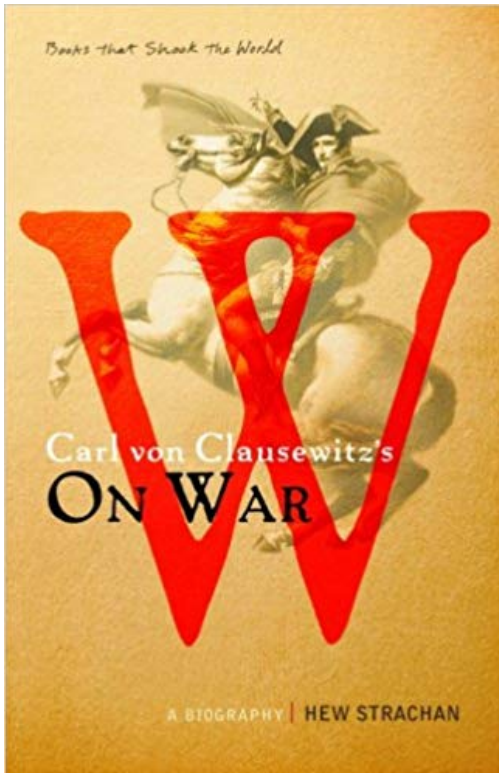


Carl Von Clausewitzs on War *by* Hew Strachan



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From inside front cover: On War by Carl Von Clausewitz was first published in Germany after the Napoleonic Wars. One of the most significant treatises on military strategy ever written, it is still required reading at many military academies today. Its description of 'absolute war' and its insistence on the centrality of battle to war have been blamed for the level of destruction involved in both the First and Second World Wars. Hew Strachan's accessible book challenges the popular misconceptions that surround "On War". He dispels the notion that for Clausewitz policy necessarily shares war, asserting instead that war has its own dynamic and that its reciprocal effects can themselves shape policy. Strachan returns to the very heart of "On War" to recover the arguments at its core; in the process he challenges the received wisdom about this cornerstone of military strategy.



Reviews of the **Carl Von Clausewitzs on War** *by* Hew Strachan

Renthadral

Hew Strachan has written an extraordinarily insightful book on Clausewitz and his theory/philosophy of war. The book is important for two reasons: (1) it provides a useful corrective to the current over-indulgence with the Howard-Paret interpretation of Clausewitz's major English-translated book, "On War;" and (2) it provides additional arguments that support the relevance of Clausewitz's thoughts to current times and events. Of course, Clausewitz should be relevant since he was digging into the psychology of war as much as its practice. Human psychological evolution changes much more slowly than the technologies of war; thus if Clausewitz got the psychology right, his ideas should endure. According to Strachan, they do. However, Strachan's most salient insight is this: that Clausewitz never intended to predict or forecast war in the future. He only tried to explain it in the present. That Clausewitz's explanations remain fresh is testament to the depth of his understanding of the dark side of the human psyche.

Nuadazius

Carl von Clausewitz spent the last dozen years of his life producing *On War*, a work unlike any that had come before it. Many authors, going back to Sun Tzu and *The Art of War* (1963), had written works on tactics and campaigns, advising the general on how to win on the battlefield. Clausewitz himself had done this with his *Principles of War*. But in *On War*, Clausewitz aimed higher, seeking to produce a general philosophical work on war and strategy. However, Clausewitz died suddenly, and the work published as *On War* had to be pulled together from his drafts and notes by his widow and brother-in-law. Additionally, Clausewitz's thinking changed over the dozen years he worked on his project, so that some parts of *On War* are contradicted by other parts. As a result, Clausewitz has been cited in support of many different and sometimes incompatible positions.

Strachan cuts through this confusion, showing how some features of Clausewitz's thinking remained constant, and how other portions changed. Strachan separates out some of the great Prussian's main ideas, but instead of summarizing them, he paints a picture of their complexity, and how they interact. He follows Clausewitz's development of his theory, and shows us how Clausewitz expanded the scope of his thought, and brought in new ideas. Most importantly, Strachan stresses what Clausewitz saw as the most important idea of all: war is a complex interaction of reason, passion, and chance, constantly changing, something that must be looked at afresh in each conflict, and during the conflict, to see what its nature is NOW.

Read Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* to find out both how to approach *On War*, and how to think about the complex subject of war.

Recommended.

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