On War and the Winter War

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ON WAR AND THE WINTER WAR

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ABSTRACT

Renowned for its heroism, intrigue, pathos, and freezing cold, the compelling story of the Russo-Finnish War, in which “tiny” Finland repulsed a much larger Soviet invasion force, has been thoroughly studied and recorded. Less well-researched are the influences of military strategy on the generals in that war. The conflict provides many examples of the theories on warfare advanced by Carl Philipp Gottlieb von Clausewitz in his book, *Vom Kriege*, first published in 1832, making it an excellent teaching tool for military scholars.

Clausewitz proposed that any war could be understood according to his theories. While his book is regarded as a classic reference on war, few authors have actually applied his “trinitarian” analysis to a particular war, and none have examined the Russo-Finnish War in the scholarly fashion he recommends. The mistaken impression of unequal forces in the war is reconfigured as an asymmetry across his three interrelated categories: chance and probability, rational policy, and primordial violence. Closer investigation reveals that the so-called “Finnish Miracle” was no miracle at all, but an understandable outcome, clear enough to preclude any need to postulate miracles.

Numerous subtopics continually resurface here. The degree to which Prusso-German military concepts, not only those of Clausewitz, affected the conduct of both sides in the war receives attention, as do Soviet leader Josef Stalin’s ideologically-based attempts to purge their influence from the Red Army. The genius of the Finnish commander, Baron Field Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, and the courage of the Finns cannot be overlooked. Neither can the looming threat of Nazi Germany, nor the hesitancy of the overly cautious Western democracies to intervene. Using the trinitarian method to untangle this complex web of competing stratagems and policies, the author reveals why and how the war followed the course it did.

INTRODUCTION

Intent on deposing a democratically-elected government and replacing it with handpicked Communist leaders, on November 30, 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Finland. Rarely has a war seemed more one-sided: the USSR had grown large and well-armed under Josef Stalin, while pastoral Finland boasted a population of 3.65 million, just slightly more than the 3.5 million inhabitants of the Soviet Union’s second-largest city, Leningrad.\(^2\) As a declared neutral, Finland had no allies, and as it happened, no nation came to the Finns’ aid. Superficially, the war appeared to be a gross mismatch.

In defiance of overwhelming odds, the Finns preserved their independence. Their success can be explained by subjecting the war to “trinitarian” analysis, using the criteria proposed by Carl von Clausewitz, in his seminal work *On War* (*Vom Kriege*). Stressing the interrelationship of his three categories: *chance and probability*, *rational policy*, and *primordial violence*, he maintains that they can only be isolated from one another for purposes of analysis.\(^3\) Through this process, the mistaken impression of unequal forces in the Russo-Finnish War will be reconfigured as an asymmetry across categories. Remarkably, the people of Finland proved the equalizer, although in some ways they were also the cause of the war in the first place. Close investigation will reveal that the so-called “Finnish Miracle” was no miracle at all, but an understandable outcome, clear enough to preclude any need to postulate miracles.

In the process of introducing his “remarkable trinity” (*wunderliche Dreifaltigkeit*), Clausewitz, a Prussian officer who had risen to the rank of general while serving in the Napoleonic Wars, identifies his three primary determinants. He argues that war is a true chameleon, which is comprised of three basic forces: irrational forces (“primordial violence”); non-rational forces (“chance and probability”); and rationality (war as “an instrument of policy”). He then assigns each force to a segment of society:

The first of these three forces pertains more to the people; the second more to the commander and his army; the third more to the government. The passions that flare up in wars must already be present in the people; the extent to which courage and talent operate in the realm of probability and chance depends upon the peculiarities of the commander and the army; but the political objectives belong to the government alone.\(^4\)

By studying these factors, he suggests, one can discern the nature of a particular war.

In order to determine the nature of the Russo-Finnish War, each fundamental category will be examined from the perspective of both the Soviet Union and Finland. Accounts of

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\(^3\) Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 53-54, 55.

\(^4\) Ibid., 22.
the conflict also illustrate many other concepts and insights first mentioned in On War - these receive comment as they occur. Clausewitz’s ideas appear throughout, as both sides in the Winter War (as it is also called) employed his strategies, while his method explains its otherwise perplexing result. Before presenting the research, a review of the primary sources used, a discussion of the secondary sources, and an explanation of Clausewitz’s ongoing significance follow.

Clausewitz’s Vom Kriege served as the principle source from which primary information was derived. The present work is first and foremost an examination of the Russo-Finnish War based on the ideas advanced in his book. Since its publication, Vom Kriege (hereafter referred to in the text as On War) has been thoroughly scrutinized by many authors, but few of them apply his trinitarian method to a specific war, and none could be found who employ it to analyze the Winter War.

To preserve the original spirit and intent of the author, his words were translated from the German for this writing. In one instance, primary material came from an English-language translation of On War - the German edition used here does not include Book 2, Chapter 6, “On Historical Examples.” Additionally, introductory chapters by other contributors to the English version are utilized as secondary sources.

Whenever possible, the research was based on first-hand accounts of the Russo-Finnish War. The published Memoirs of the Finnish commander, Baron Field Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, met these needs. His previous experience in military campaigns, diplomatic contacts throughout Europe, and impressive personal qualities uniquely entitled him not only to command the Finnish Army, but also to act as liaison between the military and the civilian government. He claims that Finland sued for peace from a position of military and diplomatic strength that could not be sustained.

A book about the Winter War by Väinö Tanner, Finland’s foreign minister during the conflict, provides a different perspective, the author having been a leading Social Democrat, and principal on the Finnish negotiating team. Tanner’s minute-by-minute descriptions of the wartime negotiations with the USSR indicate that the collapse of Finland’s southern defenses, combined with the lack of assistance from either Sweden or the Western Allies, Britain and France, persuaded Finnish leaders to accept Moscow’s unduly harsh peace terms. Although both Mannerheim’s and Tanner’s books are frequently cited in later studies of the war, they are virtually absent from any analyses of Clausewitz’s theories.

The Finnish Blue Book contains English-language translations of treaties between Finland and the USSR. Other documents, such as League of Nations resolutions and the texts of speeches and communications by the principal figures appear in the same chronological sequence. The primary materials corroborate a lengthy introduction that explains the Finnish version of the war. A survey by Anatole G. Mazour, (who also

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contributed the foreword to Tanner’s book), contains reprints of all treaties concluded between Finland and the USSR from 1920 to 1948.\textsuperscript{8} Other portions of Mazour’s book are discussed in the following chapter on secondary sources.

Paul M. Kober translates letters by Josef Stalin that reveal the Soviet dictator’s awareness of Clausewitz and the fervor with which he sought to dispose of \textit{On War}’s continuing influence.\textsuperscript{9} Remarks by then-President Mikhail Gorbachev and other Soviet officials, from a translated Soviet monograph, show that relations between Finland and its larger neighbor continue to affect diplomacy in the region. Lingering sentiments caused by the Winter War (and two subsequent conflicts) have not been entirely supplanted by more recent developments, as the former enemies struggle to resolve their tragic past.\textsuperscript{10}

The Russo-Finnish War began after the start of the Second World War, lasted less than four months, and ended in a virtual stalemate, (although Finland lost considerable territory in the peace settlement). Yet the defense mounted by the Finns impressed observers throughout the world, especially in France, Italy, and the United States, and inspired a number of subsequent historical accounts.

More importantly, the record of that war contains examples of all the key elements of Clausewitz’s principles, as described in \textit{On War}. By studying the Russo-Finnish War, military officers-in-training could learn Clausewitz’s main ideas, and their continuing relevance to modern strategy and tactics, despite all the changes that have transpired since the Napoleonic Wars. This then becomes a central theme here - that the ideas of Clausewitz can be taught thoroughly and simply, using just one short war to isolate and examine each of his principles, and their synthesis, as he recommended so long ago.\textsuperscript{11}

The outstanding number of examples of Clausewitz’s influence on the conduct of the Russo-Finnish War has apparently escaped the attention of prior scholars. Considering the persistent and inspiring motif of a fiercely determined populace in opposition to a vastly superior military force, this constitutes a glaring omission, one that this thesis proposes to amend.

Perhaps even more surprising, it appears as though scholars have rarely attempted to produce a trinitarian analysis of \textit{any} war. Harry G. Summers, Jr., used it in writing his two-volume series on the Vietnam War and the Gulf War.\textsuperscript{12} David Jablonsky applies a


\textsuperscript{11} Clausewitz, \textit{Vom Kriege}, 22-23.

modified version of the trinity to World War Two, in a cursory fashion (considering the war’s overall complexity), without delving into the specific details of the war’s strategy and tactics. A more extensive, and quite innovative, trinitarian analysis of the aerial combat phase of the 1982 Falklands War, written by a major in the Uruguayan air force, appeared in a 2006 journal article. Beyond these examples, little else appears to have been done - reinforcing the oft-cited assertion that many authors quote Clausewitz, but few have actually read him.

One author who has read Clausewitz is the French social theorist Raymond Aron (1905-1983). He applies Clausewitz’s theories to many of the conflicts that arose after World War II – not in the trinitarian method, but by invoking the various precepts of On War as they apply to his examples. This is done here as well, in order to address a wider range of the Prussian author’s ideas, and to demonstrate how many of them apply to the Winter War.

In Book 2, Chapter 6, of On War (the chapter omitted from the latest German-language edition of Vom Kriege), Clausewitz explains the value of using historical examples: “Historical examples clarify everything and also provide the best kind of proof in the empirical sciences.” Then, in a characteristic afterthought, the author reverses himself: “…historical examples are, however, seldom used to good effect.” The Russo-Finnish War stands out as a noteworthy exception.

The available resources on the war tend to over-represent the Finnish point of view, due perhaps to the higher percentage of both involved civilians and Finns who served in the military, and the significantly greater impact of the conflict on their country. Understandably, the Soviet perspective remains less well documented, owing also to the many years during which the Soviet archives were closed to researchers. Even so, adequate sources could be found for both nations’ role in the war, as well as for their governments and people, the two other factors in Clausewitz’s trinity.

One of his more important ideas, the interrelationship of all three of these factors, sheds new light on the war’s end. Some prior historians have ascribed the Finns’ relative success to Mannerheim’s undeniable brilliance. Others blame Soviet failure on either

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16 Clausewitz, On War, 170.

17 Biographies of Marshal Mannerheim in particular tend to support this view. See here Stig Jägerskiöld, Mannerheim Marshal of Finland, (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1986), 120-128 passim.
Stalin’s 1937 military purges, the Red Army’s ideological approach to warfare, or the threat that the Western Allies might intervene on Finland’s behalf. The trinitarian method requires that all of these reasons, and others, must be considered together, in order to understand the final result.

Albin T. Anderson provides critical background information on the diplomatic buildup to the war. His article presents the key international and domestic policy issues, in a basic survey that does not examine the conduct of the war proper. In the process of analyzing the inter-war politics of Finland, L. A. Puntila supplies additional background on the men of the 27th Jäger Battalion. C. Jay Smith Jr. also expands on the role of the Jägers, while he simplifies the tangled intersections of Mannerheim’s early career, Finland’s wars at the close of World War One, German militarism, and the ideological involvement of Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin.

Similarly, William Stover describes the inter-war activity of three Finnish right-wing organizations: the Jägers, the Civil Guards and the Lapua movement. Andres Kasekamp compares the Lapua movement with several other anti-Communist and related extreme nationalist groups that arose in Europe during the period. Summarizing the Lapua movement, Anatoile Mazour includes a brief description of the combat phase of the war - his appendices in the back matter are discussed in the section on primary sources.

H. M. Tillotson also discusses the Jägers, as well as numerous other aspects of the Winter War: its causes, conduct, and resolution. He comments on the prewar preparations of the Civil Guards and Lotta Svärd, over the course of his complete narrative of the Finnish view of the war. Tillotson proposes that the successful Red Army offensive in February of 1940 determined the war’s outcome. Appendices in the back of the book explain the history of the Jägers, as well as the organization of Finland’s armed forces.

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18 These authors are identified in the historiography to follow.
26 Ibid., 315-320.
Allen F. Chew examines the Finnish view of the combat phase in the greatest detail, with very little interpretation. While he bemoans the scarcity of adequate Soviet documentation, the author’s chronological narrative of the battle history strives to present the activities of both sides objectively.  

He contends that fear of Allied intervention led Stalin to the peace table. Another source written by him for the United States Army borrows heavily from his earlier effort. Chew’s work exemplifies the practical use for scholarly analysis on warfare, even if he does not cite Clausewitz in either publication.

Gleaned primarily from the Mannerheim family letters, Stig Jägerskiöld’s work supplements Mannerheim’s Memoirs. As the most accurate of numerous works on Mannerheim’s life, it emphasizes the Finnish people’s faith in the “White General.” As might be expected, Mannerheim receives most of the credit for Finland’s ability to survive the Red Army invasion. Max Jakobson provides context on the European-wide ramifications of the war, and complements Väinö Tanner’s semi-biographical work on many of the same subjects. Jakobson reviews all the major reasons for the war’s end, but he primarily blames Britain and France for not helping Finland, then goes on to condemn Sweden and Norway for obstructing plans to transit an Anglo-French force through their respective territories.

Examining the Western Powers’ reaction to the Russo-Finnish conflict, Jukka Nevakivi narrates the international diplomacy leading up to and during the Winter War. Nevakivi notes the commonly held attitude in the West that Finland was “a half-fascist state,” based on their pro-German politics and pro-German officer corps. Relying heavily on British and French primary sources, the author explores the many proposals for British and/or French military intervention on behalf of Finland, and why none of them were ever actually implemented. The book’s title derives from the “excuse” given by Britain and France that Finland had not appealed to them for aid. Nevakivi thus agrees with Jakobson, although he also suggests that such aid was never a real possibility.

Kimmo Rentola expands on the role played by the Finnish Communist Party, Otto Wille Kuusinen, and the lack of support given to his puppet government at Terijoki,

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28 Ibid., 211-212.


30 Jägerskiöld, Mannerheim Marshal of Finland, 120-128 passim.


33 Ibid., 126-128.
along with the Helsinki government’s attempts to suppress their activities. An article by Heikki Luostarinen examines the psychology of the Finns, with respect to their Soviet neighbor, from their 1917-18 “War of Independence” through 1989. Employing the structural tools of linguistics, ethnography, sociology, and psychology, the author deliberately ignores the “intragroup” aspects of his respective subjects, focusing instead on the internal factors that shaped Finnish perception, and by default, Finnish history.

A journal article by D. Fedotoff White brings together the divergent references to Clausewitz, Karl Marx, V. I. Lenin, and Mikhail Vasil’evich Frunze found in other works. Published in 1936, the author examines Soviet military philosophy shortly before the Winter War, within the larger context of Marxist political philosophy, anticipating Stalin’s attempts to cast the invasion of Finland as a “socialist” revolution. White employs a great number of Russian-language primary sources in his effort to accurately portray the Communist “party line.”

A more recent article by Jacob Kipp traces the effects of Clausewitz’s writing on Marxist-Leninist interpretations of statecraft and warfare during that period. Kipp explores the origins of the dialogue between Lenin and Stalin, among others, over the relationship of the state to the military, noting that Lenin had praised Clausewitz for his idea that the aims of war must be conducted by the state, for the good of its citizens.

Co-editor/authors Sarah Davies and James Harris provide a series of essays integrating recent information on Stalin into the existing history. Their work is divided according to particular aspects of Stalin’s career, and roughly half of the essays are cited here. Darrell Hammer describes the workings of the Soviet government, the Communist Party, and Soviet society from the Revolution through the postwar era, and includes a diagram of “The National Party Organization.” These last two books were especially beneficial in completing the sections on the Soviet government and its people. Discussing problems internal to the Red Army on the eve of World War II, David M. Glantz suggests that

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while the 1937 military purge cost the Soviet Union a clear victory against Finland, the experience led to an increased urgency in the preparations for war with Nazi Germany.\footnote{David M. Glantz, \textit{Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army on the Eve of World War}, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 9, 31.}

Two books by Roger R. Reese examine the organizational behavior of the Red Army. In a 1996 work, he explains that the purges had dealt a severe blow to morale among the enlisted soldiers, which persisted through the Winter War and on into World War II.\footnote{Roger R. Reese, \textit{Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army, 1925-1941}, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996).}


Both books argue that the Soviet failures in the Russo-Finnish War stem from the loss of so many trained officers in 1937, and the debilitating effect this had on morale.

Carl Van Dyke describes the battle history of the war from the Soviet perspective.\footnote{Carl Van Dyke, \textit{The Soviet Invasion of Finland 1939-40}, (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997).}

The author analyzes Soviet diplomacy, strategy, and tactics, in this effort based on newly accessible (in 1997) archival collections in Russia. The work examines the Red Army’s military doctrine and its implications for the Russo-Finnish War. While conceding that Stalin feared Allied intervention, Van Dyke concurs with Tillotson that Soviet military successes forced Finland to agree to a disadvantageous peace, as he incessantly repeats Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov’s “logic of war” phrase.\footnote{Ibid., 135, 161, 166-167, 170-172, 174-175, 178.}

Also like Tillotson, Van Dyke provides frequently neglected material on the naval strategies employed during the conflict.

Roy and Zhores Medvedev collaborated on a work containing new information on Stalin’s rule, including a chapter examining how, in 1946, Stalin had edited Clausewitz out of the pantheon of Soviet military theoreticians.\footnote{Roy Medvedev, “Generalissimo Stalin, General Clausewitz and Colonel Razin,” in \textit{The Unknown Stalin: His Life, Death, and Legacy.}, ed. Roy Medvedev and Zhores Medvedev, trans. Ellen Dahrendorf, (New York: The Overlook Press, 2004), 186-188.}

The authors convey a clear picture of Stalin’s arbitrary power, the precarious nature of life inside the Soviet Union, and the tightrope his subordinates were compelled to walk – all of which adversely affected the conduct of the Winter War.

Walter Jacobs returns to Frunze, depicting him as the leading force behind the USSR’s “unified military doctrine” that guided Red Army planning during the Russo-Finnish
Beyond the title, no further reference to Clausewitz appears, although this and the following work helped in clarifying Van Dyke’s discussion of Soviet military strategy. An essay by Roman Jarymowycz explores the development of strategic thought under Frunze and Marshal Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevskii. The author closely examines the Red Army performance in World War II, when the Soviet concept of “Deep Battle” (*Glubokii Boi*), scored far greater success, inspiring this rather glowing account of the USSR’s military prowess.

Several more general works provided valuable context and critical details concerning developments beyond the borders of Finland and the USSR. James E. McSherry depicts Finland’s experience in parallel to related events in the Baltic States. Anthony Read and David Fisher focus on the high politics of Hitler and Stalin. A table of “Principal Personalities” lists the major leaders of the nations involved, their respective titles, and dates of service.

The principal personality here, of course, is the eminent military strategist and author, Carl von Clausewitz. A complete historiography of his impact on prior military science would extend well beyond the purpose here, but his importance to that field, and his continuing influence, made his work the obvious choice for a study of this type.

Clausewitz wrote his treatise *On War* near the end of his life. He died in 1831, yet the fundamental ideas presented in his book continue to affect military thought to this day. As one of his biographers, Peter Paret, notes: “Clausewitz stands at the beginning of the non-prescriptive, nonjudgmental study of war as a total phenomenon, and *On War* is still the most important work in this tradition.”

Clausewitz also belongs to the Prussian military tradition, which assessed warfare from a clearly more “judgmental” standpoint. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the Prusso-German military tradition dominated strategic thought for approximately 100 years, and dictated the conduct of most of the wars fought in that period. Prussia, and afterward, Germany, set the standard by which all European armies would be measured.

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47 Jacobs, *Frunze*, 104; and Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 13-14, 119-123.


in the course of the wars waged against many of them. Eventually, two world wars resulted, due in part to the reactions of the great powers against German militarism.

Although the evidence suggests that during the Winter War certain generals, especially in the Finnish High Command, knew of Clausewitz's work and employed his ideas on the battlefield, the scholarship has largely ignored this. Clausewitz's theories were, and still are, significant, relevant, and deserving of continued research. All that remains to be demonstrated is that they have also withstood “battle testing.”

The historiography shows that the Russo-Finnish War has been well documented from numerous angles, as have the main ideas presented in On War - and that the conflict merits further analysis, using the trinitarian method Clausewitz recommends. Before the war can be properly dissected, however, an explanation of the diplomatic background seems necessary.

On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland, while Finland joined the other Scandinavian nations and Iceland by declaring neutrality, hoping to avoid entanglement in a general European conflagration like that of 1914-1918. Although the leaders of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway held meetings, the reigning definition of neutrality precluded any possibility of their signing a mutual defense treaty. On September 17, V. M. Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, declared that the USSR would pursue a policy of neutrality with Finland as well. Yet in an ominous portent, the Soviet Union persisted in referring to Finland as a “Baltic State.”

European observers realized that a war between the USSR and Germany loomed on the horizon. Military experts assumed that German forces would invade Finland to establish a northern base for an attack on Leningrad, in conjunction with a naval assault via the Baltic Sea and a second land invasion from the south, passing through the “other” Baltic States. Conversely, the well-publicized Kremlin strategy of “forward defense” warned that the Red Army would advance into neighboring countries to meet a potential attacker, before any hostile armies could reach the borders of the USSR. This meant specifically that if Germany attempted to use Finland as an invasion route to Leningrad, Soviet forces would enter Finland and establish the front as far as possible from Russian soil, ignoring both Finnish neutrality and international law.

Faced with possible invasion from two large powers, over competing ideologies about which democratic Finland no longer cared, the Finnish people embraced neutrality as the only acceptable foreign policy. Geographically isolated from the possible assistance of Britain and France (the supposed guarantors of the League of Nations), the Finns fully

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55 Jakobson, The Diplomacy of the Winter War, 44.

56 Jägerskiöld, Mannerheim Marshal of Finland, 107.

57 Van Dyke, The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 2.
understood the great risks inherent to their approach. Yet Finland rejected a proposed non-aggression pact with Germany - on the premise it would unnecessarily provoke the USSR - which Estonia and Latvia had signed in the spring of 1939. Those signatures would soon prove meaningless.

In late August of 1939, Nazi Germany reversed its commitment to the November 1936 Anti-Comintern pact, signing the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Agreement with the Soviet Union. In what might be considered a “mutual aggression treaty,” the document’s secret protocols provided for the USSR and Germany to divide between themselves a number of their weaker Eastern European neighbors.

Seven days later, German forces invaded Poland, and Soviet leader Josef Stalin, anxious to keep pace with German Führer Adolf Hitler, began intimidating the Baltic states into bloodlessly surrendering their independence. The leaders of Finland watched nervously while Stalin coerced Estonia, Latvia, and finally, Lithuania, into signing disadvantageous treaties with the USSR. As the scheme unfolded, the Finns eyed each new diplomatic conquest with suspicion, fearing that their country, a former protectorate of the Russian Empire independent only since 1918, had also been surreptitiously doomed to a Stalinist future.

Not only did the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact flout international law – it violated the existing moral and ethical standards of most European nations. So would the attack on Finland - yet the League of Nations did little more than expel the Soviet Union. A League Resolution adopted December 14 1939, called upon member nations “to provide Finland with… material and humanitarian assistance,” but stopped short of demanding military intervention. Likewise, the Western powers that had declared war on Germany over the invasion of Poland took no action against the USSR. Expecting that Germany and the Soviet Union would soon turn against one another, Britain and France hesitated to adopt any policy that might drive the two dictators even closer together.

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58 Jägerskiöld, Mannerheim, 102-103.
59 Jakobson, The Diplomacy of the Winter War, 72.
60 Read and Fisher, The Deadly Embrace, 237-267 passim.
61 Tanner, The Winter War, 18.
62 Van Dyke, The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 10-11.
63 Jakobson, The Diplomacy of the Winter War, 102.
64 McSherry, Stalin, Hitler, and Europe, Volume Two, 44; and Puntila, The Political History of Finland, 166.
65 Mazour, Finland: Between East and West, 247-248.
As the Baltic States capitulated in early October, construction of Soviet naval bases began on islands that had been seized from Estonia. In the Baltic Sea, only the Gulf of Finland, crucial to the planned defense of Leningrad but under the guns of Finnish coastal batteries, remained beyond Soviet control. Stalin hastened to secure concessions from the Finns in this area, before the Germans could complete their corresponding eastward expansion. Otherwise, Hitler might reconsider his deal with the USSR, and try to gain more territory than had been agreed upon originally.

On October 5, Molotov summoned the Finnish Foreign Minister to Moscow, ostensibly for “trade talks.” Over the following six weeks, a series of discussions focused not on trade, but rather on Soviet demands for various Finnish-owned islands in the Baltic Sea. Additionally, the Soviets wanted the frontier with Finland relocated further away from Leningrad, at that time only thirty-two kilometers distant, in exchange for land in northern Karelia, in addition to a mutual defense treaty.

Molotov, and later Stalin himself, made reasonable offers to the Finnish delegates, while explaining their defensive concerns in the frank context of preparation for war with Germany. Acceptance of any of the Kremlin proposals would have implied the abandonment of Finnish neutrality, and more importantly, a severe compromise of Finland’s own ability to defend itself against a possible Soviet invasion. For these reasons, the Finnish people would reject such an arrangement, and under strong public pressure, the government deferred to the popular will by refusing every proposal offered by the Soviets. Moreover, the agreements made between Molotov and the Baltic nations had reduced the latter to Soviet puppet-states – seeing their discomfiture, the Finns stubbornly determined to avoid a similar fate, at any price.

Frustrated, Molotov threatened them, invoking the “logic of war.” Finland’s Defense Minister Juho Niukkanen had informed Väinö Tanner and Juho Kusti Paasikivi, the ranking members of the Finnish delegation, that Finland could hold out militarily for six months, which apparently strengthened their resolve. Befuddled by what he saw as

67 Tillotson, *Finland at Peace & War*, 115.


75 Ibid., 131.
suicidal obstinacy on the part of the Finns, Stalin closed the meetings on a solemn note, suggesting that peaceful diplomacy had failed, and the matter must now be resolved by the military.\footnote{Tanner, The Winter War, 66-67.}

At this point, had they been more familiar with \textit{On War}, which describes war as “a continuation of policy by other means” (\textit{Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit andern Mitteln}), the Finns might have inclined toward some small compromise. The fierce anti-Communism of right-wing elements such as the Jägers, the Civil Guards, and the Lapua movement, which had even opposed constitutional government prior to 1932, necessitated the Finnish rejection of Soviet demands on the eve of the war. Eventually, though, both sides would have cause to regret the severing of negotiations as more a “failure of policy.”\footnote{Clausewitz, \textit{Vom Kriege}, 21, 22.}

In his discussion of unequal strength (\textit{ungleicher Macht}), Clausewitz remarks that when faced with great disparities in numbers, the inferior force might do well to make concessions in order to avoid war entirely.\footnote{Ibid., 24, 30.} The Finns ignored this advice, except for Paasikivi and the retired general Mannerheim, who would soon return to action - they understood that Finland was in no position to defy the Soviet Union. Acting separately, both men unsuccessfully urged their government to compromise as necessary in order to avoid war.\footnote{Tanner, The Winter War, 31, 43-44.} They too were ignored, or at least turned away without success.

In a later chapter on “Superiority of Numbers” (\textit{Überlegenheit der Zahl}), the Prussian sage notes, “Of course, one can imagine a mountain pass where even a tenfold superiority would not be sufficient, but in such situations one cannot speak of an actual battle.”\footnote{Clausewitz, \textit{Vom Kriege}, 111.} The Karelian Isthmus, along which runs the most direct route between Leningrad and the Finnish capital, Helsinki, was about to serve a function comparable to Clausewitz’s hypothetical mountain pass.\footnote{Jägerskiöld, \textit{Mannerheim}, 101.} The defensive strategy was not a new one - both general staffs would have been familiar with Thermopylae, the famous battle where 300 Spartans held back a vastly larger Persian force, as it is frequently cited in texts on warfare.\footnote{Mannerheim, \textit{The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim}, 272; and Nevakivi, \textit{The Appeal That Was Never Made}, 164. Clausewitz neglects to mention Thermopylae in \textit{On War}, but he describes the 1771 Russian capture of the Isthmus of Perekop, on the Crimean Peninsula, as a rare instance when a narrow passage could not be simply bypassed. See Clausewitz, \textit{Vom Kriege}, 236, 260.}

Soviet military planners, as well as the Finns, should have studied \textit{On War} more closely.
After the Moscow talks broke off, the Soviet press launched an anti-Finnish smear campaign, preparing their citizens for the impending hostilities. Then on November 26, the Soviet Union fabricated a pretext for war, blaming Finnish artillery fire for the deaths of four Soviet border guards. Though later evidence proved otherwise, the Kremlin accused the Finns of firing the first shot, simultaneously insisting that Finland’s Communist Party had requested Soviet military intervention.

On November 30, Red Army units from Leningrad poured into Finland at various points along the 1000-kilometer length of the Russo-Finnish border. Stalin appointed Otto Kuusinen, an exiled Communist, to serve as President of the “Finnish Democratic Republic,” which had presumably taken power overnight. This cynical maneuver, an openly contemptuous break from established diplomatic practice, nonetheless conformed to the Communists’ theoretical interpretation of war. While disavowing “predatory” wars, Lenin had envisioned socialist countries waging war against “bourgeois or reactionary” foes, and Frunze had predicted that socialist revolutions in Europe would require the assistance of the Red Army.

On December 1, Kuusinen, who had spent the previous twenty years in Moscow, signed a peace and mutual assistance pact between the USSR and his native Finland. Replete with Bolshevik rhetoric, the treaty disposed of “that true focus of war infection which the former plutocratic government in Finland had created on the frontiers of the Soviet Union for the benefit of the imperialist powers,” while satisfying all the demands Stalin had earlier presented to the Helsinki government. Only the names of V. Molotov and O. W. Kuusinen appear on the document.

Kuusinen had fought on the losing side during the Finnish Civil War (1917-1918), and hoped to renew the campaign to bring Communism to Finland. Now based on the thin strip of Soviet-occupied Finnish territory, he began circulating propaganda intended to spark a workers’ revolt similar to the one he had led in 1917. In 1928, Tukhachevskii had predicted that the Red Army, once firmly entrenched on foreign soil, could recruit

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84 Tanner, The Winter War, 85, 86-88.
85 Van Dyke, The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 44.
86 Nevakivi, The Appeal That Was Never Made, 40-41; Van Dyke, The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 57; Tanner, The Winter War, 105-107; and Jakobson, The Diplomacy of the Winter War, 145.
88 Mazour, Finland: Between East and West, 238-240.
volunteers from the proletarian class of the nation under attack. Ideology aside, Kuusinen’s effort failed miserably – with patriotic fervor, Finnish workers rejected the idea completely.

In Helsinki, the legitimate government resigned, apologizing for its diplomatic failure. President Kyösti Kallio then appointed Risto Ryti as his new prime minister, who in turn appointed Tanner as the new foreign minister of Finland. Although the Finns agreed on the negotiation of a cease-fire as their top priority, no diplomatic exchange was possible - the Soviet Union would only talk to the Kuusinen government, leaving the others to desperately seek out foreign assistance. It had now become apparent that the Finns were fighting to preserve their nationhood.

In addition, the absorption of all three Baltic States into the USSR in the summer of 1940 stands in evidence that such territorial conquests would no longer be considered anathema to “socialist” practice. At the very least, it signaled that the new Soviet strategy of “forward defense” had prevailed over Lenin’s pacifism and disapproval of “expansionist” wars.

On the besieged Karelian Isthmus, Finland’s top commander, Baron Field Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, struggled to fend off the Red Army invasion. As far back as 1931, Mannerheim had correctly evaluated Finland’s defensive potential:

The Karelian Isthmus was Finland’s lock – our Thermopylae: it formed a narrow gateway between the Gulf of Finland and the Ladoga, only forty-five miles wide in the narrowest part. The territory was easy to defend, as lakes and marshes divided the Isthmus into passes. Tanks could unfortunately advance easily in this merely undulating country.

As will be seen, Mannerheim would solve those problems before and during the war – although the entire conflict was fought on Finnish soil, the Soviet Army never advanced deeply enough to achieve the total victory they had assumed in their own planning.

David Evans postulates that Clausewitz implied certain principles of war, without expressly stating them. Evans then itemizes these principles for his readers: Selection and

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92 Van Dyke, The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 26-27.

93 Ibid., 56.

94 Tanner, The Winter War, 103.

95 McSherry, Stalin, Hitler, and Europe. Volume Two, 90-92.


Maintenance of the Aim, Offensive Action, Concentration, Mobility, Surprise, Pursuit, and Public Opinion. Later, the author points out that Clausewitz expanded upon the complexities of, and exceptions to, these “implied” principles.

Whereas simply gaining and holding territory does not qualify as a principle of warfare in On War, Clausewitz frequently alludes to the importance of adapting to, and using the specific features of the terrain upon which hostile armies face one another. Beleaguered as they were, the Finns grasped this key distinction, and gave ground as the situation demanded: to save their soldiers’ lives, or to assume a more favorable position. At other times, a withdrawal from the center enabled them to complete an encirclement of invading forces. The Red Army, encumbered with a “unified military doctrine” that did not allow for retreat, needlessly sacrificed troops, fought from untenable positions, and frequently permitted the Finns to envelope them, with disastrous consequences.

One frequent criticism of Clausewitz, that he ignored naval operations in his magnum opus, requires attention. The Prussian general did not participate in naval combat, and wisely avoided a topic about which he had no first-hand experience. Yet many of his principles do apply. In this instance, terrain, usually associated with land warfare, could easily include proximity to coastal batteries, waters too shallow for navigation, and frozen sea lanes – all of them key factors in the Winter War.

Additionally, Major Rodolfo Pereya’s essay on the Falklands proves that air combat, not even a possibility in the Napoleonic Wars, can be evaluated in accordance with Clausewitz’s theories. Journal articles by U. S. and British Air Force officers also demonstrate that many of Clausewitz’s ideas can be transferred to aerial warfare. In the Russo-Finnish War, the Soviet Union would exercise its huge advantage in combat aircraft to little avail.

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101 Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 43-44, 69, 197-200.

102 Tillotson, Finland at Peace & War, 147.

CHAPTER ONE: MILITARY FORCES

The most obvious of Clausewitz’s three major categories will be examined first. Clausewitz insists that military forces can only enhance the Zufall, or chance, of victory. He contends that while victory can never be certain, as war lies within the sphere of chance, it represents a gamble in which the probability of success can be calculated.\(^{104}\)

Trinitarian analysis of the Finnish and Soviet militaries reveals that the Finns won the majority of encounters because of their high morale, their familiarity with the terrain, their ability to adapt to changing conditions, and their superior generalship. Yet it was the Soviet Union who played the percentages in the Winter War, where they appeared to hold an insurmountable edge. During the three months of fighting, the Red Army would send a force of over 500,000 men against 56,000 Finns.

Besides this huge numerical advantage, the USSR possessed newer and more technologically advanced weapons, and in greater quantities.\(^{105}\) The Soviets held an eighty-to-one advantage in tanks, and five-to-one edges in both artillery and aircraft. Only the Finnish-made “Suomi” machine pistol proved superior to its Red Army equivalent, and the Finns possessed limited numbers of those.\(^{106}\) On the Baltic Sea, the virtually unopposed Soviet Navy deployed battleships, destroyers, and submarines against Finnish coastal batteries.\(^{107}\) In the previously mentioned chapter on “Superiority in Numbers,” Clausewitz weighs those situations when a force is greatly outnumbered:

> It [the advantage] can be double, or three or four times larger, or even more, until it reaches the point where it is obviously overwhelming. Superiority of numbers is, in this respect, the most important factor in the outcome of a battle, whenever it is great enough to counterbalance all the other contributing factors.\(^ {108}\)

In the winter of 1939-1940, the Finns confronted nearly ten-to-one odds. Yet they managed to withstand the opening attack by the Red Army, inflicting heavy casualties on the Soviet forces, rallying world opinion to their cause and buying precious time, while Stalin calculated the enormous cost his army would pay in Finland, winning only “enough ground to bury [his] dead.”\(^ {109}\)

\(^{104}\) Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 14, 19-20, 35.

\(^{105}\) Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War*, 172, 220.


\(^{107}\) Van Dyke, *The Soviet Invasion of Finland*, 40; and Tillotson, *Finland at Peace and War*, 150-153.

\(^{108}\) Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 111.

\(^{109}\) Tillotson, *Finland at Peace and War*, 174.
Many reasons account for Finland’s success in holding off the initial Soviet assault. As the attacker, the USSR should have made better use of the advantage of surprise (Überraschung), which, Clausewitz maintains “lies at the base of all undertakings.” David Evans, in his discussion of surprise as a Clausewitzian principle, comments that the Prussian general qualified this assertion, by pointing out “that surprise is no surefire guarantee of success.”

The Red Army offensive neither surprised nor overwhelmed Finland, due also to the efforts of Marshal Mannerheim. At his urging, the Finns had been preparing since 1932 for an attack on the Karelian Isthmus, a natural invasion route that had been the scene of fighting in centuries past, as well as during the more recent Finnish Civil War. Additional new construction began in the summer of 1939 on what would become known as the “Mannerheim Line,” a line of fortifications spanning the Isthmus between the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga.

Although inadequate for defense against Soviet artillery over a prolonged war, these last-minute preparations proved invaluable in the brief Winter War. The Finns constructed an intermediate defensive line (IDL), also known as the “V-Line,” roughly thirteen kilometers north of the Mannerheim Line. At Viipuri, (formerly Viborg, on the Gulf of Finland), a medieval Swedish castle anchored a third line of defense, called the “T-Line” – the last impediment to a Soviet occupation of Helsinki, the Finnish capital.

Both on the Isthmus and on other theaters, the Finns were not content to wait for Red Army attacks, but employed Clausewitz’s idea of counterattacking from a defensive position when least expected, or at the most opportune moment. Finnish generals appropriated the wider German concept of Schlagfertigkeit, or “quickness of repartee,” for their tactical arsenal. Under this principle, enemy attacks are to be met with immediate counter-strikes (gegenstoss) and deliberate counterattack (gegenangriff), which the Finns used effectively on multiple occasions. Tactical retreats often masked

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110 Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 113.
112 Puntila, The Political History of Finland, 166.
114 Jägerskiöld, Mannerheim, 101.
115 Jakobson, The Diplomacy of the Winter War, 216.
117 Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 213-214.
118 Van Dyke, The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 79.
the opening of a fierce counterattack, and frequent commando raids behind the Soviet lines typified their “defensive” strategy.\textsuperscript{119}

Farther north, roughly halfway between Finland’s Baltic and Arctic coasts, along what had become the “Wilderness” front, the Finnish generals devised the so-called “motti” strategy, which enabled them to encircle and destroy vastly larger Soviet forces. As previously mentioned, the Red Army did not permit surrounded units to retreat – instead, they would form compact, stationary detachments that the Finns would contain and monitor, as the invaders then starved or froze to death. The resulting pockets of dead soldiers reminded the Finns of the mottis, or cubic meters of cut and stacked wood, commonly seen along Finnish forest roads.\textsuperscript{120}

This method of non-engagement allowed the Finns to conserve precious ammunition and reduce the risk to their own soldiers. Salvaging weapons from the motti sites enabled the Finns to replenish their depleted supply of arms at Soviet expense.\textsuperscript{121} Foreign Minister Tanner, frustrated in his attempts to purchase foreign weaponry, quipped: “…Finland had taken during the first months of fighting more arms from the Russians in war booty than she had received from all the friendly powers put together.”\textsuperscript{122} Tanner’s ability to keep his sense of humor speaks volumes about how Finland survived.

The Finns also enjoyed a defensible position. They fought for their homeland and their liberty on terrain they knew far better than their adversary, and their morale remained extremely high for the duration of the conflict.\textsuperscript{123} Throughout his book, Clausewitz extols the merits of all these advantages.\textsuperscript{124}

The Finnish field commanders, personally selected by the brilliant Marshal Mannerheim, exhibited flexibility, innovation, and even genius as the situation required. In \textit{On War}, Clausewitz devotes an entire chapter to genius, that elusive yet indispensable trait which unilaterally favored the Finns.\textsuperscript{125} He maintains that only genius can overcome friction (\textit{Friktion}), his all-inclusive term for unanticipated events, such as inclement weather, when they impede the prosecution of war.\textsuperscript{126} Genius may not be able to control the weather, but as Daniel Hughes points out, Clausewitz had allowed for this when he

\textsuperscript{119} Chew, 36-37, 50, 64 102-104; and Tillotson, \textit{Finland at Peace & War}, 133.

\textsuperscript{120} Tillotson, \textit{Finland at Peace & War}, 140-141, 145-146.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 142.

\textsuperscript{122} Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War}, 194.

\textsuperscript{123} Nevakivi, \textit{The Appeal That Was Never Made}, 24; Jägerskiöld, \textit{Mannerheim}, 112-113; and Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War}, 216.

\textsuperscript{124} Clausewitz, \textit{Vom Kriege}, 224, 228 (defensible position), 43-44, 69, 197-200 (terrain), 101-105 (morale).

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 33-47 \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 51-52.
Clausewitz contends that genius rises above all rules (das Feld des Genies, welches sich über die Regel erhebt).\\(^{128}\)

Whereas author Peter Paret concedes that genius is indeed rare, and not always available in ample supply when needed, his attempt to redefine genius in layman’s terms, so that any ordinary general might strive to achieve it, misses the point – genius is determined in retrospect, and defined by success.\\(^{129}\)

The genius of the Russo-Finnish War was the 72-year-old “White General,” Marshal Mannerheim. To the people of Finland, he became a living symbol of their determined resistance, and beside his role as their Commander-in-Chief, acted as a liaison between the military, the government, and people. Despite facing severe manpower and equipment shortages, Mannerheim routinely overcame these and other difficulties.\\(^{130}\) He understood the concept of friction clearly. In his Memoirs, Mannerheim not only alluded to the effects of weather on the conduct of the war, but also used the term “friction” directly, when explaining how, while planning the major counter-offensive of December 23, 1939, Lieutenant-General Hugo Österman had not made enough allowance for its impact.\\(^{131}\)

Continuing his criticism of Österman’s plan at Summa, Mannerheim complained that Soviet forces had managed to evade Finnish reconnaissance: “The result was that the offensive lacked a point of concentration of strength.”\\(^{132}\) [My emphasis.] Here he refers to another Clausewitzian principle (Vereinigung der Kräfte in der Zeit), one from David Evans’ list that is rarely disputed.\\(^{133}\) In all fairness, it should also be noted that the Soviets suspended their planned Summa offensive for some time afterward, and Lieutenant-General Österman carried on, eventually becoming Finland’s Commander-in-Chief.\\(^{134}\)

Major-General Woldemar Hägglund, under whom the “motti” strategy would be developed, Colonel Hjalmar Siilasvuo, and Colonel Paavo Tavela also deserve recognition for their exceptional performances under extremely demanding conditions, winning pivotal battles that repulsed the Soviet invaders and sustained Finnish morale, especially during the uncertain opening stages of the war.\\(^{135}\)

Tavela’s stunning win at Tolvajärvi, and Siilasvuo’s equally brilliant victory at Suomussalmi, effectively ended the Red Army campaign in the Wilderness region, where

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127 Hughes, Moltke On the Art of War, 3, 46n.

128 Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 63.


131 Ibid., 329.

132 Ibid., 344-345.

133 Evans, War: A Matter of Principles, 7; and Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 14.

134 Chew, The White Death, 69; and Tillotson, Finland at Peace & War, 315.

135 Jägerskiöld, Mannerheim, 116-117; and Tillotson, Finland at Peace & War, 130-131.
Hägglund then devised his motti strategy. One reason for their ability to coordinate well: Siilasvuoto and all of his regimental commanders, including Tavela and his lieutenant colonel, Kaarlo Viljanen, had fought together on the German side in World War One, and again in Finland’s civil war, as members of Jäger Battalion 27.136

The military leadership owed much to German training methods. The first Jäger battalions were formed by Tsar Alexander I, in the time of Clausewitz. Composed of Finnish volunteers, they were recruited to fight against Napoleon’s Grand Armée, but did not see combat. In an attempt to suppress Finnish autonomy, in 1905 Tsar Nicholas II abolished the unit.137 During the First World War, the idea of German-trained Finnish units was revived.138

In the spring of 1916, roughly 2000 Finnish volunteers gathered at Lockstedt, in Holstein, Germany, to form the Königliches Preussisches Jägerbataillon 27, or the 27th Prussian Jäger Battalion. Predominantly composed of Swedish-speaking university students, they served on the front near Riga that summer.139 In February 1918, they returned to Vaasa, Finland, joining Mannerheim’s White Army and serving admirably in Finland’s fight for independence.140

Praising their ability as trainers and commanders for his raw recruits, Marshal Mannerheim would remember the Jägers as “an inestimable asset.”141 While leftist and centrist Finns perceived the Jägers as the enforcers of right-wing extremism in the early 1930s, the “White General,” himself a monarchist, promoted many of them.142 By 1933, at least five former Jägers had become generals in the Finnish Army – and one, Major-General Viljo Tuompo, would be placed in command of the Northern Finland Group, charged with the defense of Petsamo.143 It remains unclear if the Jägerkorps had studied Clausewitz at Holstein, but in any case, during the Winter War Mannerheim relied heavily on their experience, much as he had during the Finnish Civil War.144

Mannerheim’s self-reliance also merits further discussion. His bold counterattacking strategy involved great risk-taking, which, under the circumstances, could not be avoided,

137 Tillotson, Finland at Peace & War, 4.
139 Smith, “Russia and the Origins of the Finnish Civil War,” 484.
140 Mazour, Finland: Between East and West, 36, 48, 51-52; and Luostarinen, “Finnish Russophobia,” 128-129.
141 Mannerheim, The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim, 152.
142 Puntila, The Political History of Finland, 138-149 passim.
143 Tillotson, Finland at Peace & War, 128.
but nonetheless demanded imagination and daring. Unafraid to demote those officers who could not meet his standards, he was equally quick to promote those who did — and he unerringly recognized the difference.

Mannerheim knew exactly how much authority to delegate, and how much to retain for himself. He often directed personally the deployment of Finland’s sparse reserves, an extremely complicated task, in that certain sectors had to be left with none for extended periods, while creating the illusion of a much larger Finnish Army by rotating reservists through multiple fronts. The deception had to be coordinated with the primary functions of replacing casualties, relieving exhausted units in need of sleep, and reinforcing the most likely points of Soviet attack.

Throughout the war, he out-guessed the Red Army, leaving certain lines dangerously thin in order to mass enough troops to stage his vitally important counteroffensives. Above all else, however, it was Mannerheim’s keen eye for what is needed in battle, and his ability to respond promptly and decisively — an aptitude that Clausewitz identifies using the term *coup d’oeil* — that distinguished the Finnish commander from his Soviet counterparts.

Unlike the Soviets, the Finns did not subscribe to an ideologically-based philosophy of warfare. Whereas Mannerheim (and many of his officers) had trained in the Tsar’s Imperial Army, many others came from the Jägerkorps, with its decidedly more German influence. Perhaps the disparate opinions of such a diverse group produced a more well-rounded, if less consistent approach to the war — even inconsistency, to the degree that it equates with “unpredictability,” when utilized in an expeditious manner, could be placed in Clausewitz’s category of “surprise.” These factors all contributed to greater flexibility, and precluded any reliance on rigid constraints similar to those the Soviet planners had imposed on their generals.

The initial multi-pronged Red Army attack signaled their intentions. One southern army would storm the Mannerheim Line by means of a direct frontal assault, while a second would outflank the critical Karelian Isthmus in a wide maneuver around Lake Ladoga. A central thrust would divide Finland in half, severing the rail connections with Sweden in the process, while a northern force would cut off the possibility of foreign assistance to the Finns via the Arctic port of Petsamo.

Stalin rejected the initial war plan, offered by Marshal B. M. Shaposhnikov, Chief of the Red Army General Staff, as overly pessimistic, since it warned that the war might require several months’ effort. The final plan was developed by General Kirill A.

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148 Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 36; and Tillotson, *Finland at Peace & War*, 139, 143, 145.


Meretskov, commander of the Leningrad Military District, with the approval of Stalin, Otto Kuusinen, Leningrad’s Political Commissar Andrei Zhdanov, and the People’s Commissar for the Navy, Admiral Nilolai G. Kuznetsov.\footnote{Read and Fisher, \textit{The Deadly Embrace}, 380, 401.}

Meretskov’s basic plan was sound, although too similar to the one employed in 1917 to achieve the advantage of surprise. Overconfidence led the Soviet planners to discount the importance of surprise – they simply expected that by inundating the Finnish borders with Red Army forces, the Finns would capitulate.\footnote{Chew, \textit{The White Death}, 21; Tillotson, \textit{Finland at Peace & War}, 124; and Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War}, 145.}

In the critical southern theater, the initial assault met unexpectedly fierce resistance. Soviet armored divisions fell prey to 37-mm. Bofors anti-tank guns and improvised “Molotov Cocktails,” the latter requiring brazen close-range delivery.\footnote{Mannerheim, \textit{The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim}, 327-328, 328n. In the note, he mentions that the Molotov Cocktail was a mixture of potassium chloride, coal oil, and “noulen,” ignited by breaking an ampoule containing sulphuric acid.} The Finns targeted the tanks at the head and rear of advancing columns, leaving the remainder unable to press forward or turn back – over eighty were consequently destroyed or captured in the first week of fighting.\footnote{Chew, \textit{The White Death}, 19.} No war plan could have foreseen the ease with which Soviet armor would be neutralized.

In the central theater, Soviet leaders, anxious to avoid diplomatic complications, actually issued orders that division commanders take care not to enter Sweden.\footnote{Mannerheim, \textit{The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim}, 329.} Although this was the one place where the Finns were caught off-guard, they quickly filled the gaps in their defenses, earning fame when Captain Hägglund’s motti strategy literally annihilated an entire Soviet division.\footnote{Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War}, 172-173; and Mannerheim, \textit{The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim}, 348-349.}

In the far north, the plan was less aimed at controlling the nickel mines near Petsamo (the key consideration in the so-called “Continuation War” in 1940), as the USSR was not yet concerned with denying that strategic metal to Germany.\footnote{Read and Fisher, \textit{The Deadly Embrace}, 506.} This time, the port was the primary target, in order to prevent foreign powers from re-supplying the Finns.\footnote{Neavkivi, \textit{The Appeal That Was Never Made}, 46-47; and Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War}, 202.} Virtually unopposed Soviet forces took the port, although a hastily assembled defense prevented them from driving south to assist in other theaters.\footnote{Mannerheim, \textit{The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim}, 341.}
One additional factor in Meretskov’s strategy - Kuusinen had convinced Stalin that Finnish workers would rise up to welcome the liberation of their country, and Stalin in turn had instructed Meretskov to plan accordingly. However much this may have affected the opening weeks of the war cannot be estimated, but it indicates that even Stalin was capable of miscalculation – he did not even deploy the Red Army’s best units in the initial assault.

It seems as though, in every instance where Stalin and his generals varied from Clausewitz’s teachings, the results were less than satisfactory. Whereas the efforts of Frunze, Tukhachevskii, and others to construct a modernized, comprehensive theory of warfare had merit, in practice their methodology fell short. The temptation to blame their failures on ideological rigidity remains strong. This conclusion must be necessarily balanced against the timeless wisdom contained in On War, which could not be refuted by Ludendorff, or B. H. Liddell Hart, or even Hitler, for that matter.

Hitler’s saber-rattling against Communism, the aftershock of the German victory over Russia in World War One, and the lingering specter of the Prusso-German military tradition pervaded Stalin’s foreign policy and strategic decision-making, and to some degree, impaired his judgement. This partially explains Stalin’s misguided endeavor to consign On War to history’s dustbin, which in turn brings up his problem with Lenin.

In their chapter on “Generalissimo Stalin, General Clausewitz and Colonel Razin,” brothers Roy and Zhores Medvedev explain how in 1946, Stalin denounced Clausewitz as an “ignorant adventurer” and a “reactionary ideologue of German militarism.” Citing Lenin and Friedrich Engels, Colonel Evgeny Razin dared to challenge Stalin’s opinion in the pages of Voennaya Mysl (Military Thought). An assistant professor at the department of the “Art of War” at the Red Army’s Frunze Academy, Razin had worked tirelessly to incorporate Clausewitz into Soviet strategic thought. For his efforts, Razin was arrested by the KGB, beaten, tried, and sentenced to ten years’ hard labor. Then in 1950 Stalin, after reading several of Razin’s other works, ordered him released, promoted to the rank of major-general, and restored to his former academic position.

Stalin could declare Clausewitz obsolete. He could order generals purged and party functionaries exiled, but he could never discharge his debt to Lenin. Whenever one of his policies appeared to vary from “Marxist-Leninist” doctrine, critics such as Leon Trotsky, General Tukhachevskii, and even Colonel Razin would feel emboldened enough to question Stalin’s actions – challenges that could not be ignored. Although people soon realized that the Soviet dictator’s vindictive nature transcended political discourse, the

160 Tillotson, Finland at Peace & War, 124.
162 Roy Medvedev, “Generalissimo Stalin, General Clausewitz and Colonel Razin,” in The Unknown Stalin, 186-188.
fault lay in his heresies against orthodox Bolshevism, not that of his critics. Rather like the myth of German military superiority, the “Cult of Lenin” cast a long shadow over Stalin’s tenure in office, and at times, circumscribed his near-total power. Such a threat could not have helped his state of mind.

Like the Finns, the Soviet generals also possessed a working familiarity with Clausewitz. But the Red Army command, decimated by a lethal Stalin purge in 1937, lacked the knowledge and experience required for the proper conduct of modern warfare. Even Tukhachevskii, the leading proponent of “Deep Battle,” would not survive to see his theories implemented in the Winter War.

Facing them, Marshal Mannerheim, who had served as a Tsarist cavalry officer in the elite Chevalier Guards, then as a general, when Finland belonged to the Russian Empire, would have been personally acquainted with many of the purged Soviet officers. During the war, he was uniquely positioned to capitalize on their absence.

The Red Army’s strict, ideologically inspired “unified military doctrine” failed to adequately provide for operational flexibility and battlefield coordination. Nearly all of the authors on Soviet military doctrine omit mention of an important argument that Clausewitz makes in On War: “Theory Should Be Study, Not Doctrine” (*Die Theorie soll eine Betrachtung und keine Lehre sein*). That this distinction also escaped the attention of Red Army theorists would return to haunt them in the Winter War. The USSR’s specific plan for invading Finland, which the Finns had long anticipated, reveals yet another basic misconception nurtured by the Soviet generals:

Perhaps the most ludicrous Soviet diktat was that no piece of ground captured should be given up. History is littered with the follies of fixations over capturing or holding a particular piece of ground or a city – Stalingrad being probably the most grotesque example. Ground features are significant only if they relate directly to the main aim; that is to destroy the enemy’s capacity and will to fight.

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166 Nevakivi, The Appeal That Was Never Made, 18, 36; Reese, Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers, 24; and Glantz, Stumbling Colossus, 109, 258.


169 Van Dyke, The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 41-43.

170 Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 67-68.

171 Tillotson, Finland at Peace & War, 147.
Obviously, the Battle of Stalingrad had not yet been fought, although when evaluating the USSR, whose “history” is littered with anachronistic and often surreal rearrangements of past, present, and future, one minor lapse by the opposing camp should be excused. More to the point, Tillotson had at least studied *On War*, as evidenced by his closing sentence. The author of the Red Army’s *Provisional Field Service Regulations* apparently had not – and before he was purged, Tukhachevskii had written the importance of gaining and holding territory into the Soviet military doctrine.\(^\text{172}\)

After carefully describing the fine line between strength of character and obstinacy, Clausewitz warns against such fixations with capturing and holding ground, as he stresses at length the overriding goal of destroying an enemy’s will to fight.\(^\text{173}\) On a less specific note, Michael Handel suggests that Clausewitz’s method of “dialectical analysis” may be simply too deep for generals.\(^\text{174}\) Clausewitz phrases it more delicately; merely stating that the knowledge required for conducting war must be kept to a minimum, then adding that generals should strive to convert what knowledge they *do* possess into capability.\(^\text{175}\)

Even after the war, the Red Army General Staff failed to incorporate into their field service regulations the lessons that they had learned on the specific demands of terrain, climate, and an opposing force’s unique national characteristics.\(^\text{176}\)

Hitler and his General Staff closely followed the USSR’s performance in Finland, and it has been suggested that the German decision to invade the Soviet Union sprang from their observations of the Red Army’s ineptitude.\(^\text{177}\) This theory ignores the fact that in 1924, the virulently anti-Communist Hitler had exposed his hostile intentions toward the Soviets in his book, *Mein Kampf*, wherein he also proclaimed his abysmally low opinion of all ethnic Slavic peoples, and unveiled his idea for acquiring *lebensraum* in the East.\(^\text{178}\)

Josef Stalin had read a Russian translation of *Mein Kampf*, and thus must have known of the German threat.\(^\text{179}\) For that matter, as Hitler often repeated these same themes in his later public speeches, Germany’s attack on the USSR should have surprised no one. In


\(^{175}\) Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 71-74.

\(^{176}\) Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, 173.


\(^{179}\) Read and Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace*, 11-12, 17-18, 59, 495.
January of 1941, Soviet intelligence had apprised Stalin of the precise details of the impending German invasion, including the tentative date of the attack - information that was corroborated later in the spring by foreign agents sympathetic to the Soviet cause. The timing of Operation Barbarossa, however, was affected by the Soviet mistakes. Marshal Mannerheim comments: “If the general impression of the performance of the Soviet Union in the Finnish War had not been so unfavorable, Germany would hardly have under-estimated [sic] the war potential of the Russian giant to the extent she did.” Mannerheim adds that the Soviets likewise underestimated the Finns, despite the deployment of a million men, roughly half the Red Army, over the three-month course of the Winter War. He further contends that the “Russian” High Command neglected the relative strength of Finland’s army, the character of the terrain, and the preparation of Soviet troops in their planning. All of these omissions recall themes that Clausewitz had written about, some 100 years earlier.

Hitler had read On War, as well as other works by Clausewitz, and he attributed certain of his own ideas on warfare, including Blitzkrieg, to the late Prussian author. On War does present arguments for “the maximum use of force,” “the concentration of forces in space,” and “the unification of forces in time,” all key components of Nazi Germany’s blitzkrieg strategy. Yet Clausewitz qualifies these axiomatic themes by cautioning that “war does not consist of a single short blow,” and more importantly, that “the result in war is never final.”

In the Russo-Finnish War, the side that followed Clausewitz more closely experienced significant military benefits. The Finns coordinated their defense far better than the Soviet command executed their attack – in his book, Clausewitz outlines the important distinctions between defense and attack. (David Evans dedicates an entire chapter to an examination of the relative merits of offensive, as opposed to defensive, warfare,

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182 Ibid., 365-366.

183 Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 183-185 (enemy strength), 43-44, 69, 197-200 (terrain), 56-57, 60 (planning).

184 Hitler, Mein Kampf, 668, 670.

185 Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 9-11, 118, 119-123. Blitzkrieg also incorporated elements that Clausewitz could not have foreseen, such as combined air and armor operations.

186 Ibid., 13-14, 19.

stressing that Ludendorff disagreed with Clausewitz as to which stance is preferable).\textsuperscript{188} In any case, here the Finns did a better job of it. The unique nature of Finland’s strengths, when arrayed against the Soviet Union’s weaknesses, enabled the Finns to forestall what eventually would have become a total disaster – at least long enough for external factors to divert Stalin’s attention.

Insofar as Finland succeeded, the Soviet Union’s military advantage cannot be considered nearly as great as had been expected. And the Finns \textit{did} succeed – after the first two months of fighting, the Kremlin abandoned their support for Kuusinen, along with the attempt to conquer Finland outright – signaling to the Helsinki government that peace negotiations were possible.\textsuperscript{189} The short victory that the Soviet war planners had envisioned (and which Clausewitz insists is best) could not be achieved.\textsuperscript{190}

To a large degree, the Red Army’s difficulties were caused by the inordinate amount of \textit{friction}, as Clausewitz referred to it, encountered by the invaders.\textsuperscript{191} Logistical problems and poor communications plagued the Soviet field commanders all along the extensive Wilderness front.\textsuperscript{192} The unusually cold winter of 1939-1940 aided the Finns in northern Karelia where, as previously mentioned, Soviet troops literally froze at their posts.\textsuperscript{193} The Gulf of Finland also froze solid, upsetting the Red Navy’s plans for coastal bombardments combined with an amphibious assault.\textsuperscript{194}

The inability of the Soviets to coordinate land and naval operations, due in part to faulty communications, hindered their offensive – as did several “friendly fire” incidents involving Red air and naval units in the first days of the war. In consequence, the Soviet Navy played a diminished combat role for the duration.\textsuperscript{195} But unpredictable affairs of a much different kind – international events, and Stalin’s paranoiac reaction to them - ultimately saved Finland.\textsuperscript{196}

\textsuperscript{188} Evans, \textit{War: A Matter of Principles}, 31, 149.
\textsuperscript{189} Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War}, 215.
\textsuperscript{190} Clausewitz, \textit{Vom Kriege}, 147.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 51-53.
\textsuperscript{192} Tillotson, \textit{Finland at Peace & War}, 144; and Van Dyke, \textit{The Soviet Invasion of Finland}, 200, 201.
\textsuperscript{193} Tillotson, \textit{Finland at Peace & War}, 156, 162; and Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War}, 174. Yet on the Karelian Isthmus, the cold weather facilitated Red Army tanks moving along frozen marshlands and across frozen lakes.
\textsuperscript{194} Van Dyke, \textit{The Soviet Invasion of Finland}, 23, 46, 53-54; and Chew, \textit{The White Death}, 130.
\textsuperscript{195} Van Dyke, \textit{The Soviet Invasion of Finland}, 47, 53-55, 193-194; and Tillotson, \textit{Finland at Peace & War}, 150.
\textsuperscript{196} Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War}, 238, 250-251.
Josef Stalin was, and to this day remains, a difficult psychological study, at the very least. His decision to leave Finland standing remains a matter for debate - several competing theories have been advanced by authors claiming to understand why Stalin chose negotiation over continuing the war.\textsuperscript{197} Clearly the early reversals dealt to the Red Army influenced his attitude toward the Finnish campaign.\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{197} Puntila, \textit{The Political History of Finland}, 167-168.

\textsuperscript{198} Chew, \textit{The White Death}, 76.
CHAPTER TWO: COUNTRY

Country, the next category considered from Clausewitz’s trinity, implies government. In the Russo-Finnish War, neither government proved the deciding factor, although the two opposing governments, very different in style and substance, clearly contribute to the perception of asymmetry. Clausewitz notes that governments also supply the rationale for war. During the prewar negotiations, the Soviet Union claimed it wanted to ensure the defensive needs of Leningrad, while the Finnish government countered that, as a declared neutral, it posed no threat to the city and its approaches.

In reality, the Finns needed no rationale – their long history of resistance to Russian domination had sunk deep roots in the collective Finnish memory, and their spontaneous response to the Red Army invasion cut across all social and political divisions within Finland. The Soviet Union, having fabricated a pretext for their decidedly un-socialist behavior, faced a more difficult task in selling a war of aggression both at home and abroad. This effort was significantly eased by Stalin’s indifference to popular opinion.

As an extension of government policy, war, (as well as the generals who make war), should always be considered subordinate to the authority of the civilian government. Typically, governments establish and operate the command structure responsible for conducting a war. The democratic government of Finland worked slowly compared to the totalitarian regime of the USSR. Whereas Stalin could issue orders with every expectation of immediate and total compliance, the Finns had to consult all the involved Cabinet ministers, a Parliament, and assorted other officials before they could finalize any major decisions.

As mentioned earlier, Finland had won its independence from Russia in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, and on July 17, 1919, the Finns established a republican form of government. Finland’s constitution provided for a unicameral parliament, headed by a Prime Minister; a popularly-elected President with an appointed Cabinet; and a separate, independent court system.

Kaarlo J. Ståhlberg, the liberal leader of the National Progressive Party, defeated Mannerheim, the military victor of Finland’s civil war, in the nation’s first presidential election. Mannerheim retired from public service and his still-mobilized Civil Guards,

199 Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 22.
201 Glantz, Stumbling Colossus, 56; and Stover, “Finnish Military Politics,” 753.
202 Puntila, The Political History of Finland, 103; and Jackson, Finland, 105.
including the Jägers, were placed under the authority of the War Minister. On October 14, 1920, Ståhlberg negotiated the Treaty of Dorpat (Estonia) with Lenin – the signing of which made the Soviet Union the first nation to recognize Finland.

The unusually large number of competing political parties stimulated participation in the new democracy, while ominous challenges from left- and right-wing extremists, typical throughout Europe during the inter-war period, tested the limits of constitutional resolve. Similarly, economic boom and bust, and a failed experiment in prohibition, merely served to reinforce the civic-minded Finns’ opinion that their system could always prevail. By 1939 Finland had comfortably settled into the complementary roles of democratic Baltic “successor state,” trading partner in the Western capitalist economy, member of the League of Nations (since 1920), and progressive Scandinavian neutral.

Of course, the Finns were less comfortable in the role of Soviet neighbor. Their bitter separation from Russia had engendered lingering resentment, and the more recent, but near-constant threats of Bolshevik revolutionaries intensified the high emotional pitch of Finnish “Russophobia.” The non-aggression treaty agreed upon at Dorpat had been reaffirmed by subsequent alliances, signed in 1932 and 1934, although later developments, such as the emergence of Hitler’s Third Reich, had destabilized Europe. Even those provisions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact revealed to the public had called Stalin’s reliability into question, not least among Finnish leftists.

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204 Tillotson, *Finland at Peace & War*, 85. On page 88, the author notes that in 1922, Finland would be the first Western nation to change the name of their Ministry of War to the less belligerent-sounding “Ministry of Defence.”


206 Jackson, *Finland*, 144-152 *passim*; and Kasekamp, “Radical Right-Wing Movements in the North-East Baltic,” 590.


209 Ibid., 84.


As the war clouds gathered, Finnish diplomats found it increasingly difficult to play power politics with the likes of Stalin and Hitler.\textsuperscript{214} The democratic process in itself had handicapped prewar diplomatic negotiations with the Soviets – while in wartime, any delay can be potentially fatal. Finland compensated for this to a degree by allowing Mannerheim freedom to conduct those military operations not directly tied to political considerations. On the other hand, too many officials in the Finnish government enjoyed similar latitude, which would confuse potential allies during diplomatic negotiations and, even worse, when assessing disparate requests for war supplies.\textsuperscript{215}

A glaring example of the deficiency in their system surfaced near the end of the fighting. French Prime Minister Eduard Daladier dangled the prospect of French military intervention before the Helsinki government for a week, causing the Finns to postpone peace talks while they met to consider the offer, at a cost of “several thousand” more Finnish soldiers’ lives.\textsuperscript{216}

Finland’s plight elicited worldwide sympathy, but very little foreign assistance, despite the unceasing efforts of Finnish diplomats to secure allies, volunteer replacements, and critical war materiel. One reason for this lay in the false hope nurtured by German diplomats that the Third Reich would never allow a Soviet takeover in Finland. In 1937, Constantin von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister before Ribbentrop, had assured the Finns that the preservation of their independence was the Nazis’ sole concern in Finland.\textsuperscript{217} A special German trade envoy to Helsinki since 1935, Wipert von Blücher, repeatedly asked Berlin to intervene on behalf of the Finns. But in early October 1939, Ribbentrop ordered Blücher to instruct Finland to seek a direct understanding with the USSR, as they themselves had done.\textsuperscript{218}

Even the German Air Minister, Field Marshal Hermann Göring, “who had bitterly opposed Ribbentrop’s eastern policy,” had previously intimated to Finnish officials that, should the USSR invade them, Germany would support the Finns.\textsuperscript{219} On October 15, 1939, he reversed himself, predicting that “Finland will be attached to Russia.”\textsuperscript{220}

Before arriving at his final definition of the trinity, Clausewitz advances an alternative: fighting forces, country, and allies. In this instance, he defines “country” as “physical features and population,” which becomes “the people” in his final version of the trinity. Thus “allies” would be replaced by the other definition of “country,” meaning “government.” The point is that Clausewitz initially considered allies (\textit{Bundesgenossen})

\textsuperscript{214} Tillotson, \textit{Finland at Peace & War}, 94-95.

\textsuperscript{215} Nevakivi, \textit{The Appeal That Was Never Made}, 93, 129.

\textsuperscript{216} Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War}, 240-241.

\textsuperscript{217} Jakobson, \textit{The Diplomacy of the Winter War} 23-24.

\textsuperscript{218} Read and Fisher, \textit{The Deadly Embrace}, 386.

\textsuperscript{219} Nevakivi, \textit{The Appeal That Was Never Made}, 108.

\textsuperscript{220} Tanner, \textit{The Winter War}, 82.
as important as the three (other) components of his trinity, although two paragraphs later he discounts the value of allies, noting that they do not always perform as expected.\textsuperscript{221}

In the matter of arms procurement, the Finns fared somewhat better. Britain, France, and Sweden sold or donated substantial quantities of aircraft, cannon, bombs, guns, and other munitions, although some question remains as to how much of it actually reached Finland in time to be used in the war.\textsuperscript{222} Germany, citing the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement (which was not an overt military alliance), refused to permit the transshipment of arms through German ports, effectively cutting off such commerce from Italy, a nation more eager to support the Finns.\textsuperscript{223}

Norway and Sweden refused to allow foreign soldiers transit across their respective nations, unless they met the definition of “international volunteers,” but Sweden allowed their own people to volunteer, and surprising numbers of them did.\textsuperscript{224} As was the case in the recently concluded Spanish Civil War, volunteers from many other countries enlisted, only this time, for the anti-Communist cause. Among them was Gustavs Celmiņš, founder of the Latvian fascist “Thunder Cross” (\textit{Pērkonkrust}) movement.\textsuperscript{225}

These often-untrained volunteers rarely engaged in combat. The war ended before preparations to send much larger contingents of French, British, and Finnish-American soldiers with specialized ski training, via Norway, could be finalized. Their primary contribution resulted incidentally, when news of their possible intervention reached Stalin’s ears, about the time he reopened talks with the Ryti-Tanner government.

Although the Finns held the moral high ground, some foreign leaders, in their attempts to remain objective, concluded that Finnish leaders had exercised very bad judgement by refusing to lease a few islands to the USSR, instead of risking a war that would threaten their very existence. Conversely, numerous private individuals from around the world forwarded their good wishes to the Finns, as well as their proposals for diplomatic initiatives. One clever letter writer suggested that Finland invite Leon Trotsky to establish a provisional government for an appropriately renamed Soviet Union, based on a thin strip of Finnish territory to be furnished for that purpose.\textsuperscript{226}

In some respects, the Soviet Union shared many common features with Nazi Germany and the Western democracies. All were rapidly industrializing, with attendant economic success. Their growing urban populations were subject to propaganda campaigns via the media, as their modern communications and transportation networks linked them ever

\textsuperscript{221} Clausewitz, \textit{Vom Kriege}, 13.

\textsuperscript{222} Tanner, \textit{The Winter War}, 131-133.

\textsuperscript{223} Nevakivi, \textit{The Appeal That Was Never Made}, 35; and Mazour, \textit{Finland: Between East and West}, 114.

\textsuperscript{224} Tanner, \textit{The Winter War}, 133.

\textsuperscript{225} Kasekamp, “Radical Right-Wing Movements in the North-East Baltic,” 599.

\textsuperscript{226} Tanner, \textit{The Winter War}, 135.
more tightly. All of them maintained “state” police with sweeping powers, and all were expanding and modernizing their military forces.\textsuperscript{227}

Assuming a degree of familiarity with those times, it seems fitting to dwell on the differences between the USSR and the other powers. A complete and accurate description of the Soviet government would require a book-length effort. Suffice it to say that, while maintaining the outward appearance of a fair and democratic socialist state (in Marxist-Leninist terms), a powerful elite controlled every aspect of life in the USSR, and Josef Stalin controlled the elite. The operations of government conformed to his will, even if its official structure did not acknowledge this \textit{de facto} condition.

At the topmost level, a \textit{troika} of three positions (not always invested in three different individuals) wielded power. In 1939, the recently appointed Foreign Minister, Molotov, retained his other position as Soviet Premier, officially the “Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars.”\textsuperscript{228} Mikhail Kalinin held the largely ceremonial position of “Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR,” or Soviet President. Stalin, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, retained all real power – but this derived more from his overbearing style than from any inherent structural imbalance.

Stalin had personally selected the other two men, largely for their willingness to implement his policies, and their “election” had been nothing more than a rubber-stamp by members of the bodies that they respectively governed, who were for the most part intimidated into backing Stalin’s nominees. In 1941, Stalin would replace Molotov, adding “Soviet Premier” to his own growing list of positions. While debate continues over the exact inner workings within the power elite, scholars typically agree that, under Josef Stalin, the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was a totalitarian dictatorship.\textsuperscript{229}

Even though absolute authority gave the governmental system of the USSR one advantage during the Winter War, the actual situation – as Clausewitz would be quick to point out - cannot be reduced to a simple formula.\textsuperscript{230} While Stalin exercised near-total power, in those cases where he was wrong, his orders would still be implemented without question – those who believe in compromise and consensus might counter that totalitarianism should therefore be considered the worse form of government. Certainly the ponderous Soviet bureaucracy unduly complicated their war effort, to the benefit of the Finns:

It is, of course, difficult to say to what extent the political leaders in the Soviet hierarchy were responsible for the purely military mistakes in regard to the planning of the war, operations, and organization. But it is probably safe to assume that their influence was considerable, as was the case with the political Commissars within the combatant ranks. That every order must first be approved

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228 Read and Fisher, \textit{The Deadly Embrace}, 79.
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by the political leaders necessarily led to delay and confusion, not to speak of a
lessening of initiative and fear of responsibility.\textsuperscript{231}

That aside, the state machinery of totalitarianism more closely mirrors traditional
military command structure, when compared with the workings of democracy, while the
parallel issue of competent generalship has already been discussed in the evaluation of
respective military forces.

Mikhail Frunze had driven the development of the USSR’s unified military
document.\textsuperscript{232} Frunze died in 1925, but his backers had eventually won the debate within the
Soviet military hierarchy between the proponents of a “lightning blow,” which Frunze
had advocated, and those who supported a more defensive war of attrition, two seemingly
contradictory Clausewitzian principles.\textsuperscript{233}

Under Frunze and Marshal Tukhachevskii, Soviet strategic thought evolved separately
from that of other nations. The integration of combined operations, otherwise known as
“Deep Battle,” became Tukhachevskii’s corollary to the unified military doctrine.\textsuperscript{234}
Tukhachevskii had criticized General Ludendorff for failing to coordinate military
operations planning with German social and economic considerations (a central theme in
Clausewitz’s trinity) in explaining how the whole government, not just the military,
should become involved in the conduct of warfare. His attempt to improve upon Soviet
methods of combined operations, and to completely reorganize the Red Army, came too
too late to avert a poor performance by Soviet troops in the Spanish Civil War. Similarly,
Marshal Georgi K. Zhukov’s victorious Manchurian campaign, which also preceded the
outbreak of the Winter War, had required unacceptably high casualties.\textsuperscript{235}

Frunze had adapted Clausewitz’s famous pronouncement that “war is a continuation
of policy” to the struggle between Communism and capitalism, which clearly implied
“total war.” Then Tukhachevskii incorporated this idea into his strategic plan, while
Stalin applied it in the formulation of his “Five-Year Plans.”\textsuperscript{236} Long before attacking
Finland, the Soviet Union had begun preparations for a larger war with Germany.\textsuperscript{237}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{231} Mannerheim, \textit{The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim}, 366.
\bibitem{232} Jacobs, \textit{Frunze: The Soviet Clausewitz}, 25.
\bibitem{233} Clausewitz, \textit{Vom Kriege}, 13-14, 119-123; Jacobs, \textit{Frunze}, 104; and Jarymowycz,
\textit{“Jedi Knights in the Kremlin,”} in \textit{Military Planning and the Origins of the Second
World War in Europe}, 136.
\bibitem{234} Jarymowycz, \textit{“Jedi Knights in the Kremlin,”} in \textit{Military Planning and the Origins of the Second
World War in Europe}, 123.
\bibitem{235} Glantz, \textit{Stumbling Colossus}, 57-58; Reese, \textit{Red Commanders}, 135; Reese, \textit{Stalin’s
Reluctant Soldiers}, 170; and White, \textit{“Soviet Philosophy of War,”} 345-346.
\bibitem{236} Kipp, \textit{“Lenin and Clausewitz,”} 189.
\bibitem{237} Jarymowycz, \textit{“Jedi Knights in the Kremlin,”} in \textit{Military Planning and the Origins of the Second
World War in Europe}, 126.
\end{thebibliography}
Hitler’s ranting was not enough, certain aspects of their conflicting ideologies could not be ignored – and neither dictator could long resist the temptation to absorb the weak “successor states” lying between the two larger countries.

Stalin’s Second Five-Year Plan, launched in 1932, included increased production of coal, iron, and steel, and a rapid expansion of the USSR’s defense industry.238 Initiated in 1938, a Third Five-Year Plan extended the Soviet Union’s rail system and stepped up quotas for new military supplies, partly in response to the rearmament of Germany. Seen in this light, Stalin’s pact with Hitler can be understood as “a desperate attempt to buy time” for the Soviet arms buildup.239

Like the Red Army’s military doctrine, Soviet foreign policy derived from Communist ideology. As Foreign Minister, Molotov headed the diplomatic corps, although Stalin again pulled all the strings. Prior to his appointment, Molotov, the Soviet Prime Minister, had no foreign policy experience, and Stalin chose him as much for his loyalty as his ability. The previous Foreign Minister, Maxim M. Litvinov, was Jewish - Stalin had replaced him to signal the anti-Semitic Hitler that the USSR desired improved relations with the Third Reich.240

At first glance, this appears to contravene Marxist teaching, as the internal politics of Nazi Germany represented its polar opposite. But after the 1938 Munich Conference, Stalin had become disillusioned with the West.241 Without Britain and France, the Soviet Union would be virtually bereft of allies, and in no position to resist German aggression in the so-called “successor states” of Central and Eastern Europe. Poland and Rumania, for example, hated the USSR, while overtures from Germany had been welcomed by the Poles - and even more so by Finland.242

Rather than court their weaker neighbors, or the distant Western powers, which had already shown themselves to be unreliable, Stalin concluded that only by dealing directly with Hitler could the USSR gain security and maintain a powerful stance in the region. The situation demanded the ruthless brand of Machtpolitik that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact would satisfy. Unfortunately for everyone, including historians, the Bolsheviks had also precluded freedom of the press; opting instead for a more persuasive (if twisted) state-controlled media. In the final month before the invasion, a massive Soviet propaganda effort was directed against Finland.243


240 Read and Fisher, The Deadly Embrace, 16, 49, 74-75, 228.

241 Tanner, The Winter War, 18.


243 Tanner, The Winter War, 84-85; and Read and Fisher, The Deadly Embrace, 403.
Lastly, the unique example of Kuusinen’s puppet government must be considered. Known for almost fifty years as “the only socialist government ever removed from power,” its place in the Clausewitzian trinity appears equally anomalous. Operating out of the Finnish border resort of Terijoki, Kuusinen could find only seven plausible candidates to staff his cabinet. Backing emanated solely from the Kremlin, while the Comintern struggled in vain to generate international recognition and popular support.\textsuperscript{244} A “1\textsuperscript{st} Finnish Corps” of volunteers, composed predominantly of veterans who had preferred exile in the USSR after the Finnish Civil War, as well as a number of Soviet Karelians, imposed order and operated relief services in the small territory controlled by Kuusinen. Military propaganda streaming out of Terijoki did very little to improve the government’s standing.\textsuperscript{245}

Finnish Communists did not line up in support of Kuusinen – in fact, his choice for Vice-President, Arvo Tuominen, the Secretary General of Finland’s Communist Party (SKP), feigned illness to sit out the war in Stockholm.\textsuperscript{246} A left-wing Finnish publisher, Mauri Ryömä, also fled to Sweden, apparently to avoid collaborating with Kuusinen.\textsuperscript{247} Understandably angered by the Soviet bombings of their homes in Helsinki, Finnish workers joined the Civil Guards, not the SKP.\textsuperscript{248} Thus the Terijoki government “represented no serious political element in Finland.”\textsuperscript{249}

But a few days after the Winter War ended, a new “Karelian-Finnish Union Republic” was patched together from the Soviet territorial conquests in Finnish Karelia and the Russian portions of Karelia that had never been independent. Within a month of his recall, Otto Kuusinen was once again made President of a contrived Socialist state.\textsuperscript{250}

\textsuperscript{244} Rentola, “The Finnish Communists and the Winter War,” 599.

\textsuperscript{245} Van Dyke, \textit{The Soviet Invasion of Finland}, 58-59.

\textsuperscript{246} Rentola, “The Finnish Communists and the Winter War,” 598.

\textsuperscript{247} Ibid., 591-592, 594, 596.


\textsuperscript{249} Shearman, \textit{Finland: The Adventures of a Small Power}, 90.

\textsuperscript{250} Van Dyke, \textit{The Soviet Invasion of Finland}, 189.
CHAPTER THREE: THE PEOPLE

The fact that Finland was free and democratic certainly played a pivotal role in its survival, but that point more properly belongs to Clausewitz’s final category, the people. In On War, he emphasizes that the populace of a combatant nation supplies the passion (Die Leidenschaften) for war.\(^{251}\) Herein lies the single most important lesson of the Russo-Finnish War, and perhaps the most important point made by Clausewitz.

Compared with the military forces and the government, the role of the people is hidden within the trinity, since they participate less directly in the command and execution of warfare. Only when their support for a war reaches fever pitch, or their opposition to it interferes with those in charge, does the population make itself heard, by voting, or refusing to enlist, or again, some indirect fashion. The professionals who typically prosecute most wars rarely consult the masses, whereas in the Winter War, the Finnish people translated their high morale into their greatest advantage.

In presenting his argument for including morale on any future list of Clausewitzian principles, David Evans insists that “civilian morale” comprises one-third of the trinity, while noting that even today, neither the U.S. nor the British military services ascribe sufficient importance to it.\(^{252}\) Both the morale of those people serving in the military (even if they were civilians immediately before the outbreak of war), and the many other contributions made by a civilian population to any war effort also deserve to be included in that third. However they are defined, the role of “the people” has not received adequate attention.

If the Finnish government was indecisive, the Finnish people were not. Their posture of open defiance to Stalin drove the internal politics.\(^{253}\) No doubt public opinion had handcuffed prewar diplomatic efforts that might have resulted in a peaceful settlement, yet the Finns’ fiercely independent stance inspired their army to a remarkable effort on the battlefield. Here, too, can be seen the interdependence (innerer Zusammenhang), between the three categories that Clausewitz emphasizes.\(^{254}\) Finland’s armed forces were drawn from a populace that firmly rejected any compromise with a foreign bully.\(^{255}\)

Enthusiastic civilian volunteers made all the sacrifices deemed necessary to the war effort.\(^{256}\) In June of 1939, thousands of young men and women volunteered to spend a week in Karelia, reinforcing the defenses against a possible Soviet attack. When that possibility materialized, the Finns, recently divided over a national language debate and

\(^{251}\) Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 22, 352-354.


\(^{253}\) Jägerskiöld, Mannerheim, 117; and Jakobson, The Diplomacy of the Winter War, 107.

\(^{254}\) Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 22-23, 343.


between the two extremes of left- and right-wing politics, quickly united under a single banner of self-determination.  

Politically active Finns, like many Europeans in the Depression Era, flirted with extremism, but in Finland, the center generally held. On the Left, the Communist Party, viewed as an extension of Moscow’s policies, never gained wide popularity, while Finland’s largest party, the Social Democrats, had to enter into coalition governments with the Progressive Party (formerly known as the “Young Finns”) in order to exert their influence. The centrist Agrarian Union, which promoted peasant land ownership, attracted fewer coalition partners. Two right-wing monarchist parties, the Concentrationists (formerly the “Old Finns”) and the Swedish People’s Party, depended for the most part on the politics of compromise to advance their agendas. With the notable exception of the Lapua, the democratic process in Finland generally encouraged cooperation and unity.

The Lapua movement grew out of right-wing reaction. In 1929, an attack by local peasants on a meeting of the Young Communist League in the town of Lapua earned the party its name, as well as a reputation for violence. The leaders of Lapua then formed a conservative “society” called the Finnish Lock (Suomen Lukko). Under pressure from the extreme Right, in 1930 the government outlawed the Communist Party. Lapua continued its own illegal activities, including the kidnapping of K. H. Ståhlberg, the former President, until 1932, when an attempted coup d’etat failed. Outraged Finns soon abandoned the movement, but Lapua had driven many Finnish Communists into exile - a development that did not escape the attention of the Soviet Union.

Long before the outbreak of war, various conservative organizations had lobbied the Finnish government for increasing the defense budget. Some of these groups, like the Independence League and the League of War Veterans, included numerous reserve officers and Civil Guards. University students formed the Academic Karelia Society to demand the annexation of eastern Karelia, that territory within the Soviet Union inhabited

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260 Mazour, *Finland between East and West*, 84-85; and Puntila, *The Political History of Finland*, 143-144.

261 Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The Scandinavian States and Finland*, 101.

by Finnish-speaking people. Interest in that issue grew when the Soviets began the forced collectivization of agriculture, which was widely reported in the Finnish press.

Otherwise known as the Civil Guards, the all-volunteer Suojeluskunta played multiple roles over a period of time. They were organized as a militia (the Protection Corps) to resist the Bolsheviks during the Finnish Civil War, acting as a police force for the White Army and later, for the Provisional Government. Their commanders had backed Mannerheim’s candidacy for President of Finland, even to the point of revolt, and they remained separate from the national army until 1932, when the abortive coup caused the Finnish government to arrest their leaders.

Prior to the outbreak of the Winter War, the Civil Guards had excluded Social Democrats from participation, and the organization’s right-wing affiliations (many of its members had been Jägers, and others had supported the Lapua movement) distanced them from Finnish trade unionists. Even so, by 1938 they numbered 100,000 members, along with another 30,000 trainees in their “Boys Department.” The discipline, training, and morale of the Civil Guards, all too symptomatic of a militaristic society, nonetheless facilitated the country’s preparations for war.

While overseeing the construction of fortifications in Karelia in 1932, Gustav Mannerheim noted the contributions of the Defense Corps and their sister organization, Lotta Svärd: “With regard to Defence Corps and Lotta work, the Isthmus was a model.” Elsewhere he elaborates on their wartime efforts:

In discussing the human resources available for our defense, Finland’s Lottas must not be forgotten. The possibilities of releasing men for service at the front would have been much less if the armed forces had not had the support of the powerful Lotta Svärd organization. With its 100,000 members, this organization fell in at the front as well as in the rear, devotedly carrying on duties in the medical, quartermaster, and signals branches. It is difficult to think of the Winter War without recalling the magnificent contribution of this women’s organization, which became the model of similar organizations in many other countries.

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263 Kasekamp, “Radical Right-Wing Movements in the North-East Baltic,” 596.


265 Jackson, Finland, 86; and Smith, “Russia and the Origins of the Finnish Civil War,” 487.


267 Tanner, The Winter War, 134-135; and Tillotson, Finland at Peace and War, 102-104.


269 Ibid., 360.
One can only surmise the degree to which this approximates Clausewitz’s concept of “total war.”270 In the Winter War, Finnish women worked as “spotters” of incoming enemy aircraft, sounding air raid warnings at the sight of Soviet bombers. The “Little Lottas,” for girls eight to seventeen years of age, wrote supportive letters to Finnish servicemen, and collected gifts to send to their remote army outposts.271

The factors examined above all contributed to creating a strong Finnish people, confident in their identity and able to unite around a national purpose:

The First Republic’s ideal of identity consisted in unity and uniformity, which of course was understandable in that situation, in the immediate aftermath of the divisive Civil War. It was believed that unity was the only source of strength and that national strength was the only guarantee of continued existence. In schoolbooks, for example, the ideal of national identity was reflected in the emphasis of many traditional military virtues, physical fitness, obedience, unanimity, sacrifice.272

During the negotiations in Moscow prior to the invasion, people quickly became aware of Soviet intentions, although the talks were supposedly secret. An unprecedented outpouring of national sentiment greeted the negotiators when they returned home: “Seasoned politicians who normally had to adjust their actions and their speech to the fine nuances created by divisions among socialistic, bourgeois, and Swedish elements now suddenly seemed to feel that no such restraint was necessary.”273

The politics of inter-war Finland must be understood as a reaction to the rise of Bolshevism on their border. Perhaps this is why so many authors focus on the Lapua movement, which never won more than seven percent of the parliamentary seats.274 Finland’s former provincial status within the Russian Empire, while a source of resentment among staunch nationalists, played less of a role in fomenting anti-Soviet feelings – Communism had since emerged as the more serious enemy.275

Knowing that their party leaders had participated in the Finnish government’s rejection of the initial Soviet demands, rank-and-file Social Democrats volunteered to fight in the Winter War - even many Finnish Communists reported for duty.276

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274 Jackson, *Finland*, 107.


turn allayed the suspicions of those on the extreme Right. When called upon to do so, all the elements of a society that emphasized participation and cooperation set aside their differences to achieve a remarkable team effort.

While neither the people of Finland nor the USSR wanted war, the Soviet people displayed no enthusiasm for the conflict. After all, anti-war activists had led their Communist Revolution, and Lenin (along with Stalin and Trotsky) had personally granted Finland their freedom. Stalin had long recognized the value of wartime propaganda, but it seems this had only led him to underestimate the intelligence of ordinary people. From a more practical standpoint, the absence of significant victories and rumors of frozen Russian bodies returning from the front demoralized even those who had earlier welcomed the non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany.

If “the people” disapproved, the government barely noticed. Soviet troops also suffered from low morale, their revolutionary fervor having been quashed by the 1937 Red Army purges, and not yet recovered. In January of 1940, Zhdanov assigned forty-four more political officers to the North-Western Front, where they enlisted another 1,000 combat soldiers into the Party. Bolshevik rhetoric shifted away from class struggle to nationalist patriotism, apparently conflated with the desire to avenge the “humiliation” the Finns had inflicted on Mother Russia.

In any event, life is cheap in a dictatorship, and the USSR had plenty of unmotivated soldiers to sacrifice. After replacing Meretskov with the more experienced Marshal Semyon Konstantinovitch Timoshenko, on February 11, 1940, the Soviet leader ordered in more troops, oblivious to the losses, until the sheer weight of numbers finally broke through the Mannerheim Line.

In 1933, Stalin had predicted that millions of Soviet citizens, from all the republics, would support the Red Army when called upon to do so. In 1939, this did not happen—nonetheless, to the Georgian “Man of Steel,” Finland’s determined populace, their greatest advantage, must have counted for naught. Yet Stalin did learn from the example

277 Puntila, The Political History of Finland, 166.

278 Tillotson, Finland at Peace & War, 34; Shearman, Finland: The Adventures of a Small Power, 56; and Smith, “Russia and the Origins of the Finnish Civil War,” 496.


280 Read and Fisher, The Deadly Embrace, 412.

281 Glantz, Stumbling Colossus, 33.

282 Chew, The White Death, 143-144.

283 Chew, The White Death, 149-157 passim; and Van Dyke, The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 150-160 passim; and Reese, Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers, 171.

set by the Finns – less than two years hence, in the “Great Patriotic War,” he would mobilize the entire Soviet nation on the largest imaginable scale.\(^{285}\)

On that occasion, even the Red Army would respond: “…when Hitler invaded, the call of the reviled dictator Stalin for all soldiers to defend the motherland led to a patriotic fervour [sic] in which good morale was largely maintained.”\(^{286}\) In the negotiations with Finland after the (more successful) conclusion of that war, Stalin, having witnessed the value of morale from various sides, would insist that all “Fascist type” groups, “whether political, military, or paramilitary,” be dissolved and banished from Finnish soil.\(^{287}\)

That the lessons of the Russo-Finnish War contributed to the Soviet Union’s success in World War Two is reflected in this summary:

In the end, the Red Army defeated the Germans because of three fundamental reasons: Joseph Stalin – this includes his industrial planning, his uncompromising firmness and insecurity, as well as his vision and flexibility; second, defensive victory via attrition warfare; and finally, the evolution of the Soviet Strategic Offensive that brought Tukhachevsky’s vision of ‘Deep Battle’ into its final devastating form.\(^{288}\)

Hardly the man, or the Soviet Army, that the Finns had humiliated in the Winter War – but even here, the immeasurable sacrifices made by the Soviet people escape mention.

The Soviet Union allowed only one political party, the Communist Party, which also functioned as an official arm of the government, as the Communist Party Secretary was the third member of the troika. Typically optional, party membership included few guarantees, invited close scrutiny from the authorities, and often inspired the contempt of former associates, although greater risks attended those who chose to remain outside of the party ranks. For the ambitious, membership in the Communist Party represented the only path to whatever “success” was possible within the Soviet system.\(^{289}\)

Only the Party, the government, or the military ran civic organizations in the USSR. The goals of these organizations aligned perfectly with the goals of the state: indoctrination, internal security, and military preparedness.\(^{290}\) Their primary appeal to the


\(^{287}\) Kasekamp, “Radical Right-Wing Movements in the North-East Baltic,” 600; Tillotson, *Finland at Peace & War*, 223; and Mazour, *Finland: Between East and West*, 252-253, 262.


members lay in the desire to gain power in a system that controlled everyone that did not control it.\textsuperscript{291} Admittedly, some percentage of members subscribed to Bolshevist ideals, and still others merely sought to escape official scrutiny for non-participation.

Party organizations such as the Young Communist League and Young Pioneers funneled the energies of young people into acceptable channels, at the same time indoctrinating them with the Party’s attitude and values.\textsuperscript{292} Non-governmental attempts to organize Soviet citizens, if they occurred at all, would be met with suspicion, infiltration by government informers, and harsh repression, as were individuals whose religious and cultural (to say nothing of political) aspirations conflicted with the motives of the state.\textsuperscript{293}

To a varying degree, the Soviet Union, officially atheist, tolerated some religious organizations. The Russian Orthodox Church claimed the largest membership, but as one author notes, faithful churchgoers would more or less “opt out” of Soviet society, since the state regarded religion “as an impediment to social progress.”\textsuperscript{294} In such an atmosphere, civic participation is often replaced by alienation, if not outright resistance.

The Soviet people did not unite in support of the war, but their system of government allowed them no means of uniting against it. In a nation of approximately 180 million people, that alone would be a remarkable feat, were it not accomplished through the mechanism of state terror. By 1939, average Soviet citizens, like Stalin’s inner circle, were more concerned with their own survival than with Finland’s.

\textsuperscript{291} Harris, “Stalin as General Secretary: the appointments process and the nature of Stalin’s power,” in \textit{Stalin: A New History}, 67.

\textsuperscript{292} Hammer, \textit{USSR: The politics of oligarchy}, 81-83.

\textsuperscript{293} Shearman, \textit{Finland: The Adventures of a Small Power}, 86.

\textsuperscript{294} Hammer, \textit{USSR: The politics of oligarchy}, 65-68.
CONCLUSION

On March 12, 1940, the war ended in an anti-climactic fashion, underscoring Stalin’s appreciation of the conflict as an extension of policy. Although the Red Army offensive begun in February had finally broken through on the Karelian Peninsula, and the Soviet invaders faced a practically open road to Helsinki, the peace process had already been set into motion, some six weeks earlier. By recalling Kuusinen to Moscow, Stalin had abandoned the Communist puppet regime they had established in Terijoki, in order to resume diplomatic contact with the legitimate Finnish government in Helsinki:

The war had clearly not been the easy success on which Molotov had counted. Finnish society had shown the unity and strength needed to stand up to this severe test. From the Soviets’ point of view the hostile public opinion they had aroused by attacking their small neighbor boded ill, and unforeseeable complications could flow from it. There had been severe Soviet casualties during the heavier battles. The result was that in late January Stalin changed his policy: he now wanted to find out what possibilities there were for peace.295

Rumors of possible Franco-British intervention in Finland had reached Moscow as well.296 “Although Stalin “must have been aware” that Britain and France were not prepared to aid Finland, as another author calculates with icy logic: “The lessons obtained in the war did not recommend additional risks.”297 The Soviet leader was aware of the growing international crisis, and thus hesitant to commit too many resources to what might easily become a secondary theater.

Despite the perceived need to break off the fighting, and having been embarrassed militarily, the USSR still attempted to salvage victory through the peace negotiations. In a curious juxtaposition of Clausewitz, the disingenuous Soviet Foreign Minister redefined policy as a continuation of war by other means:

Molotov’s terms were impossible: they bore no relation to the realities of the military situation. On the Isthmus, the Soviet armies were at that moment still held back by the main line of defense; north of Ladoga, they had got nowhere. It seemed fantastic to ask Finland to surrender voluntarily what her army had successfully defended. Usually the diplomats follow the soldiers, presenting the vanquished with the bill for what has been lost in the field. Molotov reversed the normal procedure by demanding advance payment for victories not yet won. There could be no doubt that eventually the military situation was bound to catch up with Molotov’s terms. Apparently he felt he could not wait that long without risking an Allied intervention.298

295 Jägerskiöld, Mannerheim, 119.


297 Puntila, The Political History of Finland, 167-168.

298 Jakobson, The Diplomacy of the Winter War, 233.
The actual reason, or reasons, for Soviet willingness to end the war remains obscure – another unanswered question regarding Josef Stalin’s enigmatic rule. Still, it seems incredible that the usually opportunistic dictator did not find some excuse, however transparent, for completing his conquest of Finland, if only to preserve a greater measure of respect for himself and the Red Army.

Whatever his true motivations, Stalin sought to end the war on the most favorable terms possible. Of course, the Finns bargained from a position of weakness – the vaunted Mannerheim line had finally crumbled, no foreign army had come to their assistance, and the exhausted Finnish Army, lacking adequate reserves, was depleting rapidly. As staunchly as they had resisted the Red Army, the fighting phase could not continue. The subsequent peace agreement cost Finland more than they would have lost in a prewar treaty with the USSR – in March, 1940, mere survival counted as a victory.

Clausewitz says as much in his discussion of “Purpose and Means in War”:

…this need only be sufficient to counterbalance any numerical advantage possessed by the enemy; over time his political objective will not seem worth the cost. He must then abandon his policy. This gradual wearing down of the opponent applies to a great number of cases where a weak force resists a stronger one.

The Russo-Finnish War provides the clearest example.

Recall that Clausewitz had emphasized the interdependence of government, military forces, and the people. Having examined each category separately, a summation now becomes possible. In the case of Finland, the passion of the people carried the day. The Finns adamantly rejected any compromise with the Soviet Union, and when war came, they willingly sacrificed everything required to preserve their nation. Finnish military forces reflected this attitude throughout the fighting – their spirited defense produced a marvel, but not a miracle.

Lastly, Finland’s civilian government had simply deferred to the people’s wishes, despite all risks, entrusting Marshal Mannerheim to accomplish on the battlefield what the diplomats had not done at the conference table. The Finnish commander understood his people, and the importance Clausewitz attached to popular support of any war effort – in his Memoirs, Mannerheim repeatedly mentions “the people,” “the nation,” and “the national morale.” He even precedes a gloomy assessment of Finland’s long-term prospects with this example: “The nation stood as one man behind their armed forces in the calm and determined knowledge that the struggle must go on.”

Evaluating the USSR, the sequence should be reversed. The centralized government dictated all the actions of their military forces and their citizens, from the top down. Stalin’s earlier purges of the Red Army’s leadership, and the ideological basis for their

\[299\] Ibid., 225, 234-235, 248-254 passim.

\[300\] Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, 27.

\[301\] Mannerheim, The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim, 337, 340, 357.

\[302\] Ibid., 346.
military philosophy, impeded their campaign from the beginning. The Soviet people, brainwashed or intimidated (or both) by their government, contributed virtually nothing positive to the final outcome.

A mere footnote to the Second World War, the war fought between Finland and the USSR escaped the close scrutiny that it deserved, as historians and military strategists understandably devoted their energies to recording and analyzing the larger global conflagration. Thus have the valuable lessons of the Winter War gone unnoticed, or at least under-appreciated, by scholars of warfare.

Finland had engaged in a total war, and the Soviet Union had fought a limited one. Due in part to this asymmetry in motivation, Stalin, a dictator who respected very little except military strength, had not understood Finnish intransigence, even in the prewar diplomatic negotiations – and he also overestimated his military advantage, primarily because he failed to correctly add up Clausewitz’s three essential categories.

As a result, the Soviet Union suffered “a moral defeat…from which she was not to recover until she herself became the victim of aggression in June 1941.” Casually dismissive of democracy and having successfully bullied the Baltic States, both Stalin and Molotov had ultimately failed to grasp that, to some, freedom is worth any price. Besides that, “One does not need to read Clausewitz to understand that even a small country, which in a defensive war has lost territory but not its army, naturally awaits its opportunity to regain its former frontiers – by fair means or foul.” Preferring fair means, the idealistic Finns would require another half-century to achieve their simple goals of independence and neutrality.

One does need to read Clausewitz, however, if one intends to repeat the performance of the Finns. In this day and age, it is certain that the enemy has - and besides, On War makes for interesting reading. The immense popularity of Sun Tzu’s Art of War among members of the American business community suggests that, unpredictably, the next battlefield may appear in the place where we least expect it.

Even today, as conventional warfare rages around the world, the lessons learned from Clausewitz and the Russo-Finnish War could potentially save lives, as well as prevent foreign policy errors. Clausewitz’s insistence on the role of the people in time of war may have been revolutionary in his day, but has since been proven convincingly, and whether the Finns acted on the advice of Clausewitz or out of sheer survival instinct, the point is moot. Their accomplishment bears witness to the truth of his idea. For example, the United States might have succeeded in both Vietnam and in Iraq, had more credibility been awarded to On War. In both instances, U. S. policymakers and strategists ignored the will of the American people, and discounted their opponents’ will to win, with disastrous results. Still worse, they should have known better.

Following the Second World War, the United States military had studied Clausewitz. Air Force Lt. Col. Edward M. Collins argues that democracies are more prone to conduct “total war” than are their enemies, citing remarks by Generals Omar N. Bradley and

303 Nevakivi, The Appeal That Was Never Made, 158.

304 Nevakivi, The Appeal That Was Never Made, 159.
Dwight D. Eisenhower in World War II as examples. Collins recommends that the West revisit Clausewitz’s concept of “limited war,” fought for limited aims, while he also emphasizes the role of popular opinion in formulating government policy.

The distinction between total and limited war has sparked much of the debate over Clausewitz’s ideas, even in the most recent literature. A certain degree of ambivalence attends his presentation of these two types of war, wherein he seems to advocate one or the other. Employing the dialectical method to describe its dual nature, his synthesis concludes that war is a “true chameleon.” Yet in both instances, Clausewitz makes it clear that military forces, including the generals, should be an instrument of government policy, and that military objectives should not determine government policy.

Vincent Esposito, a colonel and director of the military history program at West Point, remarks that Clausewitz’s principles had never (as of 1954) been taught in U. S. military schools. The author notes how easily strategists have misconstrued the basic tenets of On War, citing Ludendorff as a prime example. Esposito suggests that with the advent of nuclear weapons, Clausewitz’s opinions about victory based on a single, devastating blow should be reevaluated, as well as his commentary on the deterrent power of visibly superior forces.

Also of interest, the author contends that Clausewitz uses the terms “policy” and “politics” to specifically indicate “foreign policy, though we always consider the inextricable relationship of domestic policies to foreign policy.” On this point, Colonel Esposito differs from Arno Mayer, who counters that “Clausewitz does not see war as a continuation of diplomacy,” insisting that policy be defined as internal politics. Over 100 years after the publication of On War, these last two authors inadvertently bring into bold relief the difficulty of interpreting Clausewitz.

In the Winter War, the failure to correctly interpret Clausewitz led to greater difficulties for the Soviet Union. Military strategists of the future can ill afford to repeat that mistake, and with the tools now available to them, there can be no excuse for such an


306 Ibid., 17.

307 Ibid., 22.


311 Esposito, “War as a Continuation of Politics,” 20.

oversight. Likewise, the example set by the Finnish people, since repeated elsewhere, demonstrates that the “professionals” cannot successfully omit popular opinion from their calculations, and that Clausewitz was right in asserting that “the people” function as a crucial element in an overall assessment of war strategy.

In 1989, the USSR offered a belated, “left-handed” apology, by condemning the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Agreement, which, a special commission claimed, were contrary to “the Leninist principles of Soviet foreign policy”, and which Molotov “did not have the appropriate formal powers to sign.” Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev then issued a statement in support of the commission’s findings, adding that the war schemes of Molotov and Stalin “in no way reflected the will of the Soviet people.” Carl von Clausewitz would have savored the irony.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Robert Karnisky was born in Gary, Indiana in 1951. After graduating from Griffith Senior High School in Griffith, Indiana, he attended Purdue University intermittently until December 1979, when he received an Associate of Applied Sciences degree in Industrial Illustration Technology. A subsequent career in electromechanical design took him to California, Colorado, New Jersey, and Florida. In August 2003 he enrolled in Tallahassee Community College, where he received an Associate of Arts degree. He has been attending Florida State University from August 2004 until the present, having earned a Bachelor’s degree in History in December 2005.