



Accounting for Alliances in Clausewitz's Theory of War

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Abstract

Allies and alliances are deeply embedded in Clausewitz's theory of war. Allies are a live and reactive means that may shift throughout a war. Alliances, often responsive to the balance of power, harness allies as a dynamic means. Both problematize Clausewitz's initial, dual conception of war; they embody uncertainty and inject Politik. To account for allies and alliances entails reevaluating three fundamental Clausewitzian premises: that the defense is the stronger form of war; that the status quo has inertia; and that war has duration. Ultimately, any comprehensive view of Clausewitz's theory of war demands the inclusion of allies and alliances.

Keywords

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I. Introduction

Allies and alliances are deeply embedded in Clausewitz's theory of war. Allies are a live and reactive means that may shift throughout a war. Alliances, often responsive to the balance of power, harness allies as a dynamic means. Both problematize Clausewitz's initial, dual conception of war; they embody uncertainty and inject *Politik*. To account for allies and alliances entails reevaluating three fundamental Clausewitzian premises: that war has duration; that the status quo has inertia; and that the defense is the stronger form of war. Implicit within his theory, allies and alliances form part of the core of these fundamental premises: as in war has duration *because of* allies and alliances; the status quo has inertia *because of* allies and alliances; and the defense is the stronger form of war *because of* allies and alliances. Although allies and alliances serve as reasons behind these premises, they are not the sole reason—necessary, but not sufficient. Without an appreciation of their value, an account of Clausewitz's theory of war is incomplete. Ultimately, any comprehensive view of Clausewitz's theory of war demands the inclusion of allies and alliances.

War, at its theoretical core, is a duel. This essential separation between oneself and one's opponent creates the space in which the metaphorical wrestlers seek to "render [the other] incapable of further resistance."¹ From this necessary division, Clausewitz sets out his initial, basic definition of war: "*war therefore is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will.*"² This first definition is summoned mainly from this adversarial duality, noticeably

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Col. J. J. Graham (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), I.1, 3.

² *Ibid.*

without reference to *Politik*. From this assertion, Clausewitz identifies three reciprocal movements: toward maximal use of force, for utter disarmament of the adversary, based on all available physical and moral means. This is a philosophical ideal of war, an abstract expression of its innermost logic separate from manifest reality. Clausewitz then reflects on how his conclusions about war's tendencies, based on interactions inherent in his first definition, fail to manifest in their absolute sense in reality—sometimes, he concludes, if for no other reason than that it would often be “an unnecessary waste of power, which would be in opposition to other principles of statecraft.”³

Anything theory might suggest must accommodate this fact: the use of violence to coerce another cannot just be an abstract, theoretical notion, but must account for and respond to “means adapted to the real world.”⁴ What might seem like tautology is actually a critical element to Clausewitzian theory: the continuous attempt to balance theoretical tendencies with an embodied reality. “We must act in the real world,” Clausewitz proclaimed in a note written in 1809.⁵ W. B. Gallie sees this, in fact, as Clausewitz's unique philosophical contribution, his “*idea of practice*.”⁶ Engberg-Pedersen, similarly, investigates Clausewitz's work as part of a “paraphilosophical program” that seeks to integrate empiricism into military theory and to “develop a conceptual apparatus adequate to the state of war.”⁷ Clausewitz continuously seeks to reconcile the theoretical with the practical, to balance the historical record with lived experience, and allies and alliances often provide the impetus.

II. Allies as a Means Because of Duration

Clausewitz's pragmatism is often quite conceptual and so his next move is missed by Gallie, as he reconstructs Clausewitz's book one, chapter one argument in an attempt to handle it on its own philosophical terms.⁸ The abstract form of war fails to obtain in reality because it does not satisfy three temporal and social conditions.⁹ First, war emerges out of “the previous history of the combatant States.”¹⁰ Second, war is not instantaneously all inclusive to form “a single solution, or a number of simultaneous ones.”¹¹ Finally, war does not “contain within itself the solution perfect and complete.”¹² Because war has a *past* based on the beliefs, judgments, expectations, and opinions of the combatants, because war has *duration*, such that war, as a social phenomenon, takes time in space wherein all available means cannot be

³ Ibid., I.1, 7.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1807-1809),” in *Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 274.

⁶ W. B. Gallie, *Philosophers of peace and war: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels and Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 42.

⁷ Anders Engberg-Pedersen, *Empire of Chance: The Napoleonic Wars and the Disorder of Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 50.

⁸ Gallie, *Philosophers of peace*, 49-52. In Gallie's reconstruction of Clausewitz's argument he places Clausewitz's basic definition of war before Clausewitz's duel and wrestler thought experiment. He also fails to account for Clausewitz's own modification to his reasoning based on the sheer fact of reality, particularly the influence of time, and thereby the social, and to a lesser extent space. In a separate account Gallie goes so far as to claim that “Clausewitz begs the question.” W. B. Gallie, “Clausewitz Today,” *European Journal of Sociology* 19/ 1 (1978), 153, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600005130>. However, I believe these mistakes absolve Clausewitz of Gallie's philosophical damnation.

⁹ See also Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle: The Political Theory of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53-55.

¹⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, I.1, 7.

¹¹ Ibid., I.1, 8.

¹² Ibid., I.1, 7.

applied at once, together, and because the results of war may be overturned by *future* “political combinations,” war’s absolute tendencies are modified in reality.¹³ The form of reality itself, its temporal and social actuality, that is its humanity, introduces the *Politik*.

Clausewitz’s conception of *Politik* is capacious. Andreas Herberg-Rothe sees three competing tendencies: *policy*, *politics*, and, the *polity*; that is, “policy of state leadership,” “general political conditions within a state,” and “political composition of a community.”¹⁴ No one element is predominant, as Sibylle Scheipers explains, “*Politik* as politics is just as important as *Politik* as policy.”¹⁵ Complexities inherent in the notion of the state are also packed into Clausewitz’s conception of *Politik*, of which war is a continuation with other means. That war is responsive to and inclusive of this expansive notion of *Politik* is what sets Clausewitz’s work apart from his peers.¹⁶ War is not an independent phenomenon; it is equally an extension and a part of *Politik*, derivative and emblematic of it. As Clausewitz writes, “*even in Wars* carried on without Allies, the political cause of a War has a great influence on the method in which it is conducted.”¹⁷ It is by way of allies and alliances that *Politik* is brought to the fore.

As Clausewitz moves from an abstracted duality to an embodied plurality, allies and alliances take on preeminence. Though allies and alliances would be components of a past and a future reality, they are not explicitly called out by Clausewitz; his discussion in book one, chapter one is still isolated to the two belligerents themselves. It is only when Clausewitz paused on the consequence of war’s duration that allies and alliances serve their fundamental complicating, and thereby, limiting function on the logical possibilities of war in its absolute sense. Recall that since war takes time, in space, among people and states, all available means cannot be “at once brought forward,” of which allies are one kind.¹⁸ More critically, this limitation is not specific to the means of Napoleonic era, such that a revolution in technology would negate this restriction. The constraint is essential to “the nature of these forces and their application.”¹⁹ Theoretically, Clausewitz contends that it could be possible to employ all “movable military forces...at once,”²⁰ but denies that it is possible for territory, fortification, and the people, what he later terms “immovable means.”²¹ Although allies may contribute movable or immovable means, they also represent a separate and distinct set of means: they are live and reactive.²²

This corresponds to Clausewitz’s conclusion that war is neither an art nor a science.²³ Instead, it belongs “to the province of social life.”²⁴ This social element, manifest as competition, underwrites Clausewitz’s “*organic* understanding of war and politics.”²⁵ Art,

¹³ Ibid., I.1, 9.

¹⁴ Andreas Herberg-Rothe, “Clausewitz’s Concept of the State,” in *Clausewitz: The State and War* ed. Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Jan Willem Honig, and Daniel Moran (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011), 28.

¹⁵ Sibylle Scheipers, *On Small War: Carl von Clausewitz and People’s War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 107.

¹⁶ Anders Palmgren, “Clausewitz’s Interweaving of Krieg and Politik,” in *Clausewitz: The State and War*, ed. Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Jan Willem Honig, and Daniel Moran (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2011), 50.

¹⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, VIII.6, 697. Italics mine.

¹⁸ Ibid., I.1, 8.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., VI.29, 562.

²² There is an interesting consequence here for artificially intelligent systems, which, based on this classification, might fall under the category of non-live reactive means.

²³ That war is neither an art nor a science is separate from how warfare, as the conduct of combat, is both an art and a science, operating within the larger rubric of war as a social phenomenon.

²⁴ Ibid., II.3, 96.

²⁵ Palmgren, “Clausewitz’s Interweaving of Krieg and Politik,” 50.

science, and competition are all human attempts to exert will. The object against which they act (or with whom they interact) differs. Art, what Clausewitz calls the ideal Arts, acts upon a “still passive and yielding subject,” while Science, labeled by Clausewitz, here, as the Mechanical Arts, acts against “inanimate matter.”²⁶ Competition, as the social element, acts “against a living and reacting force.”²⁷ Clausewitz also captures a temporal difference in a note from 1807. Herein he speaks of science, the arts, and practical life. Science exists “independent of time and space,” while art exists “not in time and space but in eternity.”²⁸ Like before, the social element, considered as practical life, sits orthogonal to art and science, where one “draws boundaries around himself in time and space.”²⁹ These distinctions also correspond to goals: science exists independently from goals, because that would be “nothing more than a preconceived opinion,” while the arts, as evocative of eternity, “seek an infinite goal.”³⁰ Only practical life, bounded by time and space, has “a finite goal.”³¹ Only the social dimension, as Howard sums up Clausewitz’s key insight, invokes interaction with not just another, the adversary, but others, likes allies.³²

Derivative of war’s social existence, allies are a fickle means. Beyerchen’s characterization of Clausewitz’s theory of “war as a non-linear phenomenon” helps to capture what makes allies, as a means, different.³³ Beyerchen continues, “if interactions or feedback or indistinct boundary conditions are irreducible features of a system under consideration, it is non-linear even if relatively simple equations can be used to describe it.”³⁴ For instance, in an inflamed response to the Russian manifesto justifying the Treat of Tilsit, Clausewitz poses this thought experiment, “like the *a* and *b* of an algebraic problem.”³⁵ In a bastardization of the parable of the good Samaritan he writes:

An honest man is attacked by a thief, threatened with death, and robbed. When he is already lying on the ground half-naked, another man leaps to his aid—who gets beaten up in turn and takes to his heels, but not before hastily compensating himself for the blows he has received by stealing from the unarmed victim.³⁶

The honest man is Prussia, the thief is France, the ally is Russia, and the theft is territory. This story, Clausewitz preposes, captures how allies may provide means, but it is live and reactive to the war as it develops over time. Specifically, “the cooperation of allies does not depend on the Will of the belligerents,” as Clausewitz’s moral shows, especially since Russia reaped Prussian territory in the concluding treaties with France.³⁷ Nor does it necessarily remain stable from beginning to end. This feedback depends on “the nature of the political relations of states to each other.”³⁸ But it also depends on “cooperation [that] is frequently

²⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, II.3, 97.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1807-1809),” 264.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Michael Howard, “The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 57/ 5 (1979): 977.

³³ Alan Beyerchen, “Clausewitz and the Non-Linear Nature of Warfare,” in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 48.

³⁴ Ibid., 49.

³⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1807-1809),” 267.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, I.1, 8.

³⁸ Ibid.

not afforded until after the War has commenced.”³⁹ In other words, attempts by external actors, and not the two belligerents, “to restore the balance of power.”⁴⁰

III. Alliance Dynamics and the Status Quo

If allies are a live, reactive means, then alliances, represent their dynamic. If, as Clausewitz writes, “[t]he plan for the war results directly from the political conditions of the two belligerent states, as well as from their relations to other powers,” then the conduct of war does as well.⁴¹ For the duration of war, that is “time, therefore, of itself may bring about a change.”⁴² While Clausewitz’s larger political views can be considered unoriginal, they are, as Anders Palmgren argues, “developed tradition” that find life in “a richer and more many-sided, integrated theoretical framework.”⁴³ That Clausewitz seats his insights among those who, like Machiavelli, recognized that war and politics are linked, ought not negate Clausewitz’s own perspective.⁴⁴ A state, in Clausewitz’s sense, is a state because of its relations to other states.⁴⁵ This, Gallie argues, is his “single brilliant [political] insight,” his recognition that “the state is the representative, or agent, of a given community’s general interests, *towards other states*.”⁴⁶ Gallie continues, dismissing an “apparent circularity” since Clausewitz captures the key, “no state would be a state if it did not exist as one of a plurality of other and (at least potentially) rival states.”⁴⁷ Clausewitz gleans this from his critical view of history.⁴⁸ Just as war without duration is infeasible in practice, so too is a war without networked feedback from external actors. Reflecting in 1831, Clausewitz identifies that “[t]he source of conflict among nations is not to be sought in slogans but in the sum total of their spiritual and material relationships.”⁴⁹ Alliances form the (non-linear) dynamic whereby allies, as live and reactive, shift their means.

But in which direction to shift? Though Clausewitz notes, “[t]he effort towards an object is a different thing from the motion towards it,” what prompts the movement towards a particular object?⁵⁰ If there is movement towards an object, then there is movement from an original condition. That motion is either an attempt to recover the original condition or it is

³⁹ Ibid., I.1, 8-9.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Since Clausewitz’s *Politik* encompasses a full view of the state, his views on the balance of power are neither “classical realist,” nor “neo-realist.” Scheipers, *On Small War*, 89.

⁴¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *Carl von Clausewitz: Two Letters on Strategy*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1984), 21.

⁴² Clausewitz, *On War*, VIII.4, 689.

⁴³ Palmgren, “Clausewitz’s Interweaving of Krieg and Politik,” 50; Anders Palmgren, “Visions of Strategy: Following Clausewitz’s Train of Thought” (PhD diss., National Defense University, 2014), 27. Gallie calls his political points in *On War*, “curiously abstract and meagre.” Gallie, *Philosophers of peace*, 61. Smith contends that although Clausewitz “was no theorist of international relations,” his perception of international politics “remained substantially unchanged and essentially coherent.” Hugh Smith, “The womb of war: Clausewitz and international politics,” *Review of International Studies* 16/ 1 (Jan., 1990): 40, 41, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021050011263X>.

⁴⁴ Cf. Gallie, *Philosophers of peace*, 61-62.

⁴⁵ See Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Jan Willem Honig, and Daniel Moran, ed., *Clausewitz: The State and War* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011).

⁴⁶ Gallie, *Philosophers of peace*, 61.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, VIII.3, 674-683.

⁴⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, “Europe since the Polish Partitions (1831),” in *Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 375.

⁵⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, VI.6, 394.

a continuing away from it. Either is possible, but Clausewitz contends, there is always a tendency towards the original, as a preferred movement toward stability. This conservative view explains how “the whole relations of all States to each other serve rather to preserve the stability of the whole than to produce changes, that is to say, *this tendency* to stability exists in general.”⁵¹ Clausewitz continues emphasizing that “*this tendency*” is what “we conceive to be the true notion of a balance of power, and in this sense it will always of itself come into existence, wherever there are extensive connections between civilized States.”⁵² Premised on the necessary intersection between states and their *Politik*, the balance of power functions as a dynamic with a propensity towards stability. This is a fundamental Clausewitzian premise: all things being equal states prefer the existing state of things, which, at its core, is their existence as such.

Such a claim does not negate the capacity for change. In some cases, Clausewitz details, “we can conceive some changes in the relations of single States to each other, which promote this efficiency of the whole, and others which obstruct it.”⁵³ Sometimes, he contends, in a kind of universalism, “they are efforts to perfect the political balance,” wherein “they will also be supported by the majority of these interests.”⁵⁴ More problematically, in other cases, “they are of an abnormal nature, undue activity on the part of some single States, real maladies.”⁵⁵ Under the right circumstances a single state can become “the arbiter of the whole.”⁵⁶ These perturbations do not negate the premise that there is a preference for existing conditions. It underscores the complexity of the interconnection, at all levels of *Politik*. Nor does the tendency to resist change entail that the effort will be successful or efficient. To reiterate, “[t]he effort towards an object is a different thing from the motion towards it.”⁵⁷ That there is tendency towards a particular object, in this case towards the maintenance of the existing state of things does not mean that it will be realized. Multiple, other interests — beyond the idealized duel — are always, also at play.

Nor does this tendency imply a static rendering of current conditions. While it is true that “the tendency of equilibrium is the maintenance of the existing state,” this is premised on the fact that the equilibrium, the existing state itself, was a rest.⁵⁸ If not, then the state “has been already disturbed, tension has already commenced, and there the equilibrium may certainly also tend to a change.”⁵⁹ In a rendering of 1807, Clausewitz imagines what if France’s ambitions under Napoleon were actually indicative of the tendency towards an equilibrium. That is, what if France’s actions were actually the attempt to revert back to an existing state. In this case, Clausewitz desired return to a pre-existing state, Europe without Napoleonic domination, would actually be the perversion and the movement away from “universal monarchy.”⁶⁰ In such a case, he declares, war against Napoleon would have been avoidable and more to the point, “a balance of power existed in Europe when the war broke out, and I

⁵¹ Ibid., VI.6, 393-394.

⁵² Clausewitz, *On War*, VI.6, 394. Civilized is an important characterization of the state for Clausewitz. Among other reasons, Poland collapsed because the Tartars did not maintain a full state in his European sense. Ibid., VI.6, 396.

⁵³ Ibid., VI.6, 394.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1803-1807),” in *Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 247.

have been wrong from the beginning.”⁶¹ His intellectual due diligence points to the need to appreciate the difference between the systematic dynamics and the ability to ascertain the propensity of that motion.

In 1803, Clausewitz describes how “[t]he balance of power *system* only reveals itself when the balance is in danger of being lost.”⁶² Loss can be considered a moral claim, as a failure to obtain what ought to be the case. Palmgren emphasized that “[t]he idea of equilibrium always retained moral and psychological significance for Clausewitz.”⁶³ The Clausewitz of 1803 continues, “[a]s long as the natural weight of states is sufficient, without noticeable distortion or moral exertion, to keep everything in its place and the whole machine steady—that is, free of violent oscillations—there is no question of a balance of power *system*; the balance simply exists in itself.”⁶⁴ By *On War*, Clausewitz sees this system as consisting of how:

the great and small States and interests of nations are interwoven with each other in a most diversified and changeable manner, each of these points of intersection forming a binding knot, for in it the direction of one gives equilibrium to the direction of the other; by all these knots therefore, evidently a more or less compact connection of the whole will be formed, and this general connection must be partially overturned by every change.⁶⁵

Palmgren explains that Clausewitz’s “web of balancing knots,” which was an equilibrium applicable to war, politics, and society, comprises all aspects of *Politik* and was “original for his time.”⁶⁶ Interconnectivity and its extent form the necessary elements of inertia, without which Clausewitz remains unsure how Europe could have existed as such and preserved “the independence of each individual State.”⁶⁷

Yet, in 1807, Clausewitz wonders, “Will a universal monarchy result?”⁶⁸ This end-point of a unified (or subjugated) Europe is an apotheosis based on an initial premise, articulated by Daniel Deudney, that “*division is logically prior to balances and balancing.*”⁶⁹ Similarly, Clausewitz in his emotional historical critique *Umtriebe*, posits how “fragmented lands combined into a unified whole,” realizing the state.⁷⁰ That division is prior to balancing is how, in a way, Clausewitz’s balancing becomes moral: that states prefer the existing state of things entails

⁶¹ Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1807-1809),” 276.

⁶² Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1803-1807),” 244.

⁶³ Palmgren “Clausewitz’s Interweaving of Krieg and Politik,” 59.

⁶⁴ Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1803-1807),” 244.

⁶⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, VI.6, 393.

⁶⁶ Palmgren “Clausewitz’s Interweaving of Krieg and Politik,” 59.

⁶⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, VI.6, 395. Clausewitz writes over “a thousand years,” which means that he sees this as a necessary condition before and beyond the codification of sovereignty in the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia. *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Jan Willem Honig, “Clausewitz and the Politics of Early Modern Warfare,” in *Clausewitz: The State and War*, ed. Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Jan Willem Honig, and Daniel Moran (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011), 30; Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1803-1807),” 247.

⁶⁹ Daniel H. Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 147.

⁷⁰ Cf. “If we now consider how the concept of the state has only evolved in recent centuries, how power has grown stronger at the top as *fragmented lands* combined into a unified whole, it becomes clear how—precisely because the estates grew closer to each other and were bound together in the unity of the state—the differences in their rights and duties became more evident and led to tension.” Clausewitz, “Agitation (early 1820s)” in *Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 341. Emphasis mine.

that states prefer their independence.⁷¹ Otherwise, to refer back to his counterfactual about France's dominance as restoration, Clausewitz's views would then represent the opposition, whereby "[he has] been wrong" — a moral claim — "from the beginning."⁷² The return to the existing condition, as Palmgren reminds us, is and has always been premised upon and "sufficient to justify, the persistent use of, or at least readiness for, war."⁷³ Importantly, in 1807, Clausewitz described this as the "violent political oscillations that will again lead to equilibrium, but of still another kind."⁷⁴ This reestablished equilibrium is not necessarily the previously existing state of things, but a recalibrated state; though the disturbances may be quieted, the echoes of their oscillations remain. The potential for new violence persists.

Without multiple, individual states Clausewitz would not be able to account for movement in one direction as opposed to another. When the system is in flux or in "transition everything will move according to its natural weight, that is, the system will not be subject to a rational will, acting as an outside force, but each part will follow its own momentum wherever it may lead."⁷⁵ Individual states act according to their own *Politik*. Allies contribute their own means, moveable or immovable, to the supported belligerent, who must also consider the ally's means as live, reactive, and always ultimately contingent, no matter how unified the alliance may seem to be against the threat. Writing in 1803, Clausewitz described Germany, the collection of many small independent states, as "the container for the small weights used to maintain the balance of power."⁷⁶ The uncertainty of in which direction the "small weights" will move (how quickly? with which means? for how long?) is social. Yet, often, allies are the necessary means with which to maintain or reset the balance. They cannot be ignored, theoretically or practically.

In what Honig calls "a remarkable piece of historically-informed theory-building on the issue of political order," Clausewitz contends, in 1807, that there are two possible structures for the balancing system. The basic account is a product of "the mere rubbing of forces against each other."⁷⁷ But, under the right conditions, Clausewitz sees the possibility for "a self-conscious balance of power, established and preserved by reason."⁷⁸ Importantly, for such a deliberate balance to emerge requires "that these alliances became a real necessity."⁷⁹ A shared understanding of a mutual threat provides the impetus to develop a "sort of equilibrium, maintained by design and effort."⁸⁰ The collective interest against the collective threat represents a collective desire to maintain the existing state of things, which is premised on the sovereignty of each individual state. "This design, this effort," as the embodiment of shared reason, "ought to govern the material forces involved."⁸¹

⁷¹ Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*, 62. See also Youri Cormier's *War as Paradox: Clausewitz and Hegel on Fighting Doctrines and Ethics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016).

⁷² Clausewitz, "Notes on History and Politics (1807-1809)," 276.

⁷³ Gallie, *Philosophers of peace*, 64.

⁷⁴ Clausewitz, "Notes on History and Politics (1803-1807)," 249.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* See Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9/ 4 (Spring 1985): 3-43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>. Clausewitz's queries seem one step abstracted from Walt's views; it is not the specifics of the *Politik*, but the *Politik* itself with which Clausewitz is wrestling.

⁷⁶ Clausewitz, "Notes on History and Politics (1803-1807)," 243.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Yet, in 1803, Clausewitz laments, “People who complain about the ineffectiveness of coalitions do not know what they want; what better way is there to resist a stronger power?”⁸² In Clausewitz’s terminology, a coalition is a particular kind of alliance, based, of course, “[o]n the nature of its political connection,” but also on the “common object” around which the coalition is unified.⁸³ Coalitions and alliances entail a shifting of means, but in coalitions, for Clausewitz, there is a greater sense of investment in the outcome based on the object sought. Though coalitions are alliances, alliances may also be of a weaker kind. From history, Clausewitz gleans a sense of alliances whereby states “pledge themselves to mutual assistance,” but without collective interest.⁸⁴ Instead, their promise consists of “a fixed, generally very moderate, contingent of troops, without regard to the object of the War or the scale on which it is about to be carried on by the principals.”⁸⁵ These alliances are not just weak, but constitute the kind of wars that Clausewitz describes as “shilly-shally” or “half-hearted.”⁸⁶

Ultimately all alliances are constrained because “[w]e never find that a State joining in the cause of another State takes it up with the same earnestness as its own.”⁸⁷ The greater the divergence, the weaker the alliance or coalition. Thus, in Clausewitz’s 1803 piece entitled “On Coalitions,” Clausewitz explains that “[i]n politics there are two kinds of coalitions: one that aims expressly to defeat or coerce the enemy, and another that aims to *weaken*, to *preoccupy*, both the enemy *and* the state with which one is allied.”⁸⁸ And so, not only is possible that there is a weakly motivated corroboration, but there may be large *Politik* motivations that are not wholly supportive. Equally important is ensuring that “we must feel sure that in our political situation such a result will not excite against us new enemies, who may compel us on the spot to set free our first enemy.”⁸⁹ Clausewitz connects the social and temporal such that emotions, as “psychological laws...raise up for [the *vanquished*] on the one hand friends, and on the other hand weaken and dissolve the coalition against his enemies.”⁹⁰ If war didn’t take time in a social-historical context, other states would not come to another’s aid – there would not be time, nor historical memory, as another kind of previously existing state of things, to direct that movement. Ultimately, Clausewitz concludes, “[i]f two or more States combine against a third, that combination constitutes, in a political aspect, only *one* War,” even if “this political union has also its degrees.”⁹¹

IV. The Difference with Defensive Allies

Defensive allies are qualitatively different from offensive allies; like the form of warfare itself, defensive alliances are stronger. Self-preservation is prioritized, but the degree of conviction is a function of *Politik*. As a means, defensive allies are not “ordinary,” but are “those *essentially*

⁸² Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1803-1807),” 242.

⁸³ Clausewitz, *On War*, VIII.9, 714.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. O. J. Matthijs Jolles, ed. Ralph Peters (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 931. See Jan Willem Honig, “Clausewitz’s *On War*: Problems of Text and Translation,” in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68n, 35-36.

⁸⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, VIII.6, 696.

⁸⁸ Clausewitz, “Notes on History and Politics (1803-1807),” 241-242.

⁸⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, VIII.4, 688.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII.4, 689.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, VIII.4, 687.

interested in maintaining the integrity of the country.”⁹² Again, this difference is one of *Politik*. Clausewitz concludes, “the defensive in general may count more on foreign aid than the offensive,” but only to the extent of and “in proportion as his existence is of importance to others, that is to say, the sounder and more vigorous his political and military condition.”⁹³ This last caveat accounts for the problem of Poland’s partition.⁹⁴ According to Clausewitz, Poland did not have political value such that Russian, Prussia, and Austria desired to expend resources to maintain its existence as an independent state. Nor did Poland have the military capability, including its population’s willingness to take up arms, to encourage potential allies in the belief that it could defend itself long enough to reap the support that would be beneficial if it were provided.⁹⁵ If, as Clausewitz explains, “the maintenance of a State is entirely dependent on external support, then certainly too much is asked.”⁹⁶ Allies, as means external to the state defending itself, are “the last support of the defensive.”⁹⁷

In his manifesto (*Bekennnisdenkschrift*) Clausewitz has an Addendum on the defense. In addition to classifying the defense as either “tactical, strategic, or political,” he defines the value of the defense by how “the intention and the advantage, which one enjoys in the defense, are not suspended through the procedure.”⁹⁸ Favorably, the defense can “await the attack”; “enjoy the assistance of the locality”; and “be close to sources of support.”⁹⁹ Though these conditions are key, it is the fact that these capabilities are not diminished over time or by time—that is through duration. These defensive advantages are inherent in the “waiting for” and are derivative of the defense’s goal of maintaining the current state of things, politically, strategically, or tactically.¹⁰⁰ The “negative object” is merely to await and to preserve possessions.¹⁰¹ Preservation is easier than acquisition.¹⁰² Clausewitz concludes, if given an equality of means, then “the defensive is easier than the offensive.”¹⁰³ Easier does not mean stronger. Strength, for the defense, derives from and includes the “natural advantage in the employment of those things,” like the “the advantage of ground, sudden attack, attack from several directions (converging form of attack), the assistance of the theater of War, support of the people, and the utilizing great moral forces.”¹⁰⁴ These are all forces that weaken the attacker, who has the “positive object”¹⁰⁵ and finds the strength to acquire

⁹² Ibid., VI.6, 393.

⁹³ Ibid., 397.

⁹⁴ “We only wish to say a few words about a case which is always on the lips of those who ridicule the idea of a political balance, and because it appears especially applicable here as a case in which an unoffending State, acting on the defensive, succumbed without receiving foreign aid. We allude to Poland.” Ibid., 395.

⁹⁵ Clausewitz describes Poland “like a public road” and “an uninhabited steppe.” Ibid., 396. See Scheipers who explains the function of balance of power politics whereby “the existence and survival of states are inherently linked with the readiness of their people to take up arms to defend them, via the device of defense as the stronger form of war.” Scheipers, *On Small War*, 107.

⁹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, VI.6, 396.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 393. Italics mine.

⁹⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, “Testimonial (*Bekennnisdenkschrift*),” in *Clausewitz on Small War*, ed. and trans. Christopher Daase and James W. Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 210.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, VI.1, 371.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 372.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., VI.6, 391. The attack Clausewitz refers to is the transition to a tactical attack by a strategic defender operating in the tactical defensive.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., VI.1, 372.

attenuating over time, a concept best captured in the idea of the “culmination point.”¹⁰⁶ Into this natural strength of the defense, Clausewitz injects the live, reactive means of allies and the dynamism of alliances.

Although these tendencies between the offense and the defense have “brought about a peace in many instances,” Clausewitz finds his account incomplete.¹⁰⁷ Inherent in the concept of the defense, that of the *waiting for*, Clausewitz sees the notion as

an alternation of circumstances, of an improvement of the situation, which, therefore, when it cannot be brought about by internal means, that is, by defensive pure in itself, can only be expected through assistance coming from without. Now, this improvement from without can proceed from nothing else than a change in political relations: either new alliances spring up in favor of the defender, or old ones directed against him fall to pieces.¹⁰⁸

In this description, Clausewitz touches on all the elements whereby allies and alliances are not just possible, but necessary. War, in embodied reality, is a function of time, space, and society, as is the defense. Allies shift means as the *Politik* evolves, new alliances form or change based on the ever-malleable political context. Palmgren explains how “Energy was also implicated in the problem of maintaining the balance of power.”¹⁰⁹ Specifically, Palmgren reiterates, this energy is “social energy.”¹¹⁰ Scheipers, too, underscores the social and emotional power of the defense, arguing that “[t]he superiority of defense favoured the status quo in the European balance-of-power system...[whereby] the threat of escalating defense into people’s war had to be present at all times.”¹¹¹ Scheipers sees that this threat of people’s war makes Clausewitz “an early (implicit) theorist of deterrence.”¹¹² But what Scheipers is missing in her account is how alliances necessarily factor into that balance; it is not just the potential for people’s war, which harnesses the natural strength of the defense, but that it provides the opportunity for alliances to form, change, and add their means to the dynamic.

In the Third Confession of his manifesto (*Bekanntnisdenschrift*), Clausewitz details how Prussia could operationalize people’s war against France, in what he describes as “a Spanish civil war in Germany.”¹¹³ This requires allies and alliances. Prussia, leveraging the *Landwehr* and *Landsturm*, operating as popular resistance, can buy time for the system, and England in particular, to allocate its means in support of Prussia against France. Clausewitz explains: “So Prussia will not stand alone; not fall alone. It will be a strong rampart for its natural allies. It will cost the common enemy a considerable amount of time and blood and through its significant weight give the war a different direction.”¹¹⁴ Internal resistance buys time for

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., VII.21, 655.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., VIII.8, 710.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Palmgren “Clausewitz’s Interweaving of Krieg and Politik,” 61.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹¹¹ Scheipers, *On Small War*, 106. “This defensive attitude is by no means a sign of indifference, since it is essential that the powers [opposing France] have the sympathy of all sound heads and pure hearts on their side and against the enemy. A war of the kind to be expected here must not be fought as a cabinet war, but with the hearts of the people. To secure this great advantage the powers will never give up their defensive posture.” Clausewitz, “On the Basic Question of Germany’s Existence (1831)” in *Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 383.

¹¹² Scheipers, *On Small War*, 26.

¹¹³ Clausewitz, “Testimonial (*Bekanntnisdenschrift*),” 201. It’s worth noting that the primary point of the Second Confession is laying out the pros and cons of an alliance with France.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 192-193.

systemic external resistance. Clausewitz accepts that “England will supply us with arms and munition,” and he is confident that he declares that “[i]t is unreasonable to call this into doubt, as England, not only now but also in the last war, has demonstrated a willingness to do so.”¹¹⁵ Even more clearly, Clausewitz explains for this plan, “[t]hrough the most concerted action in the negotiations with England, through a firm indissoluble life and death alliance with this state, we could expect from this nation support, which would be adequate to our exceptional needs or even surpass them.”¹¹⁶ The alliance with England is necessary and existential, and only with it is popular resistance possible over time.

Of course, there is the paradox of the defense: the defense chooses war. As Clausewitz explains, “A conqueror is always a lover of peace (as Buonaparte always asserted of himself); he would like to make his entry into our State unopposed.” It follows, he concludes, “in order to prevent this, we must choose War.”¹¹⁷ Speaking on behalf of small states, and Prussia in particular, Clausewitz is also justifying the necessity of arms and the necessity of the potentiality to resort to war. His memorandum, written in 1819, entitled, and defending, “Our Military Institutions,” reminds us “that the main justification for the state’s existence is defense against an outside enemy.”¹¹⁸ The strength of defensive alliances emerges out of the *waiting for* and the choice to defend, and while “the assailant may also have allies...they are only the result of special or accidental relations, not an assistance proceeding from the nature of the aggressive.”¹¹⁹

Equally, alliances may shift over the course of the war.¹²⁰ On the attack, a source of potential strength is “[t]hat the Allies of the enemy secede from him, and others join the conqueror.”¹²¹ But equally, it may sap strength as “the danger which threatens the State, rouses other power to its protection.”¹²² In other words, allies bandwagon or balance.¹²³ Thus, when attempting “to ascertain the real scale of the means which we must put forth for War,” among other conditions, Clausewitz emphasizes that it is necessary to consider “the political connections of other States, and the effect which the War will produce on those States.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 189.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 195.

¹¹⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, VI.5, 389.

¹¹⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, “Our Military Institutions (1819)” in *Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 319. That Prussia seeks a sufficient defense, should not entail that Prussia “be considered a barbarous garrison state.” Instead, he contends, it should be a source of pride. (Ibid.)

¹¹⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, VII.2, 597.

¹²⁰ Clausewitz personally could attest to this. Wearing a Russian uniform, Clausewitz helped to negotiate the Convention of Tauroggen between Yorck, leading Prussian troops, and Diebitsch, leading Russian troops. Yorck, surrounded, defected from the forced French alliance and entered into so-called neutral status.

¹²¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, VII.21, 650.

¹²² Ibid., 651.

¹²³ Cf. Stephen M. Walt’s “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power.” Or Clausewitz: “The change in political alliances. If these changes, produced by a victory, should be such as are disadvantageous to the conqueror, they will probably be so in a direction relation to his progress, just as is the case if they are of an advantageous nature. This all depend on the existing political alliances, customs, and tendencies, on princes, ministers. In general we can only say that when a great State which has smaller Allies is conquered, these usually secede very soon from their alliance, so that the victory, in this respect, becomes stronger with every blow; but if the conquered State is small, protectors much sooner present themselves when his very existence is threatened, and others, who have helped to place him in his present embarrassment, will turn round to prevent his complete downfall.” Clausewitz, *On War*, VII.21, 654.

¹²⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, VIII.3, 673.

How will other states react to a war between two states? With whom will they throw in their means? How might that shift over time because of *Politik*? To see how allies represent live and reactive means, how alliances serve as the dynamic whereby states shift those means, often in response to a perturbation to the existing state of things, we turn to Clausewitz's historical critique of the Seventh Coalition's defeat of Napoleon during the Hundred Days Campaign.

V. Napoleon and La Belle-Alliance

In his *Campaign of 1815 in France*, written in 1827, Clausewitz revisits his metaphorical wrestlers in the context of the Battle of Waterloo. "The heavy fighting in the center" between Napoleon's forces and those of Wellington's was, Clausewitz writes, characteristically, "a tiring wrestling match between two sides."¹²⁵ Enervated, each was predisposed to "the decisive blow," whereby "the defeated would be in no position to rally again."¹²⁶ Though critically objective, Clausewitz is proud to report that Blücher's "Prussian attack was this decisive blow."¹²⁷ Note how Clausewitz's metaphor breaks down: Blücher's forces come from outside the wrestling match, from the east, and from beyond the isolated duality of the battle in progress. Note, too, that Blücher was an ally of Wellington, and that it was only through the combined forces of the Seventh Coalition, coupled with Napoleon's domestic turmoil, that Europe bid its final farewell to Napoleon; "the great magician was caught," Clausewitz revels, "en flagrant delit."¹²⁸

Clausewitz is careful not claim that Napoleon's destruction was preordained, however unlikely his potential success may have been. Napoleon's political situation, especially his precarious domestic situation, restricted the set of possible options. To maintain his tenuous claim to power, Napoleon needed a decisive victory against the Allies, provisional currency to pay for limited domestic political stability. Clausewitz, Scheipers argues, sees Napoleon "trapped in a political logic that forced his hand strategically."¹²⁹ If Napoleon were to remain in power, then his only viable option was a rapid and decisive attack; "perhaps," Clausewitz contends, "this offensive was the only likely way of offering resistance and no other way could have been considered."¹³⁰

Not only was Napoleon limited to a strategic offense if he wanted to maintain power, but he also had limited means. Clausewitz calculates that Napoleon had, effectively, 130,000 men to fight the Allies' 220,000 men. But this was of far less importance than the fact that those 130,000 represented two-thirds of Napoleon's force, whereas the 220,000 were only one-third of the Allies' force: a potential force of 195,000 men against a potential force of 660,000. That this "offered no significant probability of success," does not mean that it was predetermined.¹³¹ Clausewitz, in *Guide to Tactics*, makes clear this balance between degree of success and its likelihood: "the greater the risk we run—so much the greater are the results."¹³² Equally, however, "[t]he more we risk the less the probability and, consequently, the certainty of the result."¹³³ To maintain his precariously held power Napoleon had to be bold.

¹²⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On Wellington: A Critique of Waterloo*, ed. and trans. Peter Hofschroer (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 129.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹²⁹ Scheipers, *On Small War*, 127.

¹³⁰ Clausewitz, *On Wellington*, 36.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³² Clausewitz, *On War*, Appendix, 828.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 829.

Napoleon needed to divide the Allies. For the strength of the Allies was their means, combined. Not only did Napoleon need to be quick, but also given his numerical deficit, he needed “to fight them individually and not let them combine.”¹³⁴ On the offense, Napoleon had to seek out the Allies. To this extent, Clausewitz contends, “the two commanders could have united their forces at a single point and been certain that, wherever that point was, Bonaparte would find it.”¹³⁵ Selecting that position, for Clausewitz, is contingent, based only on the relation between the Allies such that they could “link up here at the right time, either in one position or in two sufficiently close to each other that they could cooperate.” For “with their great superiority of numbers, they had nothing to fear.”¹³⁶ Clausewitz identified potential “on the Brussel-Namur road,” but Wellington was too concerned with defending Brussels and too dispersed to concentrate.¹³⁷

On 16 June 1815, Napoleon faced Blücher alone at the Battle of Ligny with a parity of forces: around 75,000 Frenchmen against 78,000 Prussians.¹³⁸ Though Napoleon was victorious, it was not “a particularly decisive victory,” and only resulted from “the balance tipping slightly after a long struggle.”¹³⁹ More importantly, Napoleon failed to exploit his success by pursuing the Prussians; a result of his hubris, Clausewitz contends, “Bonaparte let go of Blücher too soon.”¹⁴⁰ Consequently, by the time Napoleon sent Grouchy in pursuit, the French had lost contact with the Prussians.¹⁴¹ That the Prussians were able to “[coordinate] the orderly retreat of the army,” was distinctive, praiseworthy, and a product of their recent military reforms.¹⁴² This decision by the General Staff to “maintain contact with the British according to the original plan,” meant that they “abandoned [their] natural line of retreat to maintain contact with Wellington.”¹⁴³ Unmolested by the French, Blücher’s forces were able to regroup at Wavre, within range of providing Wellington the support he needed.

The “agreement” that Blücher would come to Wellington’s aid, pledged on 17 June, was a decision that could only ever have been a promise; it could never encompass the same expectation of execution found within in an order.¹⁴⁴ Wellington had to trust that Blücher’s forces would come; Wellington had to have faith in the uncertainty that Blücher, as his ally, would provide him his much-needed means. Failure to capitalize on these live and reactive means is not under the same expectation of military command as, say, military dispositions or exploitation of terrain. Blücher’s troops could have retreated along the banks of the Sambre toward Liège and history would not have faulted Blücher on this particular point. He had just been defeated by Napoleon at the Battle of Ligny. It would likely have been seen as a failure of the alliance in the face of Napoleon’s continued genius.

¹³⁴ Clausewitz, *On Wellington*, 143.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁴¹ “It is most remarkable that on the morning of June 17, the Prussian army was sought and pursued only the direction of Gembloux, where one corps had gone, and Namur, where none had gone, but not in the direction of Tilly and Gentinnes, where two had actually gone.” *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁴² Charles Edward White, *The Enlightened Soldier* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 173.

¹⁴³ Clausewitz, *On Wellington*, 119. Gneisenau was Blücher’s chief of staff and chief of the General Staff. During the final hours of the Battle of Ligny, Blücher led a calvary charge to cover the Prussian retreat. His attack failed, his horse was killed, and he lay trapped for hours such that Gneisenau assumed command of the Prussian army. White, *The Enlightened Soldier*, 170, 172-173.

¹⁴⁴ Clausewitz, *On Wellington*, 130.

The social contingency of allies is deeply connected to temporal extension. As in *On War*, Clausewitz has an extended hypothetical on the consequences of war's duration. There he considers war in a single moment, here a battle in a single blow.¹⁴⁵ Imagine, Clausewitz writes, "If battles consistent of a single momentous blow, and if armies could be conceived as brittle bodies, whose crystalline structure could be shattered by such a blow."¹⁴⁶ Like wars, battles take time.

Battles lasted a half or a whole day, and taking into account the larger part of the entire effort, consisted of a slow grinding and wearing away of two armies, which, when their fronts come into contact, are like two hostile elements that destroy each other where they meet. The battle burned like wet powder, slowly, with limited intensity, and only when the greatest part of the opposing forces was burned out like useless cinders would the remainder have achieved the decision.¹⁴⁷

In this case, the battle took enough time such that Blücher's additional 50,000 men, "offensive in nature" could tip the balance.¹⁴⁸ Wellington, without Blücher, was 68,000 men against 100,000 men.¹⁴⁹ With Blücher the alliance fought with 118,000 men against 100,000 men. "For Wellington, everything came down to holding his position long enough for Blücher to arrive."¹⁵⁰ Encased in this plan are two assumptions that Clausewitz contends Bonaparte rejected. First, Wellington would not accept battle if all of his forces required for success were not present, and, second, closely linked, that Blücher would not provide those forces. Napoleon discounted the value, power, and even the dynamic contingency of the alliance.

For a seventh time, the Allies rose up to fight against Napoleon's latest design on power and revert back to the previous existing state of things. The Seventh Coalition was the necessary instantiation of the majority of European states' desire to return back to the previous state: to restore the balance of power. That the Allies' resistance proved successful was not inevitable; it was the sum total of local particularities. As Clausewitz explains, while it is true that "[t]he united forces of Blücher and Wellington destroyed him," it was also "the force of circumstances."¹⁵¹ Ultimately, Clausewitz concludes, Napoleon lost the Battle of Waterloo because of exhaustion; nightfall; Blücher's attack; the Allies' superiority; the pursuit; and, summing up the pervasive influence of *Politik*, "all the political elements that permeate any war to a greater or lesser extent, but that in this one were obviously more imposing and proved to be liabilities of the worst kind."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ See Clausewitz, *On War*, I.1, 8; Carl von Clausewitz, *On Waterloo: Clausewitz, Wellington, and the Campaign of 1815*, ed. and trans. Christopher Bassford, Daniel Moran, and Gregory W. Pedlow (CreateSpace, 2015), 172n72. Bassford, Moran, and Pedlow contend that Clausewitz's insight that war has duration "is still presented as historically contingent, and is applied to battles and armies rather than to war as such. Yet the generality of Napoleon's problem is apparent throughout Clausewitz's discussion: Napoleon needs, somehow, to strike a single blow that will transform the politics of Europe. The problem of how to break Wellington's center is no more than a tactical manifestation of this overarching, and ultimately insoluble, dilemma."

¹⁴⁶ Clausewitz, *On Wellington*, 155.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 123, 157. In particular, it was Müffling, the head Prussian liaison officer in Wellington's staff, who coordinated to ensure that the Prussians arrived "at the critical time and place on the battlefield." White, *The Enlightened Soldier*, 175.

¹⁴⁹ Clausewitz, *On Wellington*, 122.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 173-174. One of the primary sources that Clausewitz's evaluates is Grouchy's account. As evidence of the domestic *Politik* about which Napoleon was preoccupied, we find Grouchy recalling on

Part of the liability for Napoleon was his domestic turmoil, but at the international level it was the determination and unification of the Allies to see Napoleon restrained once and for all. Clausewitz saw that “Bonaparte was balancing not only the crown of France but also many other crowns on the tip of his sword, and he tried just with boldness and daring defiance to make his way in a world whose established relationships and order were set against him.”¹⁵³ This world of “established relationships and order” was the previously existing state of things; this was the propensity of the system, which provided a sufficient unity of force and impetus to return. Tactically, an alliance was necessary to defeat Napoleon: Blücher’s additional forces tipped the scales at the Battle of Waterloo, reinforcing Wellington, and providing the decisive blow and the forces for the pursuit. Strategically, the alliance challenged Napoleon such that he had to distribute his forces at various garrisons along the French border, further reducing his limited manpower, and forcing his hand toward an audacious offensive. Finally, an alliance was necessary to restore the political balance between states, reaffirming individual states’ independence, through the final pursuit and occupation of Paris. At each level – tactical, strategic, and political – the alliance was necessary and, importantly, defensive.

VI. Conclusion

Without allies, as a live, reactive means, and alliances and their dynamic instantiation, an understanding of Clausewitz’s theory of war is incomplete. Through the confrontation of reality in the form of duration and the social, war’s absolute conception as a dual and its logical tendencies to the extreme are limited. Duration brings into play, at the level of combat and that of *Politik*, “*the unforeseen event,*” which is uncertainty.¹⁵⁴ Equally, there is a presumed natural tendency to support the existing state of things, which is most commonly expressed in the form of alliances, and today, the liberal international order. Coalitions, like the Seventh Coalition that finally defeated Napoleon once and for all, are a particular instantiation of alliances, united by “a common object.”¹⁵⁵ Alliances serve as the dynamic whereby the states, based on their complete interaction at all levels of *Politik*, decide to shift their means.

Though allies and alliances were deeply embedded in Clausewitz’s theory of war, they were also representative of where Clausewitz wanted to take his theory next. Clausewitz intended to write a chapter on supreme command, but this was never written.¹⁵⁶ Clausewitz was not just concerned with what war is — what allies and alliances are — but how best to fight with them, especially given their frequent necessity.¹⁵⁷ Alliances are political and given the historical record and his experience, Clausewitz required a way to reconcile what war theoretically *ought* to be with how wars were actually fought. Partially derivative of an embodied reality in time, space, and society, allies emerged as a live, reactive means. Alliances serve as the dynamic by which these means shifted, with a natural preference for the existing state of things. This desire for preservation is partially derivative of the natural strength of the defense, but also a preference for the equilibrium previously established by a certain set of political connections between states. When that existing state of things is disrupted, as by Napoleon, the states must determine whether or not to throw their weight in with the current

16 June how Napoleon “dismounted and spoke for a long time to General Gérard and myself about the state of opinion in the chamber in Paris, the Jacobins, and various other topics, completely alien to what would seem to have been the exclusive concerns of a perilous moment.”¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 148-149.

¹⁵³ Clausewitz, *On Wellington*, 159.

¹⁵⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, Appendix, 836.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII.9, 714.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 735. Graham translates this as “Chief Command.”

¹⁵⁷ See Engberg-Pedersen’s *Empire of Chance* for views on Clausewitz’s poetics and how Clausewitz sought to empower commanders by, with, and through the reading of *On War*.

momentum or seek to revert it back to the way it was. Just because defensive allies are stronger does not mean they will be successful; it was on their seventh try that the coalition was able to finally defeat Napoleon for good. Clausewitz reaches the necessary connection between war and *Politik* through an account of allies and alliances. For it is “*even in Wars carried on without Allies,*” that the *Politik* emerges.¹⁵⁸ A robust understanding of Clausewitz’s theory of war demands an account of allies and alliances.

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¹⁵⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, VIII.6, 697. Italics mine.

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