

Civil-Military Relations and Democracies¹

Wilfried von Bredow

Modern societies, especially democracies, seem to have difficulties with their armed forces, and the armed forces seem to have difficulties finding a suitable place in the network of organizations in modern democracies. On the one hand, the military functions as an agent of modernization. In this process, however, the meaning of violence in social and political conflicts, the role of the armed forces and the role of warfare are losing some of their former political relevance. Even if we do not subscribe to the idea of 'democratic peace'² we have to admit that modern (mostly Western) democracies, with one notable exception, are, at the beginning of the 21st century, less inclined to use their armed forces for purposes of conflict-management and conflict-solution. This trend, if it is a trend, invites us to re-consider the interplay between politics and war and the current terms of civil-military relations in general and especially in these kinds of society.

Carl von Clausewitz was a thorough observer of the interplay between politics and war. Although his famous remarks about the primacy of politics refer to the pre-democratic societies of the 18th century, they implicitly form the nucleus of a theory of civil-military relations in democratic societies. Taking Clausewitz' observations as a point of departure, this paper sketches the outline of that theory in the light of recent developments both within modern societies and on the inter/transnational level.

1. Violence, Organized Violence, and Order

Among human beings, violence is ubiquitous. Violence in its virtual and real forms indicates the fragility of any web of order between human beings. In social and political relations, violence does not mark the breakdown of order, but functions as an important part of it. Only eruptive and spontaneous violence endangers the emerging or existing order and, if it is not contained, it may cause fatal damage to it.

Containing and controlling violence is one of the permanent challenges for social organizations that are responsible for the collective survival of people (families, clans, communities, states). The modern territorial state is unthinkable without its successful claim on the monopoly of legitimised violence. It is only with this concentration and organization of violence that the latent violence between individuals and groups within a state can be controlled, channelled, and defused. In a functioning state, violence is concentrated in public organizations like the police, the gendarmerie, and the armed forces. The emergence of organized violence outside the public sphere is an indicator of problems of legitimation that the state has to face. A state whose political system is unable to contain and control violence between its citizens and has to concede the existence of organizations of violence beyond its reach is doomed to fail.

Violence between states is deeply embedded in the structure of international systems. An international system is also not viable without a minimum of order that is accepted by the member states. Ideally, the acceptance of an international system permanently increases and thus expands the quantity and quality of codes, norms, rules, and regulations for the

¹ Publikation in Vorbereitung in: Hew Strachan, Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds.): *Clausewitz in the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Sept. 2007.

² Spencer R. Weart: *Never at War. Why Democracies Will Not Fight One Another*. New Haven und London (Yale University Press) 1998.

international behaviour of the member states. One of the aims of such a process is to minimize inter-state violence.

In a state-centred international system, organized violence is a phenomenon between states only. International systems have *never* been exclusively state-centred, and especially today, a growing number of non-state actors characterize the current international system. Some observers see the future of the modern state in rather bleak terms. They predict the decline or even the fall of the state - both as the dominant actor in international relations and as the pillar of the order of violence. For Susan Strange the “perceived need for the state as an institution necessary to defend society against violence within or beyond its territory still exists, but in many societies at a much lower level”.³ Martin van Creveld’s study of the rise and fall of the state is conceived as a kind of dirge for the modern (*Westphalian*) state.⁴ In his view, the retreat of the state from the position of monopolist of organized violence creates growing security problems in the centres and at the periphery of the planet.

Other observers predict a brighter future for the peaceful development of international relations with or without strong states. In their eyes, democratic societies neither want nor need organized violence to flourish. Because of the democratization of the international system, at least traditional inter-state wars will occur less and less. Democratic structures within a state function as a great incentive for the strengthening of peaceful and non-violent means of communication with other states. Trading states are non-military states.⁵

These two perspectives contradict each other to a certain degree, but their proponents can find some empirical data that support their respective views.

A third perspective on the future of organized violence tries to combine the other two and to emphasize the considerable difficulties emerging from the pressure from globalisation on the current international system. The re-arrangement of the international system, not only on the state-centred but also on the non-state level, encourages all kinds of violent moves. It is therefore necessary to expand and to strengthen the international acceptance of an order of violence that concentrates on two aims. First, it should minimize the amount of organized violence in the international system by an array of measures ranging from arms control and partial disarmament to the peaceful settlements of conflicts and incentives for non-violent behaviour. Secondly, it should be prepared to sanction the deviant behaviour of outsiders and *rogue* actors, if necessary with military means that are both effective and based on a multinational consent. The international order of violence is, more than ever before, a political concern of the global community.

2. Organized Violence and Political Goals

Any group that strives for longevity must earmark some of its resources in order to sustain the collective interest. The group has to develop a policy. Policies are actions (and frameworks for actions) designated to guarantee the well-being and the survival of the group. Internal and external dimensions of policy are often studied separately, but in fact, they overlap and compliment each other.

Not always, but very often, the collective interest of a group is challenged by other groups and their respective collective interests. In many cases (at least in the past), the competition between different groups is characterized by the use of organized violence. Organized violence functions as a means to help achieve the group’s collective goals. Evidently, this relationship of means and goals does not depend on the size and the shape of the group. Nor does it depend on the sophistication of the group’s division of labour – violence is organized in very different ways.

³ Susan Strange: *The Retreat of the State. The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1996. p.73.

⁴ Martin van Creveld: *The Rise and Fall of the State*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1999.

⁵ Richard Rosecrance: *The Rise of the Trading State*. New York (Basic Books) 1986.

The relationship between organized violence and political authority is part of the general relationship between war and politics. According to Clausewitz, “war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument”.⁶ War occurs as the violent clash of interests between two or more collective actors. Each of them acts or re-acts after a short or a longer moment that is necessary to make a *political* decision. One main factor in the decision to risk war is the perceived strength of the organisation for waging war, the armed forces. The armed forces are an instrument in the hands of the political decision-makers.

Some critics of Clausewitz point to the socio-political environment in which he lived and conclude that his observations about the nature of war and the relation between the political and the military spheres of society are of limited value for the present. In their view, his arguments are confined to a late-absolutist state system. Although we have to acknowledge that certain of his opinions and perspectives have lost parts of their relevance over time, it would be wrong to reduce Clausewitz to the dimension of a defunct *Zeitgeist*. Nobody would seriously discount Kant’s ideas about eternal peace because he lacked experience of modern-style democracy.

The concept of war being a consequence of conflicting political interests is not a concept only for the late 18th century, but for any political actor with some internal stability. The core of Clausewitz’ concept of war is not unbound violence but the idea of politics as the source of war and its guiding principle.⁷ This insight transcends the peculiarities of a specific historic era and proves its explanatory power about different forms of war in different cultural contexts and at different times.

Violence can also be a spontaneous expression of anger or the result of a destructive urge for superiority. However, when it is organized in forms of trained collectives, it is usually designed for the use as an instrument to achieve certain goals. The definition of these goals and the decision to use organized violence or other instruments to realize them is a political decision. Whoever is in charge and responsible for this decision, decides in political terms. However, violence does not lose its character when used as a political instrument. The danger that violence gets out of the hands of its organizers is always lurking behind the attempts to contain, to channel, and to control violence.⁸

The differences between controlled and uncontrolled violence were clearly visible in the era the emergence of the modern state in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The 30 Years War (1618-1648) was experienced by contemporaries as a war during which the use of violence had emancipated from political guidance and had created anomy – with disastrous consequences for individuals and societies in Central Europe. Therefore, in the absolutist era following the peace of Westphalia in 1648, with its inauguration of the co-called “Westphalian system”, the armed forces were put into the firm hands of the monarch as a tool to enable him to pursue the interests of the state.

It is important to note that even in ‘militaristic’ societies like Prussia, the armed forces, although expensive and in a way dominant in civil society, did not really influence the definition of these interests pursued by the King. Instead, they were the instrument he used to develop the country and to enhance its political influence in the region.

After 1789 and the decline of aristocratic influence in Europe’s political landscapes, some political philosophers like Auguste Comte and others expressed the expectation that the role of organized inter-state violence would decrease in the same way as the level of internal violence had been decreased by the rise of the modern state. This was, of course, much too optimistic. On the contrary, the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century saw an enormous expansion of the armed forces and, in some places, a militarization of civil society. However, even under the

⁶ Carl von Clausewitz: *On War*. Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton (Princeton University Press) 1989, p. 87.

⁷ Raymond Aron: *Clausewitz. Den Krieg denken*. Frankfurt/M. (Propyläen) 1980, p.159.

⁸ Wolfgang Sofsky: *Traktat über die Gewalt*. Frankfurt/M. (S. Fischer Verlag) 1996. Sofsky reminds us that war is very often not a fight between warriors but a massacre of unarmed people. This is unfortunately true. In some cases these actions are based on political decisions, in others they are just the expression of violence running amuck. The canon of the *ius in bello* is to stigmatise such actions as criminal behaviour.

auspices of extreme nationalism and totalitarian rule or the in cases of anarchist action⁹ against the detested social order, the use of organized violence rarely lost its instrumental character.

Panajotis Kondylis reminds us that this juxtaposition of war and politics must not be translated into the pseudo-liberal credo that the political (civil) agents are necessarily less belligerent than the military leadership. The assumption that a strong dominance of politics over the military automatically implies a more co-operative and less militant policy has been too often falsified.¹⁰ Clausewitz himself cautioned such expectations by pointing to the fact that policy “can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests, and vanity of those in power”.¹¹

In the 20th century, a whole range of authors has contested the reflections of Clausewitz on the political character of war and the primacy of the political authority over the military commander. They emphasize the autonomy of violence - out of opposite perspectives. In 1935, the German General Erich von Ludendorff published his study on total war.¹² In his view, total war is just the opposite of what Clausewitz thought about the nature of war. He restricts Clausewitz' term *policy* to *foreign policy* and argues that in times of total war the most important aspect of any policy is domestic policy, that is a policy which mobilizes every single person and all of society's resources for the purpose of war. Thus, policy becomes in instrument of the preparation for war. Politicians and the government have to follow the guidelines of the supreme commander who is therefore the genuine leader of the country and the people.¹³ In Ludendorff's case, this was a sort of retrospective self-serving argument, for he wanted to re-model his role in the First World War in the collective memory of the Germans by presenting a ‘what, if’ - history of a virtual German victory in that war. His diatribe against Clausewitz reveals a rather gruesome *political* perspective, for the supreme commander as the genuine leader of the country is, of course, a political leader. Other opponents of Clausewitz point to the nuclear arms race in the Cold war and argue that under the auspices of mutual assured destruction an East-West war would destroy the whole planet. Under such conditions, war can no longer be regarded as a rational option. Therefore, they conclude, Clausewitz' famous formula is not valuable any more.¹⁴ This conclusion is wrong, for the era of East-Western nuclear bipolarity was very much characterized by a strong primacy of the political over the military. Truman's decision to reject General MacArthur's request for introducing nuclear weapons on the Korean war theatre, the management of the Cuban missile crisis, to name just these most dramatic events, demonstrate in each case the validity of Clausewitz' concept of war as a political instrument. This concept is not invalidated if political decision-makers decide to avoid war, to start arms control negotiations, and to accept negotiated agreements to reduce the armament level.

A third group of critics emphasizes the seemingly non-political aspects of warfare, the attraction of cruelty and torture for some warriors, the existential hatred between fighting soldiers or the sudden bouts of solidarity between enemies in the trenches – all this, they contend, cannot be explained in political terms. Clausewitz himself has pointed to this dimension of war at the end of Book One, Chapter One. “As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as in instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.”¹⁵

⁹ In most anarchist action, the political goal of the terrorists is the demonstration of the vulnerability of law and order. Sometimes, anarchists followed a strategy of symbolic politics. This is impressively described in Joseph Conrad's novel *The secret agent* (published first in 1907).

¹⁰ Panajotis Kondylis: *Theorie des Krieges. Clausewitz-Marx-Engels-Lenin*. Stuttgart (Klett-Cotta) 1988, pp.103-115.

¹¹ Clausewitz, op. cit., pp. 606-607.

¹² Erich von Ludendorff: *Der totale Krieg*. München (Selbstverlag) 1935.

¹³ Ludendorff, op. cit., pp. 115-119.

¹⁴ This phrase was a kind of mantra among critics of nuclear strategy from the 1960s to the end of the East-West conflict. See, among others, Anatol Rapoport: „Tolstoi und Clausewitz. Zwei Konfliktmodelle und ihre Abwandlungen“. In: *Atomzeitalter*, N° 9/1966., pp. 257-266.

¹⁵ Clausewitz, op. cit., p.89.

These three aspects, related by Clausewitz to the people, the military commander and the armed forces, and the government are present in every war. The history of warfare teaches us the melancholic lesson that the balance between them is often endangered. In the course of history, we also meet certain military cultures, which were or are nurturing primordial violence as an individual and collective virtue. Even in the most violence-prone groups and societies, however, political imperatives (sometimes in the guise of economic ambitions) are present and of decisive importance.¹⁶

3. Nationalization and Professionalization

Concerning Europe's history during the last ten centuries, Charles Tilly proposes making a distinction between four types of warfare, state organization, and the allegiance of the armed forces:

- patrimonialism (up to the 15th century)
- brokerage (roughly from the 15th to the 17th century)
- nationalization (from the 18th to the 19th century)
- specialization (from approximately the mid-19th century to the recent past)¹⁷

The last two of these types are of special interest here. *Nationalization* describes a period when states created mass armed forces, which were drawn increasingly from their own national populations. The organization of the armed forces became part of the state's administrative structure. There are (with ongoing arguments about the different types and models) at least two clearly distinguishable ways of nationalizing the armed forces, depending on the militarist or civic orientation of the dominant political culture. A strange, backward looking, but equally modernist militarism characterizes the Prussian/German development of civil-military relations in the 19th century to the end of the Second World War.¹⁸ In many other Western states of that period, notably in the United States, armed forces with effective military discipline and technologically advanced weapons co-existed with emerging democratic political institutions. Morris Janowitz even contends, that "particular forms of military service can serve and have served as a form of effective civic education".¹⁹ The American model of the '*citizen soldier*' earned its mythical aura in the American Revolution and survived for a long period in the form of militia duty. It re-emerges in the first half of the 20th century in concepts like a citizen army based on universal military training, proclaimed by General John McAuley Palmer, or the 'Plattsburg-movement' inaugurated by General Leonard Wood, or the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)-programs since 1916.²⁰

The German model of '*Staatsbürger in Uniform*'²¹ was introduced for the newly founded Bundeswehr in 1955. It builds on ideas of the Prussian reform officers (Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and others) during and after the wars against Napoleon. Its main feature is the granting of an unusually high amount of democratic rights to the soldiers. They should perceive themselves as citizens and an integrated part of democratic society, '*Citizen Soldier*' and '*Staatsbürger in Uniform*' are models for a military man with strong allegiance both to the nation and to the various and developing forms of democracy. The most important

¹⁶ See Andreas Herberg-Rothe: "Primacy of 'Politics' or 'Culture' Over War in a Modern World: Clausewitz Needs a Sophisticated Interpretation". In: *Defense Analysis*. Vol 17, N° 2, 2001, pp. 175-186.

¹⁷ Charles Tilly: *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*. Oxford (Basil Blackwell) 1990, p. 29.

¹⁸ Volker Berghahn: *Militarism: The History of an International Debate 1861-1979*. New York, N.Y. (St. Martin's Press) 1982; Wilfried von Bredow: *Moderner Militarismus: Analyse und Kritik*. Stuttgart (Kohlhammer) 1983, pp. 23-45.

¹⁹ Morris Janowitz: *The Reconstruction of Patriotism: Education for Civic Consciousness*. Chicago, IL (The University of Chicago Press) 1983, p. 14.

²⁰ Meyer Kestnbaum: "Citizenship and Compulsory Military Service: The Revolutionary Origins of Conscription in the United States". In: *Armed Forces and Society*. Vol 27, 2000, N° 1, pp. 7-36

²¹ The civil executive and Parliament introduced the concept of the *Staatsbürger in Uniform* into the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany in order to express the tight democratic control of the military.

task of the armed forces is the defence of the country and the protection of its peaceful society. This task should not be left to a group of experts in violence, for it is the most distinguished obligation of every (male) citizen to participate in the protection of the nation and its determination to be independent. Military service became a national duty. This is the *leitmotif* since the American Revolution and the French *levée en masse*. The myth of the more or less peaceful mass army had its dark sides from the very beginning, and Napoleon put it already in jeopardy. From the emergence of the mass army on until after the Second World War, mass armed forces were regarded as the most efficient and adequate form of the military. Professional standards and political norms and values amalgamated in the name of nationalism.

Anti-colonial wars of liberation in the 20th century could rely on the mobilizing force of this nationalism, if the political and military leaders were able to paint themselves as national leaders.²² Many of these wars started with the combined politico-military activities of a small group of partisans, guerrillas, or freedom fighters. In nearly all of them, the number of involved (often disguised) combatants expanded over time, and some of them became eventually the war of the people.

The armed forces and military service played an important role in the process of building or rebuilding the nation, integrating different social groups and immigrants.

Nationalization did not necessarily incorporate the democratic control of the armed forces. In fact, this occurred only with certain reluctance on the part of the armed forces and their leaders. Even in the most advanced Western democracies, there was always a kind of uncertainty about possible undemocratic or anti-democratic movements within the armed forces.²³ In most cases, the armed forces remained hostile to any organizational reform, which threatened to do away with traditional forms of hierarchy, rank, and chains of command. The protagonists of a liberal and democratic society, however, which on its ideological margins is even decidedly pacifist, were always trying to subordinate the armed forces to a strong civil control.

The term *specialization* comprises several aspects. The Industrial Revolution also generated the 'industrialization of war'²⁴ and of the military profession. The never-ending process of innovation and the refinement of new weapons and weapons systems literally opened new dimensions for military action. This in turn demanded new skills of the soldiers and new forms of organization and management of the armed forces. The military thus became a driving force, but also an ambiguous element within the general process of modernization.

The professionalism of the armed forces developed as a response to several developments that threatened the unity of the military profession. First, the pace of technological invention in weapons and military infrastructure created the need for more and more special military branches and more 'civilian' skills within the armed forces. This process of industrialization threatened the social homogeneity of the officer corps. Like other expanding professions which became more 'scientific' in the second half of the 19th century the profession of arms developed the usual features of professionalism (common norms and values, common language, common behavioural patterns, a clear distinction between members and non-members of the group) in order to control the process of growth in numbers.

Specialization meant professional specialization and the division between the political and military spheres in the organization of the state. Nevertheless, both developments were balanced and powerful attempts were made to keep the unity of the military profession and to fine-tune

²² Nationalism was the most successful integrative ideology of the past two centuries. Sometimes, the nation invented itself through the fight against colonial forces or dominant ethnic groups. This is a wide-spread pattern, according to the comparative studies by Nikolaus Buschmann and Dieter Langewiesche (eds.): *Der Krieg in den Gründungsmythen europäischer Nationen und der USA*. Frankfurt/M. (Campus) 2003.

²³ To mention just two (quite different) examples: first, the notorious Dreyfus affair in France, and second the erosion of democratic structures in Western countries through the influence of nuclear deterrence and a powerful „military-industrial complex“ as anticipated by some peace groups and peace researchers in those countries.

²⁴ Anthony Giddens: *The Nation-State and Violence*. Cambridge (Polity Press) 1987, p. 5.

the interaction between the political executive and the military leadership, not only in times of war but also in peace.²⁵

4. Soldier/Diplomat

Raymond Aron introduced the fundamental distinction between the diplomat and the soldier as the authentic representation of a state in its foreign relations²⁶. The civil ambassador and the soldier in uniform live out and symbolize the relationship between states. This distinction is still valuable. It has lost, however, some of its previously sharp contours:

- A steadily growing number of cross-border relations is no longer confined to states and governments but is of a transnational character. This weakens the position both of the diplomat²⁷ and of the soldier. It would be premature, however, to believe that the relative decline of the number of interstate wars in the recent past would develop into a sound trend to eliminate war as an instrument of international politics.
- A special form of convergence or synthesis seemed necessary in the context of mutual nuclear deterrence of the main actors in the East-West conflict after 1945. Political control of the possible escalation from a 'cold' war into a direct military confrontation of the nuclear powers was extremely important. This occupied not only the minds of the responsible politicians and military commanders but also the public imagination.²⁸
- Many anti-colonial wars in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s were characterized by a strictly organized convergence of political and military operations. Leaders like Tito, Mao Tse Tung, Castro, Guevara, and other guerrillas were more or less successful in combining the roles of the soldier and the diplomat. Their concept of guerrilla warfare was based on the unity of the political and the military spheres. The myth of the violent birth of a new nation often did not survive the first generation.
- After the era of anticolonial wars, which were legitimised and fought on the part of the indigenous peoples in order to liberate themselves, a new wave of wars between and within recently founded states emerged. Often enough, it is hardly possible to identify the political contours of these violent conflicts. It would be, however, wrong to think of these wars only or principally in terms of apolitical eruptions and implosions of social order.
- Violent intra-state conflicts and wars on the territory of failed states, of which there is an increasing number, often create (through sheer intensity of physical violence) a new and brutal military culture. Warrior-soldiers in these wars often do not care to act in the name of a political interest and do not consider themselves actors in a nation-building process. They act in a turbulent environment made up of cruelty, terror, and annihilation. The high number of juvenile soldiers in such wars is a gruesome reminder of this kind of alienated violence beyond any political goal. A deeper analysis of the distribution of power and interests in these conflicts will always reveal, however, the political context of these wars.
- A different kind of considerate co-operation between the military and civilian agents is necessary in the cases of multilateral peace missions and the protection of humanitarian relief operations in trouble spots of the globe.

It is mostly the last two phenomena, which are interesting in the context of this paper. The second is mostly a reaction to the first. At the same time, however, they form the two extremes on a scale, which visualizes the different combination of the military and the diplomat. In the

²⁵ Under the shadows of a nuclear war in the East-West conflict, this fine-tuning became extremely important in order to avoid any escalation into forms of conflict that threatened to invalidate conflict-management.

²⁶ Raymond Aron: *Frieden und Krieg: Eine Theorie der Staatenwelt*. Frankfurt/M. (S. Fischer) 1963.

²⁷ Paul Sharp: "Who Needs Diplomats? The Problem of Diplomatic Representation". In: *International Journal*. Vol. 52, N° 4, 1997, pp. 609-634.

²⁸ One of the both serious and amusing testimonies of this is Stanley Kubrick's movie *Dr. Strangelove* (1963).

case of *new wars*²⁹ or *wars of the third kind*⁸⁰, violence appears to be motivated by emotions beyond political control.

In multilateral peace missions, which are to contain the violence of local wars, it is primarily the diplomats who decide on the scope and intensity of the action. The soldiers executing these decisions are not only obliged to stay in close contact with the local political authorities and the agencies of the international community (like the United Nations). They are also expected to display a diplomat's sensitivity.

5. Aspects of Civil-Military Relations

From an *organizational* perspective, civil-military relations reflect the relationship between the political leadership of a country and the commanders of the armed forces. From a *social* perspective, this relationship comprises all contacts between the realm of the military and civil society. There is a third, a genuine *political* perspective. Here, civil-military relations reflect the relationship between organized violence and political goals and interests. In modern times, political goals and interests, as far as they concern the community (group) as a whole, stem from the civil sector of society. Depending on the format and the legitimising structures of the polity, the group members, or some representatives or some circles who claim to express the will of the people, are in charge of this process. The military is usually seen as a multi-functional organization with social, economic, and other roles. However, these are only secondary functions. Their primary function, as the professionally trained defender of society and its territory, is to provide security against any other state, which threatens national interests. Clausewitz clearly emphasized this third perspective

Clausewitz' famous contention that war is simply a continuation of political intercourse with the addition of other means, follows from his general concept of war as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will".³¹ An enemy in this sense is constituted by a clash of interests or values between collective actors. Planning and beginning a war is therefore a political process: "It can be taken as agreed that the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values, and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy, of course is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests against other states".³²

The armed forces and organized violence are instruments in the hands of the political leadership: "In no sense can the art of war ever be regarded as the preceptor of policy, and here we can only treat policy as representative of all interests in the community".³³

Whenever a modern state is concerned, as an actor in war or as prey in civil or guerrilla war, the guiding rationale for warfare is always the political interest of the parties involved. A major military development, or the plan for one, cannot be judged in an adequate way when the judgement is concentrated on purely military aspects. When war is a continuation of political intercourse, of politics, it is only logical to contend that civil-military relations in times of peace are also characterized by the domination of the political leadership over the armed forces. In short: modernity always implies civilian primacy.

The shaping of civil-military relations differs from state to state and is part of their political culture. In some nations, the armed forces as an organization and the soldiers as members of this organization enjoy high social prestige. This does not imply that they rise beyond their status as (precious) instruments in the hands of the political leadership. Even in militarised states, e.g. after a military *coup d'état*, the formulation of national interests remains a non-military task. After a

²⁹ Herfried Münkler: *Der Wandel des Krieges. Von der Symmetrie zur Asymmetrie*. Weilerswist (Velbrück Wissenschaft) 2006, chapters 5 and 15.

³⁰ Kalevi J. Holsti: *The State, War, and the State of War*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1996, chapter 2.

³¹ Clausewitz, op.cit., p. 75.

³² Clausewitz, op.cit., p. 606

³³ Clausewitz, op.cit., p.607.

military *coup d'état* the masters of the country cannot but act as its political leaders. Sometimes, colonels and generals think they are more efficient in running a country and fulfilling non-military tasks. Usually, they are wrong.

Civil-military relations become a delicate affair in times of regime change or after a regime change has taken place. Germany's history in the 20th century is a case in point. After the end of the First World War, the armed forces did not accept their defeat and refused to transfer their loyalty from the old monarchy to the new democracy. The failure to establish new kinds of civil-military relations deeply influenced the history of the Weimar Republic. Thus, not all, but many officers of the *Reichswehr* sympathized with the Nazi government that came to power in January 1933. Paradoxically, Hitler and the National Socialist party were very successful in introducing a different kind of political primacy over the armed forces (renamed *Wehrmacht* in 1934). After the Second World War, the Allied Powers divided Germany into several parts. When the East-West conflict turned into Cold War, the Western powers (mostly the United States) put some pressure on the West German government to contribute actively to the defence of the West against the perceived military threat by the Soviet Union. The new military, the *Bundeswehr*, founded in 1956, remained under the political control of Germany's NATO allies. The new and more stable democracy was therefore able to establish also a stable democratic control of the armed forces.

6. Democratic Control

In the second half of the 20th century, professionalism, bureaucratisation, and the acceptance of a legitimate framework, namely the nation-state and democratic values, became the major conditions for a military career in most Western countries. The so-called equilibrium model of civil-military relations in its ideal form „presumes that the military profession is composed of an educated elite whose role in society is the organization, control, and application of force in pursuit of democratic values as determined by the state. Complementing this is the concept that the profession not only controls and supervises the military instrument in accordance with established policy, but that professional morals and ethics require a commitment to democratic ideals which in turn presuppose a role in the political process.“³⁴

Armed forces are *not* democratic institutions. Because of their internal structures and the imperatives of their missions, they are, in fact, *non-democratic institutions*. It would be futile to change this and all attempts to go in this direction have failed.

However, what is feasible and reasonable is the attempt to make the armed forces *compatible* with their democratic environment.

Military sociologists use the concept of *civilian control* in order to describe the norms, attitudes, and rules that should guarantee the primacy of the political (civil) over the military leadership of the armed forces. The armed forces are obviously a *dangerous* organization – they are supposed to be well equipped with instruments for violence, they are well trained, easily mobilized, and placed in a position to threaten potential or actual enemies. Every society and every political system therefore need some efficient devices to keep this organization under control. As David Segal has put it: “The central issue in theories of civil-military relations is that of civilian control of the military”.³⁵ When the military successfully overrules *civilian control*, the danger of a military coup or military dictatorship is imminent. The attempt to integrate a society by means of military norms and values (often accompanied by virtual or openly demonstrated terror) can be called *militarism*. The concept of *civilian control* is useful when we analyse civil-military relations on a relatively general level. However, it does not provide suitable distinctions between societies according to the degree of their democratization. Totalitarian dictators in the 20th century were very successful in domesticating the armed forces. They used instruments such as ideological infiltration,

³⁴ Sam C. Sarkesian: “Military Professionalism and Civil-Military Relations in the West”. In: *International Political Science Review*. Vol. 2, N° 3, 1981, pp. 290-291.

³⁵ David R. Segal: „Civil-Military Relations in Democratic Societies“. In: J. Kuhlmann, D. R. Segal (eds.): *Armed Forces at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*. Sozialwiss. Institut der Bundeswehr, Strausberg 1994, p. 40.

propaganda, and positive sanctions, but also terror and purges in order to keep the armed forces under tight control. In the 1930s, both Stalin and Hitler were comparatively successful in gaining tight control on the armed forces of the countries they commanded.

Civilian control refers only to the formal relations between a society, its political system and the armed forces. If we want to find out if a given model of civil-military relations is compatible with the fabric of democratic society, we need a more normative concept which could be called *democratic control*.

Democratic control comprises all formal norms and rules, laws and regulations which are designed to integrate the organization of the armed forces into the democratic political system and the soldiers, especially the officer corps, into the democratic political culture.

This normative concept can be implemented in different ways. The mechanisms of democratic control of the armed forces depend on the political culture and the traditions of the country. In some cases (and not just a few), democratic control of the armed forces encounters special difficulties because of the salient role the armed forces have played in the process of nation-building. Sometimes, the military leadership enjoys a sort of institutional charisma because the armed forces have liberated the country or because they have overthrown an anachronistic regime and thus have prepared the conditions for a new national start.

The democratization of a political regime and of a society as a whole remains dangerously incomplete without the establishment of democratic control of the armed forces. A typical feature of any process of democratization is that it is actively pursued by the elites *and* is actively accepted by the majority of the population. This is the most important prerequisite for its success. Prescriptions and implantations do not suffice. This is true for both the civilian and the military sectors of a society – one cannot *order* democratization.

In the case of West Germany after the Second World War, the newly constructed democratic state lived for half a decade without armed forces of its own. When the Bundeswehr was eventually founded, the political framework for the new organization had been carefully designed that democratic control could find enough institutional hooks.

Evidently, democratic control of the armed forces has to develop on several levels:

- the *political system* must provide legal opportunities to exercise democratic control in an effective manner. It is primarily Parliament which has to play an important role;
- the *media* and the *public* must show more than just a superficial interest in the armed forces and their internal functioning. They must be able and willing to function as watchdogs;
- the *armed forces* as an organization must accept that it acts under the auspices of democratic control;
- the *soldiers*, especially the officer corps, must have internalised the norms and values of democracy and be willing to comply with the rules of democratic control.

This is not an easy task.

7. Reluctant Civil-Military Parallelism

In most Western societies, civil-military relations have developed over the recent decades in a contradictory way.

It is evident that many of the changes in values and attitudes that have taken place in civil society have also influenced the armed forces. The role of women in the armed forces is a case in point. Women first gained access to positions in civil life, which had been formally or tacitly reserved for men. After some time and despite a considerable reluctance on the part of soldiers, the armed forces had to open their gates to women. Equally, the policy of the armed forces towards homosexuality is changing along with changes in civil society. These examples demonstrate a kind of *reluctant parallelism* between civil society and the armed forces – an illustration of the contention that the gap between them cannot be too wide.

This parallelism, however, seems to be interrupted by another development which clearly is about to widen that gap.³⁶ Interestingly enough, the most important impulse in this development stems not from the military, but from civil society:

- The abolition of universal conscription in many societies means that a traditional link between civilian society and the armed forces vanishes. A considerable number of young males have previously encountered military life. The armed forces were obliged to cope with new generations of youngsters. When this kind of mutual adaptation does not take place, it will be easier for all sorts of mutual prejudices and misperceptions to establish themselves.
- In modern nation-states, territorial defence is a generally accepted task. It is also a task common to society and to the armed forces. The new missions of the armed forces, although usually regarded with great sympathy by society, are the jobs of specialists often far away from home. Genocides and humanitarian catastrophes demand intervention, but it is of secondary importance whether this intervention is in the hands of “our” soldiers or some other troops or perhaps even some private security firms.
- As Bernard Boëne has observed: The future will see a return to radical professionalism, due mostly to the restoration of prestige, more frequent opportunities for military action, drastically reduced military establishments, and societal contexts for which the ‘post-modern’ label provides a convenient short-hand description. In terms of civil-military relations, the consequences will include – on the military side – stronger identities, more forcefully expressed interests, and less flexibility, while politicians, as is already the case in a number of countries, will exhibit a degree of diffidence, or at least less assurance, in dealing with military matters.³⁷ This vision may stretch the argument a little too far. But the tendency exists.

If the distance between society and the armed forces is growing, it remains a friendly distance. Societies do not become pacifist, but they are only sporadically interested in the armed forces. They do not want to spend too much money for their maintenance (in this respect, the United States is a remarkable exception). The public is proud of the armed forces when they intervene successfully and help to make peace, but it turns away from their activities when there is no quick and visible success.

Behind all different forms of civil-military relations and civilian and/or democratic control of the armed forces, we find the same structural pattern of political guidance. This structural pattern influences the decision to use the armed forces in a conflict that may consequently grow into a war. What is at stake in a war depends on the context. However, this context is always a political one, and the definition of what the stake is, is a political decision. Political actors, state and non-state actors alike, should be aware of this *fait social*, to use a term by Emile Durkheim.³⁸ The discovery of this *fait social* is Clausewitz’ legacy.

³⁶ Peter D. Feaver, Richard H. Kohn: *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*. Cambridge and London (MIT Press) 2001.

³⁷ Bernard Boëne: „Les rapports armée-Etat-société dans les démocraties libérales”. In: *La Revue Tocqueville/The Tocqueville Review* Vol.17. N° 1, 1996, p. 69.

³⁸ Emile Durkheim: *Regeln der soziologischen Methode*. Translated by René König. Neuwied (Luchterhand Verlag) 1961, p. 114. (*Les règles de la méthode sociologique* were published in 1894).