

## Enduring Theorists through a Contemporary Lens

The stalwart military theorists of professional military education— Clausewitz and Sun Tzu—continue to be relevant even when examined through the lens of recent events. Future strategists should not discount them in the mistaken belief the true nature of war has changed. Just as historiography offers a lens to review historic events, some theorists continue to offer enduring advice with which to consider conflict. In his recent work, *Reconsidering the American Way of War: US Military Practice from the Revolution to Afghanistan*, author Antulio Echevarria argues there is no single American way of war. Unsurprisingly given his reputation as a scholar of Carl von Clausewitz, he concludes, “the American way of war was, and still is, thoroughly political.”

He reaches this conclusion in the same manner Clausewitz used to draw his own conclusions about the nature of war, through the lens of historical analysis. Clausewitz offers the familiar:

*No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so— without first being clear in the mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose; the latter its operational objective. This is the governing principle which will set its course, prescribe the scale of means and effort which is required, and make its influence felt throughout down to the smallest operational detail.*

Echevarria’s conclusion applies to all wars, not just the big ones with clearly defined objectives. Senior military leaders will continue to bear the responsibility for helping civilian decision makers understand what will be required to “achieve” their ends through war. They should remember civilians take the decision to go to war in a unique domestic political condition ever subject to change. As Clausewitz cautions, “certainly the exhaustion or, to be accurate, the fatigue of the stronger has often brought about peace. The reason can be found in the half-hearted manner in which wars are usually waged.” This is particularly important in the context of Echevarria’s other conclusion that the United States, in the past, sought minimalist solutions and resisted the expenditure of too many resources. Future generals should try to avoid the risk of imbalance between ends and means no matter how good they think they are at designing ways to balance the equation.

emphasis added

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