



# The Relationship Between Military and Political Objectives

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“As you know, our objectives in Iraq have been quite limited.”

Professor/Colonel [USA]  
National War College  
AUG 2003

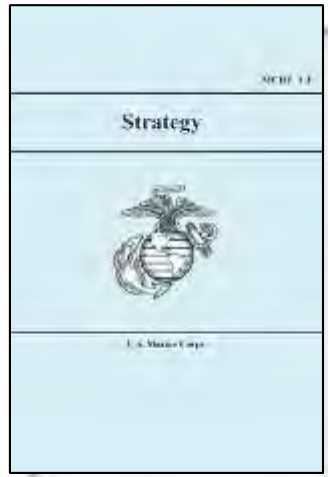
The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish ... the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.

Clausewitz

This is where I'm going today. →

This is where you can find this concept discussed in USMC doctrine. →

		MILITARY OBJECTIVE	
		LIMITED	HIGH-END
POLITICAL OBJECTIVE	LIMITED	ERODE	DISARM
	HIGH-END	CONTAIN	DISARM



**MCDP 1-1 STRATEGY (1997)**

My updated draft: <https://clausewitzstudies.org/readings/Bassford/StrategyDraft/index.htm>

USMC Publication: <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCDP%201-1%20Strategy.pdf>

PROFOUND CONFUSION IN CLAUSEWITZ'S REPUTATION

**“The Apostle of Total War.”**

B.H. Liddell Hart, 1934

**“The preeminent military and political strategist of limited war in modern times.”**

Robert E. Osgood, 1979

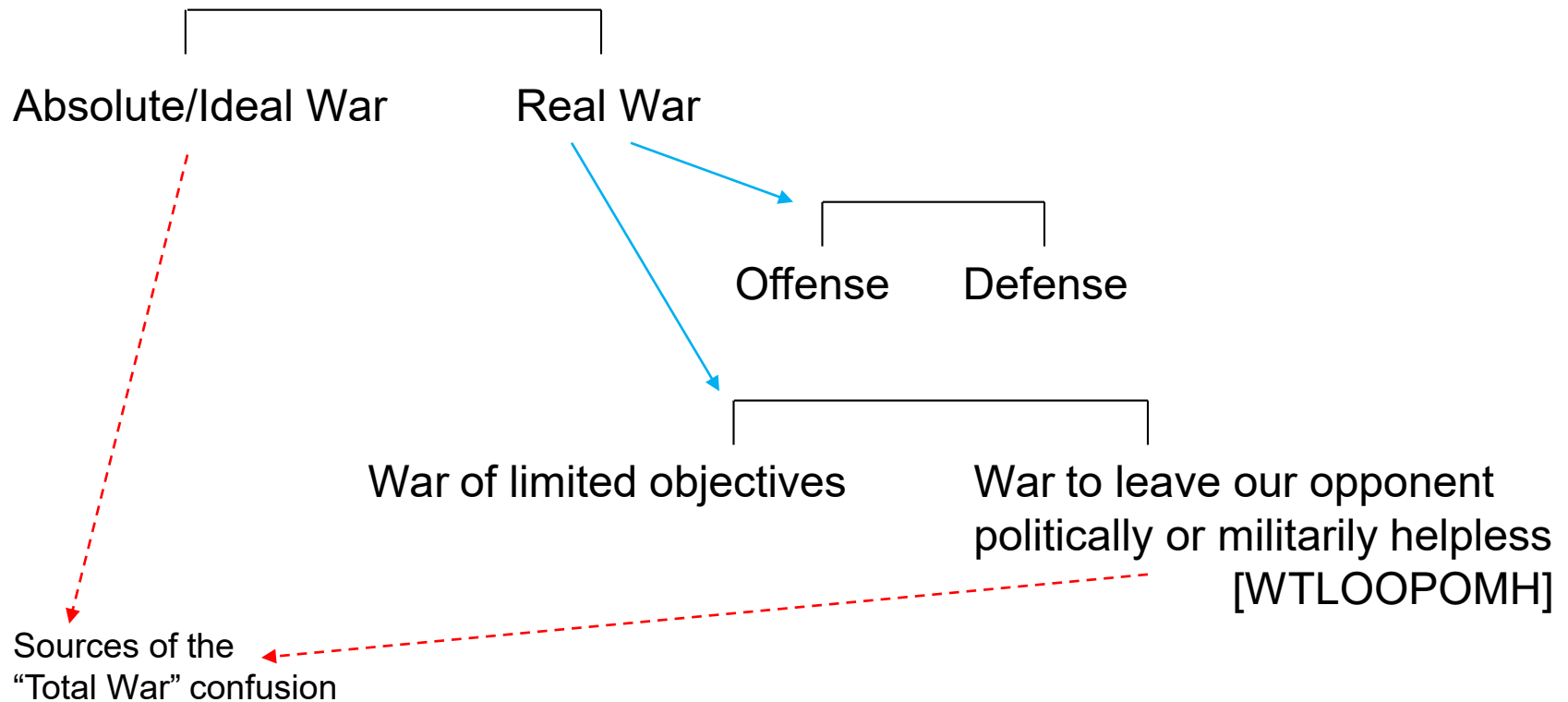




# TWO MAJOR SOURCES OF CONFUSION ABOUT ON WAR:

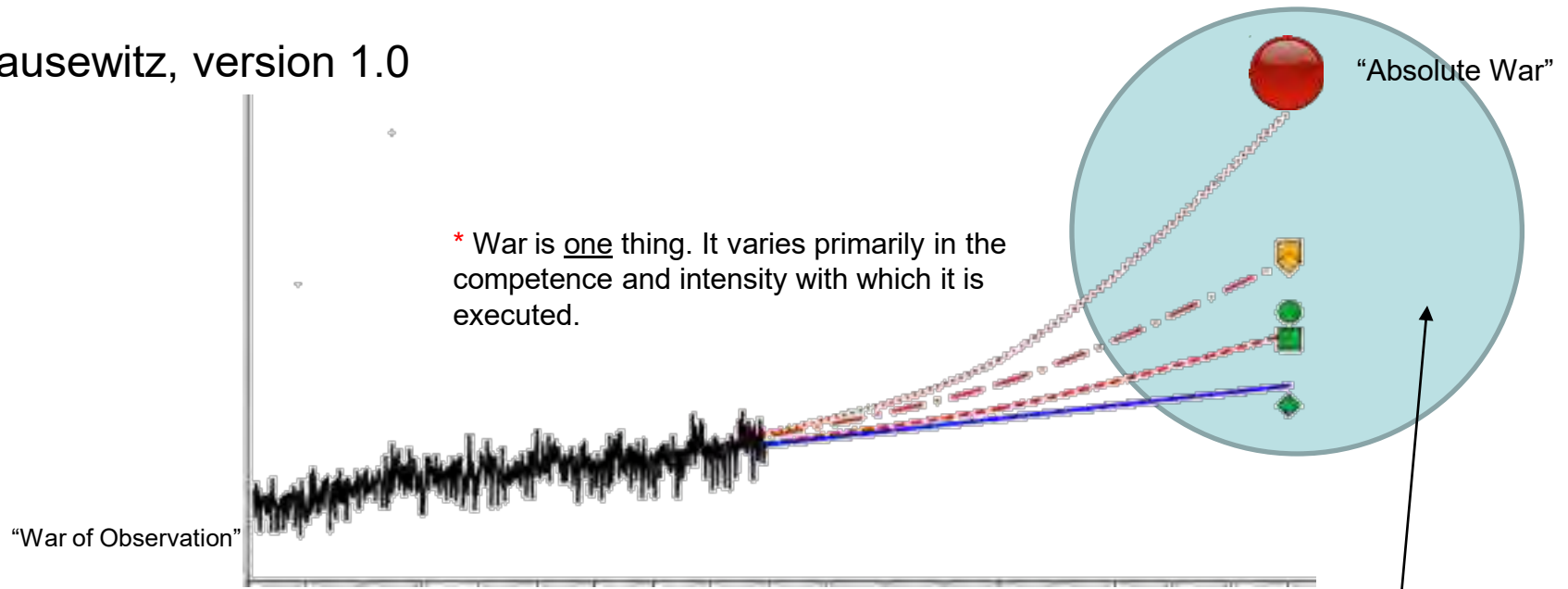
1. Clausewitz's dialectical approach
2. His continuous intellectual evolution

Examples of the dialectical structure of his analysis:



# Confusion stemming from Clausewitz's intellectual evolution

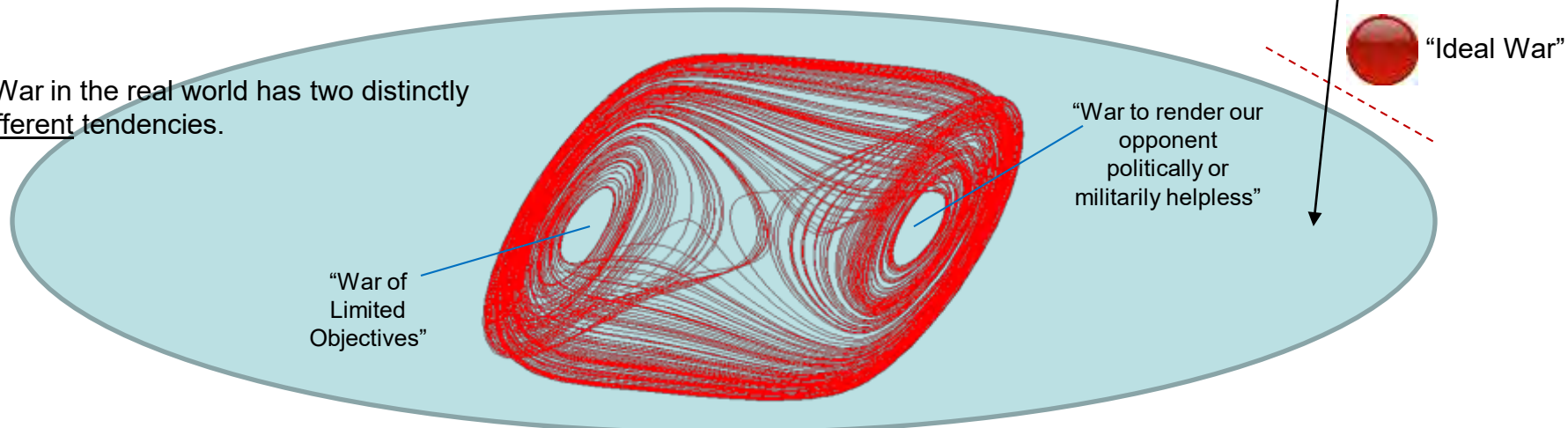
## Clausewitz, version 1.0



real world

## Clausewitz, version 2.0

\* War in the real world has two distinctly different tendencies.





## WHAT IS BEING LIMITED (OR NOT) IN CLAUSEWITZ'S TERMS?

The term "LIMITED" applies to our political and/or military ***objectives*** vis-à-vis *the opponent*, not to our own motives or the *means or resources* used.

Objectives are unilateral.

Wars are not.

# POLITICAL OBJECTIVES IN WAR



These are 'positive' objectives to be imposed on the enemy.

Pure defense is a limited, "negative" objective.

# MILITARY OBJECTIVES IN WAR

**LIMITED  
MILITARY  
OBJECTIVE**  
(Inflict Stress)

Two forms of military objective:

**HIGH-END  
MILITARY  
OBJECTIVE**  
(Disarm)

**Coercion** (PAPE)  
**Exhaustion** (DELBRÜCK)  
**Attrition** (TRAD.)  
**Erosion** (USMC-MCDPs)

**Compellance** (PAPE)  
**Overthrow** (CLAUSEWITZ)  
**Incapacitation**  
**Annihilation** (DELBRÜCK)  
**Disarm** (CLAUSEWITZ)

**TARGET:**  
The adversary's WILL  
to continue the struggle

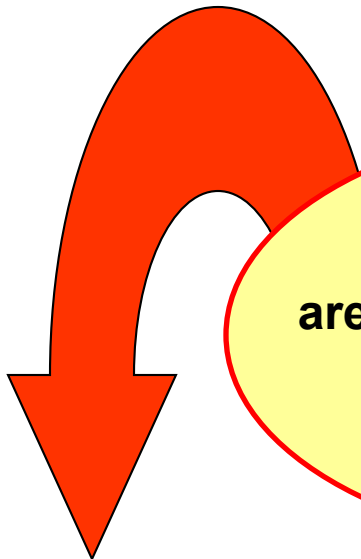


**TARGET:**  
The adversary's MILITARY  
CAPACITY to continue the  
struggle

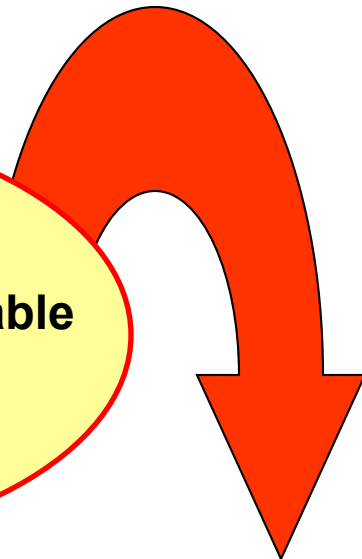




**TARGET:**  
The adversary's WILL  
to continue  
the struggle



**These two things  
are not easily distinguishable  
from each other.**



**TARGET:**  
The adversary's MILITARY  
CAPACITY to continue the  
struggle



# Limited POLITICAL OBJECTIVE



# Unlimited POLITICAL OBJECTIVE

Opposing political entity can survive our success.

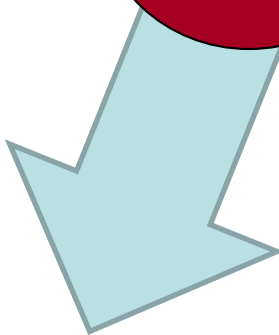
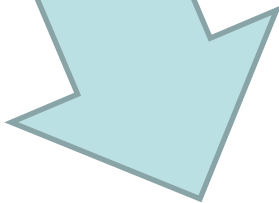
Opposing political entity will not survive our success.

- Intimidate
- Cause Change in Policy
- Reduce Enemy Military Capacity
- Take Slice of Territory
- Change Regime
- Change Form of Government/ Ruling Class
- Conquest/ Absorption
- Genocide/ Extermination

**LIMITED  
MILITARY  
OBJECTIVE**  
**Erode**

**HIGH-END  
MILITARY  
OBJECTIVE**  
**Disarm**

**HIGH-END  
MILITARY  
OBJECTIVE**  
**Disarm**



# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL AND MILITARY OBJECTIVES IN WAR

		MILITARY OBJECTIVE	
		LIMITED	HIGH-END
POLITICAL OBJECTIVE	LIMITED	ERODE	DISARM
	HIGH-END	CONTAIN [Military force is not our primary instrument.]	DISARM

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL AND MILITARY OBJECTIVES IN WAR

## MILITARY OBJECTIVE

LIMITED

HIGH-END

POLITICAL OBJECTIVE

LIMITED

HIGH-END

<h3>DISARM</h3> <p><u>Napoleon</u> vs Russia, 1812  <u>US</u> vs Mexico, 1846  <u>Prussia</u> vs France, 1870-71  <u>Most Powers</u> in WWI  <u>US</u> vs Saddam, 1991</p>	<h3>DISARM</h3> <p><u>Patriots</u> vs Tories, 1776-83  <u>Union</u> vs Confederacy, 1862-65  <u>Germany</u> vs Russia, 1941-44  <u>Allies</u> vs Germany, 1945  <u>US</u> vs Viet Cong, 1960s/70s  <u>NVN/VC</u> vs RVN, 1960s-1973  <u>Mujahideen</u> vs DR Afghanistan  <u>US</u> vs Panama, 1989  <u>US</u> vs Saddam, 2003</p>
<h3>ERODE</h3> <p><u>US</u> vs UK, 1776-83  <u>Former Confederacy</u> vs US, 1865-76  <u>UN/US</u> vs PRC/DPRK, 1953  <u>US</u> vs NVN, 1960s-1975  <u>NVN/VC</u> vs US, 1960s-1973  <u>Mujahideen</u> vs USSR, 1980s  <u>US</u> vs Serbs, 1995</p>	<h3>CONTAIN</h3> <p><u>US/West</u> vs USSR, 1947-1989  <u>US/ROK</u> vs DPRK  <u>US</u> vs Saddam, 1992-2003</p>

### NOTES:

Wars do not have objectives—only the individual participating political entities (e.g., states, etc.) do.

Objectives are unilateral, so this matrix refers only to one side's military objective.

Doing this analysis for only one side gets you only part way to understanding the strategic structure of the war.

The strategic structure can very rarely be described using only one of these terms, because the opponents' objectives are seldom mirror-imaged.

