State in military affairs.

The reformist government sought very broad liberal reforms for the Prussian polity, advocating for transformations beyond military reforms with the goal of transforming an antiquated and rigid aristocratic body into a society of free citizens.³⁶ Indeed, for the reformers, the necessary changes would affect many aspects of the Prussian polity, including agriculture, the nobility’s privileges, education, military discipline and even the very foundation of the legitimacy of the monarch’s rule. Some proposals were purely military (e.g. army organisation) while other measures pertained to the social and political spheres (e.g. manpower sources or officer selection); still others pertained to both (e.g. military discipline).³⁷ The reformers also attempted—with limited success—to increase citizens’ relationships with the State at different levels through proposing to create official instances of representation.³⁸ Reformers even attempted, unsuccessfully, to create a constitutional system that would replace absolutism. This proposition proved intolerable to conservative circles; “even with the threat of a French invasion” the elite would not agree to limit its privileges for the sake of military imperatives.³⁹

As a consequence, the reformers devoted much thought to revolutionising society without frontally confronting the King’s dynastic order. They found within the nascent nationalist ideology an adequate replacement narrative for revolutionary ideas as a foundation for transforming the Prussian military.⁴⁰ This is a blatant example of an instrumental use of reflexivity in order to generate new ontologies in order to adapt not only organisations, doctrines, and capabilities but, also, the very ideas to think of them. In this line of thought, and as an answer to the dilemma of a reformers’ conservative revolution, they settled for creating an ‘educational dictatorship’ [Erziehungsdiktatur] in order to diffuse this discourse.⁴¹ Clausewitz and other reformers argued for

³⁵ Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 86.

³⁶ Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz’s On War*, pp. 47-48.

³⁷ Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, pp. 87, 92-97.

³⁸ Gray, “Prussia in Transition,” p. 118.

³⁹ White, *The Prussian Army*, p. 205.

⁴⁰ See: Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 102; White, *The Prussian Army*, pp. 231-232.

⁴¹ Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz’s Puzzle*, p. 20.

mandatory military service and public education; temporary military service and the education system were meant to disseminate national identity. The acceptance of the nationalist liberal ideology was in itself a way to enhance the military power of the Prussian State.

Indeed, the reformers imported the idea of using the nationalist narrative for mobilisation from Revolutionary France in order to improve the Prussian army's fighting capabilities. However, it was a nationalism stripped of its revolutionary radicalism, acceptable to the royalists since national cohesion beyond class did not necessarily threaten the monarch's power. Nonetheless, this undermined liberal discourse revised the relationship between the people and the State—the latter becoming the authoritative institutional embodiment of the nation. This new contract asked for more from the populace than the formal "Frederician monarchy's demands for the obedient and competent execution of orders."⁴² The population's duty to serve the monarch became conditional on the latter's embodiment of the nation's interest. The people were to defend their *nation* with vigour and enthusiasm; in return, the King was to devote himself to the ethical principles inherent in the German national ideal. While promoting this new contract, reformers understood the role of a deeply felt identity and ideological conviction in war.

Clausewitz wrote at the time that military reforms rested "on a new concept of the nation, a changed social consciousness, new economic thinking, and an altered relationship to policy—both in its assumptions and in its objectives."⁴³ In the eyes of the reformers, all these liberal transformations were meant to create vivid societal forces and prepare Prussia for war.⁴⁴ Clausewitz's mind, considering these social reforms solely from the point of view of military efficacy, was guided by the same principle as the other reformers: "[s]ince the Peace of Tilsit anyone wishing to restore the Prussian State should think of nothing except preparations for a renewal of the struggle, about that and about nothing else."⁴⁵

For a time, the Dynast favoured the State reforms even if they were in contradiction with the nobles' interests, driven by the need to create a new form of

⁴² Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, p. 96.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz's On War*, p. 47.

⁴⁵ Clauswitz, as quoted in Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, p. 215.

warfare. Land reforms were of special interest to the reformers as they could allow freeing the Prussian population remaining under servile domination. Obviously, this issue touched the core of the dynastic order. Most importantly, the *Edict of Emancipation of October 1807* brought serfdom, feudal privileges and many formal class distinctions within the State to an end. At that time, the reformers tried replacing the Frederician corporate class structure's rigid hold on the economy with Great Britain's capitalist liberal model of social mobility. This would supplant the Prussian "economy of a land-bound peasantry, of artisans tied to guilds, and of a rigid barrier restricting the flow of capital between cities and the countryside", and nurture a capitalist agriculture.⁴⁶

Stein's government enacted reforms to free agriculture from the restrictive semi-feudal corporatist system by widening crop markets and the commercialisation of agriculture. Among many other market hindrances, the corporatist system restricted capital flows from urban to rural areas and assured that land management remained controlled by the aristocracy. Through the abolition of entail's⁴⁷ juridical foundations, Stein's policies allowed the dissolution of feudal large estates while encouraging individual properties. This passage away from serfdom led to a two-fold division of feudal estates. The first half remained the property of aristocrats—large estates exploited by tenants—and the other half was concentrated into the ownership of the most prosperous peasantry. The process of emancipation concluded with increased urbanisation as it provoked the displacement of an important proportion of the remaining serfs from their lands. Concretely, the Prussian *revolution from above* created the necessary conditions to institute the British economic model, with rural capitalism and productivity gains in agricultural production.⁴⁸

The liberal ideology adopted by the reformers for its military efficacy, also brought profound changes in the military institutions. General Scharnhorst became

⁴⁶ Gray, "Prussia in Transition," pp. 1, 9. See also: Ellen M. Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002); and Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*.

⁴⁷ An entail refers to the "limitation of the inheritance of property to certain heirs over a number of generations" (Oxford Dictionary 2013).

⁴⁸ Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, p. 12. In fact, commercialisation of agriculture was a socio-historical process already well underway at the time of the Reform Party. In 1805, Prussia supplied almost half of the grain imports needed by Britain in its initial phase of industrialisation. When Napoleon closed external trade with Britain in November 1806 through the Continental Blockade, he dealt a fatal blow to the highly dependent Prussian rural economy. In this context, the reformers tried to bring the liberal agricultural transition even further along (see Gray, "Prussia in Transition," p. 25).

Minister of War and Head of the Military Reorganisation Commission (MRC). Clausewitz, acting as First Assistant, helped create a national army inspired by the French model that defeated Prussia's army in 1806. The reformers had established equal rights to officer positions on the basis of merit in 1807: "[o]nly an army made up of all classes could introduce to society a greater national awareness, help join dynasty and nation, and exploit popular energies."⁴⁹ The MRC also recommended the complete abolition of physical punishment.⁵⁰ Scharnhorst's views on third ranks composed of skirmishers became official doctrine in 1809, "with repeated warnings that in their training and employment everything formal and mechanistic should be discarded in favor of naturalness and the free play of the individual intelligence."⁵¹ At the junction of the political and the military, these instructions delineated a novel tactical system for the Prussian Army.

The reforms realised another of Scharnhorst's projects. While outwardly respecting the limit of 42,000 soldiers imposed at Tilsit, Scharnhorst repeatedly proposed the introduction of a universal military service.⁵² He adapted the French military system in a way that was suitable for the dynastic polity: the National Guard. Following a short period of training, poor soldiers were transferred into a popular reserve—the *Landwehr*⁵³—backed by the whole male population—the *Landsturm*—while the wealthy and educated formed volunteer *Jäger* companies.⁵⁴ This allowed Prussia to prepare a large army despite the French military restrictions imposed at Tilsit.⁵⁵ Even so, Scharnhorst's project went beyond merely increasing the numerical capacity of Prussia's defeated army. Due to nobility opposition, the reformers' idea of a universal conscription—regardless of social class—would only be adopted in 1813, and only for the war's duration. Although Scharnhorst intended it to be a permanent

⁴⁹ Paret, *Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform*, p. 134.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁵² H. M. E. Bruncker, *Story of the Jena Campaign 1806* (London: Foster Groom and Co., 1913), p. 4.

⁵³ The term refers in German to the defence of the country. In 19th-century-Prussia, it referred to an insurrectional militia aimed at defending the country. It was instituted by a royal edict on 17 March 1813 and constituted by all serviceable Prussian men between 18 and 45 years old not enrolled in the regular army.

⁵⁴ Paret, *Yorck and the Era of the Prussian Reform*, p. 137.

⁵⁵ Bruncker, *Story of the Jena Campaign 1806*, p. 5.

measure, this system fulfilled his aim of mobilising “the physical and moral energies of the whole nation during the period it was in place.”⁵⁶

Clausewitz held his first teaching position from October 1810 until the spring of 1812. In his lectures on ‘small wars’, Clausewitz presented Scharnhorst’s flexible tactical approaches to future Prussian generals. Scharnhorst, in turn, integrated part of his lectures into the army’s new regulations.⁵⁷ The *Reglement of 1812* established these new battle methods in Prussian doctrine and pulled them into a coherent system:

The battalion commander arranges the disposition of the companies and guides their movements in general. The company commanders use the specific advantages that the terrain affords their purpose, they decide which squads or sections are to skirmish, they reinforce or reduce the skirmish line according to the course of the action, choose an advantageous position for the closed sections from which these can easily support the skirmish line, etc. A fusilier company must be trained to develop a skirmish line quickly from any closed formation, and again to reform in line or in column.⁵⁸

To increase tactical suppleness, command and control was moved from the battalion to the company level. Troops were taught to “deploy in depth, in a series of mobile, mutually supporting skirmish swarms, squares, columns, and lines” rather than in a one-dimensional and rigid linear front.⁵⁹ This new military doctrine synthesised the larger liberal reforms designed to transform the Prussian polity. Comparable to the changes in Prussian society at large, the battlefield served as a place to celebrate individual valour and intelligence, engender national sentiment and abandon Frederician orthodoxies.

At a time when the Grande Armée was diminishing tactical flexibility and the proportion of *tirailleurs* to favour maximum concentration of mass into shock columns, the Prussian forces abandoned Frederician lines and revolutionised their doctrine. They further developed early Napoleonic strategy by empowering the lower levels and

⁵⁶ Scharnhorst and Gneisenau as quoted in Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, p. 187; and Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 90.

⁵⁷ Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, p. 187; and Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 90.

⁵⁸ *Prussian ‘Reglement’ of 1812* as quoted in Paret, *Yorck and the Era of the Prussian Reform*, p. 186.

⁵⁹ Paret, *Yorck and the Era of the Prussian Reform*, p. 152.

increasing tactical flexibility. It was this revolutionised Prussian army inspired by liberal ideals and fighting in open-order which would defeat the French armies from 1813 to 1815 and dominate 19th-century Europe.⁶⁰

As a whole, Clausewitz learnt a great deal from the other reformers while aiding Scharnhorst.⁶¹ Looking at neighbouring polities, these intellectual soldiers attempted to both develop a citizenship culture and foster national identity like the French, and to create economic reforms like the British.⁶² Transferring these aspirations into writing enabled Clausewitz to develop his thoughts on liberating war from the limitations set by a rigid Frederician polity and ideology. Above all else, the reformers' objective was to create an idealised German nation State that could wage an absolute war against Napoleon. This belief was the core of the Clausewitzian principle stating that forms of warfare result from the nature of the contending polities—and their underpinning ideologies.⁶³ Years later, Clausewitz wrote on this topic:

This unity lies in the concept that war is only a branch of political activity; that it is in no sense autonomous. [...] We maintain [...] 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 radically different. In essence this intercourse continues independently of the means it employs. The main lines along which military events progress, and to which they are restricted, are political lines that continue throughout the war into the subsequent peace.⁶⁴

This passage, which contains his most famous axiom, was not the result of Clausewitz's innate genius. Rather it brilliantly depicted debates Clausewitz had observed during his participation in the reform party. Although Clausewitz carries the distinction of being the philosopher of war, the inspirational thesis above was, in fact, tacitly understood by

⁶⁰ See: Paret, *Yorck and the Era of the Prussian Reform*, pp. 210-211.

⁶¹ Strachan, *Carl von Clausewitz's On War*, p. 48.

⁶² This form of translation (isomorphism) as a military tradition is a practical example of a practice that facilitated the use of reflexive thinking. It is seen as normal to borrow ideas that work for others no matter their label. The paradox is that most of these 'others' are enemy and that, by taking something from the enemy, your identity gets closer to your enemy.

⁶³ Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 119.

⁶⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 605.

a number of his military colleagues. Prussian military reformers who were truly aware of the self-imposed limitations resulting from the conservative mind-set and able to understand the effect social transformation had on the military could, in turn, create the most innovative proposals for state reform. They constantly questioned ideas and social norms in order to prepare for war.

On balance, it is these critical inclinations that allowed the reformers to produce such innovative strategic propositions. Their experiences of war and reforms led them to problematise political ideas, state institutions and social forms in function of their potential impact on military efficacy. Those officers actively promoted the liberal ideas, a reorganisation of society and a united nation under the State against the accepted class based dynastic ideology. The institutional reforms aimed at changing the way in which the State and the population looked at each other through liberal concepts such as citizenship and constitution. The feudal lens of *transnational* classes was to be abandoned in order to facilitate the organisation of a nation in arms. Social reforms aimed at materialising these views.

The subversive strategic vision of the reformers was progressively institutionalised into open-ranks doctrines and liberalised state institutions.⁶⁵ However, these disruptive ideas faced strong opposition from the conservative sectors of the Prussian polity. Stein, Scharnhorst, Clausewitz and the other reform party members were motivated, and partly blinded, by nascent Prussian liberal nationalism. For these liberals—heirs of the Enlightenment—this “new political philosophy had hardly been tried, and its potential seemed boundless to the Prussian reformers”.⁶⁶ Due to their own exacerbated patriotism and hatred of the French, the reformers—including Clausewitz—had overestimated the dissemination of the national ideal within early-19th century Prussia.⁶⁷ In the post-Waterloo years, the idealist reformers realised the “bitter lessons of liberalism’s limitations: aristocracies do not fade away as a result of governmental edicts.”⁶⁸ Indeed, many of these plans never materialised—and some were never completely conceptualised—since Stein was removed from office after only thirteen months by his successors, who lacked his determination. Moreover, it is

⁶⁵ Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 102.

⁶⁶ Gray, “Prussia in Transition,” p. 11.

⁶⁷ Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, pp. 236-237.

⁶⁸ Gray, “Prussia in Transition,” p. 11.

important to note that the Prussian reformers' disruptive propositions rapidly clashed with the parochial interests of the dynast and the nobility. Clausewitz, like the other reformers, had to face active opposition from these conservative circles. The reactionary forces actively sought to reverse the liberal reforms enacted because of war necessities.

Instrumental Reflexivity: A Suppressed Tradition in Strategic Studies

The reformers' ideas lost currency in Prussia and throughout Europe after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo.⁶⁹ Dynastic rulers attempted to restore 18th-century domestic and international order as much as possible. The reactionary classes considered the restoration of their privileges more important than potential gains that could stem from the nationalist energies as the French Revolutionaries unveiled them. Nobody had forgotten that the new French method of warfare was specifically designed to reverse the dynastic society/interstate order.⁷⁰

Reform reversals began quickly. In 1816, just one year after Waterloo, the proportion of the peasantry allowed to gain ownership was reduced by two-thirds and shifted in favour of the most prosperous.⁷¹ The Prussian State also countered Scharnhorst's *soldats-citoyens* plan, through which absolutist subjects could become free citizens in exchange for defending their country.⁷² Frederick Wilhelm did not follow through on his promise to grant the constitution the reformers had been requesting since Jena.⁷³ The success of the war against Napoleon both proved the efficacy of the reforms and, paradoxically, re-empowered the conservative nobility, who hurried to bury the changes. The rhetoric of Prussian reform would not be heard again during Clausewitz's lifetime.

⁶⁹ Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics: 1763-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 517-582; Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 103; A. J. P. Taylor, *Europe from Napoleon to the Second International: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 91-104; White, *The Prussian Army, 1640-1871* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), pp. 271-292; and Anthony Wood, *Europe, 1815-1945* (New York: Longman, 1964), pp. 6-48.

⁷⁰ Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.94.

⁷¹ Gray, "Prussia in Transition," p. 152.

⁷² Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 103. Soon after his appointment as minister of war Scharnhorst died of an infected battle wound.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

The Prussian ideological shift back to conservatism impacted the military and the King's new favourites made every possible effort to reverse the reforms and return to a pre-Jena State.⁷⁴ The national élan reverted back to the "drill, ceremonial, and barracks-tone that had prevailed until 1806."⁷⁵ The reformed infantry *Reglement of 1812* was judged too simplistic, and the general staff returned to parade drills and all-encompassing war games. However, a few of the 1807–1813 military reforms, such as conscription and organisation, were left in place.⁷⁶

Nonetheless, the last episode of the Napoleonic Wars would later prove that the societal and military reforms that had been realised were efficacious in terms of their planned purpose: Prussia's geopolitical pre-eminence. After the external threat of Napoleon had been eliminated, the King and, behind him, the Prussian social forces of conservatism, reversed the now unnecessary reforms to bring back a more acceptable status quo. As Howard emphasised, the post-Napoleonic European military cursus and military writings generally disregarded the qualitative differences between *Ancien Régime* warfare and reformer-era Prussian warfare.⁷⁷ This was the result of the nobility's explicit efforts to obliterate the reformers' intellectual legacy.

Consequently, the Reformers' ideas—and a coherent reading of Clausewitz⁷⁸—were neglected for more than a century. The important thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries suffered from the effects of this planned amnesia. As Paret remarked, Count Schlieffen—Chief of the Imperial German General Staff at the turn of the 20th century—recognised the Prussian tactical inefficacy at Jena in 1806.⁷⁹ However, he concluded that the defeat was due to poor leadership, not out-dated doctrine: "To the assertion of the military reformers after 1806 that the army could not be modernized without changing society and State, Schlieffen a century later responded by emphasizing [military] strategy and leadership, which took the problem out of society and politics [...]. He may not have been aware of the extent to which ingrained beliefs affected his interpretations

⁷⁴ Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, p. 103.

⁷⁵ Paret, *Yorck and the Era of the Prussian Reform*, p. 220.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Howard. *War in European History*, p. 96.

⁷⁸ I refer here to the Clausewitz who warned against a tradition which "turned into a routine that denied changing times" (Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, p. 74) and advocated for social reforms for the sake of war preparation.

⁷⁹ Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, pp. 31–32.

of the present and past.” Those reading obliterated Clausewitz’s call for two critical practices; reworking one’s own ontological lens and diffusing new ontologies as essential dimensions of war making. In the image of Schlieffen’s reading, Clausewitz’s call to tear down the analytical barriers between war and civility remained unheard by many of his readers.⁸⁰ His reflexive legacy suppressed.

If some determinants of the production of innovative strategic knowledge may be identified from Clausewitz’s life, other determinants may work just the other way. Indeed, it remains important to underscore that reactionary forces in Europe actively erased from both the strategic tradition and military life the features that made the Prussian reformers such innovative strategists. In this regard, it could be said that strategic studies have struggled to maintain a reflexive tradition, being recurrently forced into conservative orthodoxy.

Conclusion

In the rapidly changing geopolitical environment of the 21st century, strategists, nation-states and their administrations will be faced with radical problems calling for creative solutions.⁸¹ The globalisation of production networks, the loss of economic sovereignty related to liberalisation and the constant loss of corporate-based public revenue are deep rooted trends threatening traditional financial equilibrium of Western social-democratic States.⁸² Nonetheless, 21st century state reformers will not only be faced with a necessity to transcend the limitations of accepted formulae but also to engage in developing socially momentous alternatives—a research topic that has remained outshined by established problems such as efficiency or productivity.⁸³ Scholars criticised repeatedly several flaws of old and contemporary public administration or strategic literature that inhibit innovation such as instrumental-

⁸⁰ Frederich von Bernhardi and Bernhard Schwertfeger were two representatives, among others, of this biased tradition, writing on the eve of the Great War (Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, pp. 132–138).

⁸¹ Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: How China’s Authoritarian Model will Dominate the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Jong S. Jun, *Rethinking Administrative Theory: The Challenge of the New Century* (Westport: Praeger, 2002); Aldo Musacchio and Sergio G. Lazzarini, *Reinventing State Capitalism: Leviathan in Business, Brazil and Beyond* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁸² Christian Deblock and Michèle Rioux, *De la nationalisation du monde à la globalisation* (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2013).

⁸³ Jun, *The Social Construction of Public Administration*.

technical rationality, dualistic thinking or reified bureaucracy.⁸⁴ In this line of thought, a critical endeavour facing contemporary state administrators and strategists is to problematise the roots of radical innovation in state reforms.

Studying the rise of the “Revolutionary Conservative” ideology and the invention of the nation-state out of a perversion of early liberal ideals is a thought-provoking exercise. More specifically, this exercise highlights the intellectual practices that could improve practical and strategic value of knowledge. A key empirical observation herein is that Clausewitz’s genius for strategic innovation was not innate or exceptional but depended on specific reflexive practices that were common among his close intellectual and social circles. Clausewitz’s innovative ideas about strategy were not the product of an unreachable genius. Instead, many of them were tacitly common among the military circles in which he evolved, with his theories echoing the debates that sprang up among his contemporaries.⁸⁵ To some extent, the genius of Clausewitz may be de-essentialised and summed up by his capacity to transmit through his writings some reflexive features of the most innovative intellectual officers of his time.

The contextualist approach adopted here opens the door to identifying the underpinnings of innovative strategic thinkers as various forms of instrumental uses of reflexivity and, reversely, the social and ideological impediment of strategic innovation and state reform in contentious times. The reformer officers were characterised by a propensity to problematise accepted ideas, social norms and political forms while aiming at identifying the discourse that would empower their State. They settled in favour of the revolutionary ideal of early liberalism—creating a nation of free citizens— notwithstanding its antagonistic nature to the Dynastic order they aimed to protect. These officers believed that thinking the world through liberal ideas and spreading them into the population was necessary in order to bring about the changes that would

⁸⁴ For example, see: R. B. Denhardt and J. Denhardt, *The New Public Service: Serving, Not Steering* (Armonk: Sharpe, 2003); O. C. McSwite, *Legitimacy in Public administration: A Discourse Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997); D. J. Farmer, *The Language of Public administration: Bureaucracy, Modernity, and Postmodernity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995); C. J. Fox and H. T. Miller, *Postmodern Public Administration: Toward Discourse* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996); and H. D. Kass and B. L. Catron, *Images and Identities in Public administration* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990).

⁸⁵ Clausewitz’s avoidance of references—a convention of the time and perhaps reinforced by political reasons, as well as possibly worse ones of vanity—has been instrumental in hindering this idea. Although this goes well beyond the scope of this article, the extensive documentary record underlines key debates and differences amongst Clausewitz and contemporary reformers.

give the Prussian State the manpower that new forms of warfare demanded. Doing so, these men have problematized the value of liberal propositions in function of its potential to enhance the military power of a State.

Napoleon's wars had already proved the devastating military potential of liberalism. These officers considered this ideology from an instrumental perspective, re-engineered it to fit Dynastic interests and invented the first nation-state—this being a hybrid polity combining the class-based privileges of the Old order and the military vigour of the new one. As the 1807 *revolution from above* episode demonstrates, an idiosyncratic reflexive perspective characterising strategic thinking allows for considering knowledge exclusively for its potential to empower a political agent and, therefore, to bring about social change. It is this intellectual inclination that allowed the Prussian reformers to produce strategic knowledge that resulted to be powerful enough to shake Europe and force back the genius of Revolution into the lamp.

As contemporary political scientists practice it, reflexivity allows for better theoretico-epistemological practices and is essential to question the normative-hermeneutical dimensions of any scientific knowledge.⁸⁶ For Critical theory scholars, a *good knowledge* is the one that is consistent with the normative standpoint of emancipation.⁸⁷ For poststructuralists there are only chains of interpretations. Reflexivity is about perspectival interpretations, about hermeneutical analyses.⁸⁸ Instead, for the Prussian conservative reformers, a *good knowledge* is the one that can lead to victory—the one that will lead an actor to prevail over its opponent.⁸⁹ From this instrumentalist perspective, potential empowerment is the criteria reflexivity uses to problematise accepted categories and theories.⁹⁰ Re-habilitating this neglected reflexive

⁸⁶ Inanna Hamati-Ataya, "Reflectivity, Reflexivity, Reflexivism: Ir's' Reflexive Turn'-and Beyond." *European Journal of International Relations* 19 (2012): pp. 1–26.

⁸⁷ Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1972); and Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁸⁸ Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

⁸⁹ On this, see: Daniel Levine, *Recovering International Relations: The Promise of Sustainable Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁹⁰ For example, see: Jack L. Amoureux and Brent J. Steele, eds., *Reflexivity and International Relations: Positionality, Critique, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Brent J. Steele, "Of "Witch's Brews" and Scholarly Communities: the dangers and promise of Academic Parrhesia," *Cambridge Review of*

tradition, which was suppressed from strategic studies, is of seminal importance to our theoretical understanding of the roots of radical innovation in war and statecraft.⁹¹

Clausewitz is of special interest to define and rehabilitate the suppressed reflexive tradition of strategic studies notably because his life and writings demonstrate that he considers the liberal ideology as *good knowledge* solely—and paradoxically—because it can increase the manpower of his antiquated dynastic State. From an epistemological perspective one can argue that this is a very special form of reflexivity—one that uses neither epistemological truth nor normative righteousness to evaluate knowledge—it is a form of reflexivity solely geared on military efficacy. As this article emphasises, this specific critical practice is an idiosyncratic form of reflexivity conducted with an instrumental cognitive interest.⁹² This form of reflexivity is forthrightly yoked to a unique purpose; empowering the political actors who practice it. We could refer to this disregarded Clausewitzian legacy as *instrumental reflexivity*. Echoing Clausewitz⁹³ when he states that “barriers” in strategy “consist only in man’s ignorance of what is possible,” it could be argued that this specific form of reflexivity is a methodological necessity in order to bring about significant leaps of innovation as it allows us to reach new “degrees of freedom”⁹⁴ previously obscured by cultural, ideological or doctrinal certitudes.

Clausewitz intellectual legacy is of seminal importance for contemporary state reformers as the form of reflexivity that can be extracted out of Clausewitz’s legacy is being overlooked in contemporary social sciences: it serves to question habitual categories, accepted theories and social norms—not with a cognitive interest in truth or

International Affairs 23 (March 2010): pp. 1, 49–68; and Erik Voeten, “The Practice of Political Manipulation,” in *International Practices*, edited by Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, pp. 255–279 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁹¹ For example, Wesley Widmaier, “When the Fix Isn’t In: Reflexivity, Planned and Unplanned,” in *Reflexivity and International Relations: Positionality, Critique, and Practice*, ed. Jack L Amoureux and Brent J. Steele, (New York: Routledge, 2016). pp. 240–252

⁹² Although this goes beyond the scope of this article, it may even be argued that this peculiar practice characterising some military officers emerges as an adaptation to the prolonged lived experience of war, to its inherent contact with brutal forces and its inherent state of radical contingency.

⁹³ Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 593.

⁹⁴ See Ofra Graicer in this special issue for contemporary discussion around this form of reflexive practices in military contexts: ‘Self Disruption: Seizing the High Ground of Systemic Operational Design (SOD),’ *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017).

emancipation—but with an interest in power and practical efficacy. This study suggests that a revisionist reading of Clausewitz’s legacy is characterised by a highly disruptive and dangerously subversive cognitive practice: *instrumental reflexivity*. The latter allows problematising the potential for power that is inherent to knowledge in a specific context, to question how to alter it or diffuse it in order to provoke collective empowerment. We can extrapolate tentatively and argue that two basic reflexive practices seems to be at the core of applying instrumental reflexivity to: constantly reworking one’s own ontological lens in function of the changing reality of the war being fought and diffusing instrumental ontologies that may empower friendly forces in war-making. These practices are critical for radical innovations both in state reforms and strategy. On this basis, it could be argued that Clausewitz should be reinstated as a classical critical thinker of social sciences; as the forbearer of instrumental reflexivity.

This contribution opens new sets of questions regarding radical reforms of the State in contentious times and opens the door for the production of strategic knowledge with the use of critical theories and the variety of forms of reflexivity they encompasses. Differences in the ideological and social backgrounds of key strategists and State reformers are of primary importance in understanding their propensity to innovate. As such, it appears that there is more to strategic studies than the strategic tradition may want to acknowledge.

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