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To cite this article: Lukas Milevski (2020) Battle and its emotional effect in war termination, *Comparative Strategy*, 39:6, 535-548, DOI: [10.1080/01495933.2020.1826844](https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2020.1826844)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2020.1826844>



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Published online: 06 Nov 2020.



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Battle and its emotional effect in war termination

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ABSTRACT

The emotional dimension of the human element of war remains understudied. This article explores war's fundamental cognitive frame of mind, adversariality, with a focus on its emotional thread, in the context of battle and war termination. Adversariality itself is discussed with specific reference to Clausewitz before key emotional aspects—emotion causation and consequence, and stress, anger, and fear—are explored from the perspective of the emotions sciences literature. Finally, three brief historical cases demonstrate the importance of the emotional side of strategy: Königgratz campaign in 1866, Germany's defensive campaign in 1918, and the War of the Spanish Succession.

It has long been acknowledged that the human element of war is a primary source of its enduring nature. With his wondrous trinity, Clausewitz asserted that war is always dominated by the three forces of emotion or passion, reason, and chance, each in varying measure according to the specific circumstance of any particular war. These reflect the constraints of war's human dimension: we experience emotion; we seek to reason, partly on the basis of emotion; and we act in an environment rife with chance. Clausewitz further stipulated that “[o]ur task ... is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets.”¹ Often, however, the emotional thread in strategy is lost, including for war termination. This is understandable—it is exceedingly difficult to study—but a vital element is missing nonetheless. Again contrary to Clausewitz's trinitarian dictum, the literature on war termination deliberately focuses primarily on ending war as a rational operation. Dan Reiter, for instance, conceives of war as a bargaining process, which “proposes that the problems of uncertainty and unenforceable commitments cause war, fighting war serves to alleviate these problems, and war ends when these problems have been reduced sufficiently or eliminated.”² Emotion does not enter into the picture.

Even while hampered by the as yet undeveloped state of psychology, Clausewitz repeatedly emphasized the importance of moral factors as well as the mental, including emotional, life of the commander in war. “With our slight scientific knowledge we have no business to go further into that obscure field; it is important nonetheless to note the ways in which these various psychological combinations can affect military activity.”³ In the approximately two hundred years since Clausewitz, psychology and cognitive sciences have developed substantially. The key to relating this knowledge to strategy and war termination, particularly through the Clausewitzian trinity's frequently but usually superficially invoked emotional side, is understanding adversariality.

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Adversariality underpins war. It is the key which starts war, a frame of mind in which interaction with the other party appears to be zero-sum, whether or not it actually is. If evolving adversariality is one of the initiating phases leading to war, then breaking that adversariality must similarly be one of the early developments leading to peace—the whole point of strategy in practice. This analysis is not concerned with the whole process of war termination from the final dregs of battle to the making of peace. Rather, it focuses on the moment when the adversarial frame of mind breaks as a result of battle, which is the necessary first step to a real process of war termination. It focuses specifically on the emotional thread which runs through that moment of battle and breakage, especially when it may be the dominant influence. Adversariality is explored to explain the nature of adversarial relationships in terms of both emotion and reason. Stress, emotion causation, and emotion consequences, particularly fear and anger, are highlighted. Finally, these emotions are related to three historical examples: Austria's Königgratz campaign in 1866, Germany's defensive campaign in 1918, and the War of the Spanish Succession.

On adversariality and battle

Clausewitz defines war as “*an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.*”⁴ This elegant definition encompasses war's three fundamental elements: violence (“an act of force”); instrumentality (“to do our will”); and, most important for our purposes, adversariality (“compel our enemy”). Each element describes a different but necessary aspect of war. Violence and instrumentality have long received attention in the literature, but our understanding of adversariality, despite its definitional centrality to war, is still lacking. Many definitions of strategy tend to focus most on instrumentality, with violence in second place and adversariality distinctly third.

Clausewitz's trinity posits that war is always beset by factors “composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, ... to be regarded as a 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 an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.”⁵ When discussing adversariality as both a frame of mind and a description of mutual interaction between strategic actors one may disregard chance and probability. The standard Western supposition, a Cold War legacy, implies that the remaining two elements of the trinity are at odds: reason exists to control passion in war, to prevent escalation that might conceivably lead to Armageddon. Thus passion is adversarial and reason is instrumental. In *Clausewitz's Timeless Trinity*, for example, Colin Fleming adopts this perspective, that passion is equated to hostility, leaving reason free to deal with the difficulties of reconciling politics and policy in war.⁶

Yet Clausewitz distinguished between two different hostilities: hostile *feelings* and hostile *intentions*. Fleming suggests that both belong to passion, redefined simply as hostility.⁷ This is inapt. Hostile feelings are clearly passionate and emotional, but Clausewitz differentiates between them and intentions: “Essentially combat is an expression of *hostile feelings*. But in large-scale combat that we call war hostile feelings often have become merely hostile *intentions*. At any rate there are usually no hostile feelings between individuals. Yet such emotions can never be completely absent from war.”⁸ Clausewitz defines hostile feelings as emotions, but implicitly categorizes hostile intentions otherwise, as the product of reason. They represent intentionality about changing the future and make adversariality as a whole a complex phenomenon to which both passion and reason contribute, albeit not necessarily in the same ways, at the same times, or with the same effects on strategy or the politics surrounding the war.

Adversariality in any particular belligerent context has its own life cycle: a beginning, a middle, and an end, with passion and reason engaged variously throughout the cycle. This cycle is born of politics, the basic context of war, a (usually) deliberate choice to employ armed force and so to practice strategy. The deterioration of any political relationship to the point of war both reflects an increasingly adversarial thread in that relationship and is simultaneously exacerbated by that

thread. A characteristic of escalating adversariality is an increasing preference to resolve a political dispute using force, largely through the judgment that no satisfying outcome can be achieved with any means short of violence. Goals appear, rightly or wrongly, to be zero-sum and indivisible, the winner taking all. This is adversarial reasoning in the war's political context. By introducing violence, adversariality gets locked into the relationship, along emotional as well as reasoned trajectories.⁹ As Clausewitz noted, "[e]ven where there is no national hatred and no animosity to start with, the fighting itself will stir up hostile feelings: violence committed on superior orders will stir up the desire for revenge and retaliation against the perpetrator rather than against the powers that ordered the action."¹⁰ This is adversarial feeling, alongside which comes adversarial reasoning in strategy: "So long as I have not overthrown my opponent I am bound to fear that he may overthrow me. Thus I am not in control: he dictates to me as much as I dictate to him ... If you want to overcome your enemy you must match your effort against his power of resistance ... But the enemy will do the same."¹¹

Despite adversariality's natural tendency to escalate in war, ultimately the middle of the adversarial life cycle—battles and other engagements harboring both adversarial feelings and intentions—is meant to bring adversariality to an end. The point of strategy is to employ force to create a situation in which violence, and strategy as such, become unnecessary because the enemy's adversarial will has been broken and he has acceded to terms of some sort. That it is effectively self-negating when successful is a fundamental irony about strategy. Breaking adversarial will results in the enemy's changed belief and perception about the apparent zero-sum quality of mutual goals in the belligerents' relationship: the enemy is now willing to give up part or all of its war goals in return for peace. This change does not, however, necessarily transition directly into war termination processes.

Battle is the event in war where all three of war's defining elements—instrumentality, violence, and adversariality—are most apparently concentrated. Clausewitz's thinking clearly reflects the close relationship between battle and adversariality. Battle begins early in the adversarial life cycle as an expression of hostile intention, but the very experience of battle inevitably rouses passions which both interfere and augment reason, including hostile reason. Yet battle is recognized as the sole means by which one belligerent party may be defeated by the other in war, suggesting that the emotional role of battle in strategy and war cannot be as simple or straightforward as merely escalating hostile feelings. In the same way that a reasoned individual may interpret the strategic meaning of battles differently, so too may an emotional individual appraise battles uniquely as well. Battle can strengthen adversariality by igniting the hostile feeling which Clausewitz identified, but it can also break adversariality by causing emotions which inhibit the adversarial frame of mind.

Thus, because adversariality as a mindset is both emotional and reasoned, battle, the primary means in war, can affect both the enemy's reason and his emotion. Yet the literature tends to focus primarily on reason in strategic analysis and war termination. One author argues that "organizations form beliefs about their likelihood of success from what they observe during a war. We can capture these beliefs with ... the dominant indicator approach: a general, organizational model that focuses on sudden and dramatic changes in the quantitative indicators on which decision makers rely to predict how organizations evaluate the performance of such implemented policies as strategy."¹² Others also adopt rational approaches to war, including ways such as bargaining theory which altogether ignore adversariality as a problem in war: "The bargaining approach proposes that the problems of uncertainty and unenforceable commitments cause war, fighting war serves to alleviate these problems, and war ends when these problems have been reduced sufficiently or eliminated."¹³ Or, as observed in yet another rationality-focused manner, "[w]ars usually end when the fighting nations *agree* on their relative strength, and wars usually begin when fighting nations *disagree* on their relative strength."¹⁴ Such perspectives have little, if any, room for emotion even though emotion is a major component of adversariality in war. So

how can the emotions sciences fit into our understanding of adversariality and the study of battle in strategy?

Stress and emotion

Strategists navigating the dynamics of adversarial interaction in war do not just do so rationally but also ‘irrationally’—emotionally. The main relevant cognitive sciences here relate to emotions as well as to stress. Unfortunately, consistent definitions of emotions have not emerged as researchers have generally preferred formulating operational definitions of emotion over conceptual ones to define their research interests.¹⁵ This is particularly the case as an experienced emotional episode may contain many components—cognitive, feeling, motivational, somatic, and motor—and researchers may prefer focusing on any of these components individually or in combination.¹⁶ As far as strategy is concerned, the key components are cognitive, feeling, and motivational. Stress is distinct body of literature within the cognitive sciences, one which had historically substantially and unfortunately emerged without reference to or relation with the emotions literature. Unlike emotions, stress has been defined fairly simply: “the struggle to adapt to life” and is the product of a relationship between a person and his or her environment.¹⁷ Stress clearly must be present as a dimension of adversariality as the relationship between any strategist and the hostile, reciprocally violent environment of war is difficult to navigate and to manipulate against an independent enemy.

At the heart of both stress and emotion is *appraisal*, a specific term from emotion sciences which has gained ground to denote a particular cognitive approach to emotion. Appraisal theories are not the only theories of emotion, but they are usually the most relevant for strategy. “The notion underlying appraisal theory is that personal evaluations of events—rather than the situations themselves—are crucially important in both eliciting and differentiating emotions.”¹⁸ The act of appraisal is key, and is also why emotions and their impact on decisions and behavior sometimes seem so unrealistic to external observers. Appraisal also means that stress and emotions, in both causation and consequence, are particular to individuals.¹⁹ Stephen Rosen’s early attempt at incorporating cognition and neuroscience into the study of war and its termination is expanded below through discussions of stress and of the causation and consequences of emotions.

Stress

Rosen presents a simple thesis of how stress from battle influences war termination: battlefield defeat leads to the accumulation of distress among the defeated. Distress “induces a condition very similar, and perhaps identical, to the psychological and physiological state of depression. Depression is defined symptomatically in terms of pessimism about the outcome of one’s actions, lack of energy to perform tasks, and, in extreme cases, a collapse into near complete inaction.”²⁰ He suggests that this psychological process begins earliest with both the physical participants of battle as well as non-civilian elites, and that distress is contagious once it sets into an army. This leads to mass behavior with which decision-making elites must contend in determining subsequent policy and strategy. One of the major elements Rosen identifies as contributing to distress, the primary reason why it sets in among frontline soldiers first, is uncertainty about the future and the individual’s ability to control the environment. “It is the losing side in a war that is subject to stressors in the environment that cannot be predicted or controlled.”²¹

Rosen’s early thesis suffers from three main shortcomings. First, his focus is on stress with no mention of emotions other than those describing the parallels between distress and depression. This is an unfortunate reflection of the scientific literature itself, in which stress and emotions as concepts have traditionally developed independently of one another. Yet stress influences emotions and tends to engender certain emotions over others. Second, his discussion of stressors

focuses on battle as an experience, with an overly simple differentiation of battle understood as victory or defeat, excluding how context combines with outcome to determine the meaning of battle.

Third, Rosen focused on a lower level of analysis: that of individuals and groups of soldiers and officers, direct participants of actual battle, rather than strategists and certain policymakers. Clausewitz also worked with this lower level of analysis, as he described the feeling of defeat—which he had directly experienced after the battle of Auerstadt and throughout the ensuing French pursuit of the Prussian army across Prussia itself.

When one is losing, the first thing that strikes one's imagination, and indeed one's intellect, is the melting away of numbers. This is followed by a loss of ground... Next comes the break-up of the original line of battle, the confusion of units, and the dangers inherent in the retreat... Then comes the retreat itself, usually begun in darkness, [and] continued through the night. Once that begins, you have to leave stragglers and a mass of exhausted men behind; among them generally the bravest—those who have ventured out farthest or held out longest. The feeling of having been defeated, which on the field of battle had struck only the senior officers, now runs through the ranks down to the very privates.²²

Clausewitz described the effect of battlefield defeat on the conduct of strategy: “The effect of all this outside the army—on the people and on the government—is a sudden collapse of the most anxious expectations, and a complete crushing of self-confidence. This leaves a vacuum that is filled by a corrosively expanding fear which completes the paralysis.”²³ Rosen was not able to relate these emotions back to the question of war termination; all he could say in concluding that theme is that “[t]he behavior of defeated troops in battle is not irrelevant to war termination.”²⁴ This is true; a common theme in a collection of studies edited by Holger Afflerbach and Hew Strachan on surrender in war suggests that the surrender of armies and even of nations often begins as a bottom-up process.²⁵ Rosen's lower level of analysis could not reconnect emotions to the dynamics of war termination as a whole.

Stress is induced by any change in the environment, positive or negative, to which one must adapt, although clearly negative changes tend to create more stress. Scale matters as well: larger changes create more stress.²⁶ Stress emerges when an individual's resources appear insufficient to allow adaptation to environmental change. Crucially, stress is inherently relational: changes to the environment mean nothing if they are not relevant to individuals within it. “A person is under stress only if what happens defeats or endangers important goal commitment and situational intentions, or violates highly valued expectations. The degree of stress is, in part, linked with how strong these goal commitments are, and partly with beliefs and the expectations they create, which can be realized or violated.”²⁷ Although stress may be—and has been—classified in a number of ways, one may suggest three various types of stress. “*Harm/loss* deals with damage or loss that has already taken place. *Threat* has to do with harm or loss that has not yet occurred, but is possible or likely in the near future. *Challenge* consists of the sensibility that, although difficulties stand in the way of gain, they can be overcome with verve, persistence, and self-confidence.”²⁸ The act of appraisal is fundamental to stress: appraising changes in the environment and their relationship to oneself, appraising the quality of the changes (as positive or negative); appraising potential responses to the changes (is it possible to adapt to the change or not).

Furthermore, stress may accumulate if stressors in the environment propagate, whether laterally (new stressors appearing) or sequentially (existing stressors are exacerbated or grow in importance and/or proximity), without effective responses. As stress accumulates, that is, as it appears increasingly unlikely that one's resources or powers are sufficient to manage or adapt to changes in the environment, it becomes more difficult to regulate emotional responses to those or subsequent changes. The various types of stress may engender related emotions, whether fear, anger, hope, relief, etc, depending on specific outcomes or concerns about the future. Increased stress similarly increases the chances of feeling any given relevant stress emotion, and increases the intensity of that emotion.

Emotion causation

Consideration of emotions has been increasingly incorporated into international relations, culminating recently in a strong attempt to begin creating a theory of emotional choice in coercive diplomacy.²⁹ This has also filtered into strategic studies with similar work on the role of emotions in choice and decision-making in strategy, particularly relating to deterrence and war termination.³⁰

Yet focusing on decisions is insufficient for strategic studies, as strategy is inherently more than mere decision-making. Without subsequent tactical, operational, and strategic performance, decision-making alone loses meaning; strategy requires a broader and more flexible understanding of emotion. First, emotions must be contextualized in a longer performative process than isolated moments of decision-making. This leads directly to the second point, that emotion *causation* is equally important to emotion *consequence*. On-going strategic performance causes emotions in both adversaries, and those emotions have consequences for subsequent performance, which in turn causes further emotional reactions, etc. Finally, this longer performative process, in which emotion causation and consequence are equally important, occurs within a specific range of violent and adversarial contexts and circumstances which often inhibit the full range of human emotion. Only some emotions are necessarily relevant to strategy or the strategist, although one must recognize that both context and level of analysis play a part. A strategist seems unlikely to commit to battle merely to bolster pride, but he may commit to battle because he is proud or, conversely, he may not cooperate effectively with a fellow commander in battle because he is (or they both are) too proud to do so.

Unless aiming for complete annihilation and conquest, the strategist inherently seeks to induce a psychological effect in the enemy which involves an emotional dimension. Understanding emotion causation, particularly in the adversarial context of war, is crucial. While myriad theories consider the question of emotion causation, appraisal theories focus on the act of appraisal in causing emotion. This act tends to center on a few variables. One is goal relevance, or the relevance of a perceived change in the environment to one's ability to attain a currently held goal. Goal relevance also affects the intensity of emotions. Second is goal congruence, or the degree to which the perceived change in the environment helps or hinders goal attainment. Whereas goal relevance determines whether an emotion is felt, goal congruence determines whether that emotion is positive or negative. Beyond these two fundamental appraisal variables, various appraisal theories focus on a variety of other possible variables, including level of certainty, potential to cope with the change, and the question of another's agency behind said change.³¹

Goals are related to another important consideration of appraisal theories: the issue of belief. Goals are held because they are believed to be attainable; if a goal were not attainable, there would be no sense in holding it.³² This suggests that a change in the environment which elicits an emotional response also inherently affects, positively or negatively, one's beliefs or expectations about goal attainability. An emotional experience may imply an inherent revision of beliefs or expectations, particularly about the attainability of goals.³³ Yet this is not necessarily the case, as emotions may prevail despite rational appraisal that there is no meaningful change to the environment.³⁴ For example, one may still fear the height of the tower one has just climbed even while rationally knowing that the tower is architecturally sound and cannot collapse. Emotions may contain a substantial *denial* component; the person denies perceived reality in favor of a half-perceived, half-emotionally imagined reality. Expectations may be stronger than perceptions of environmental change.

Discussing emotions as inducers of belief revision implies that the need to revise was broadly unexpected. This observation seems not to have been explicitly made in the emotion sciences literature. If one expects an environmental change to revise one's beliefs, those beliefs have already been revised rather than waiting for the event to occur. Although it is too strong to say that surprise is inherent in any emotion—as one may still feel some emotions even if the situation develops along a desired or anticipated path—it is fair to suggest that the greater the deviation between

expectations and results, the stronger the emotional response. This is important when tying emotion causation concretely with battle, which are not emotionally equal. If one engages in battle without serious hope of victory because the circumstances demand it—a rearguard action to cover a retreat, for example—battlefield defeat will not induce substantial negative emotions because defeat was expected and beliefs/expectations were already suitably revised (although it may still increase stress). In the context of strategy, therefore, strategically meaningful emotions seem most likely to occur when the environmental change is unanticipated, a surprise. Then-Commander James B. Stockdale, a prisoner in Hanoi during the Linebacker 2 bombings, observed this firsthand.

Night after night the planes kept coming in—and night after night the SAM's streaking through the sky were fewer and fewer (the naval blockade worked). The *shock* was there—the *commitment* was there—and the *enemy's will was broken*. You could see it in every Vietnamese face. They knew they lived through last night, but they also knew that if our forces moved their bomb line over a few thousand yards they wouldn't live through tonight.³⁵

The North Vietnamese had lived through quite a few US air raids by December 1972 and had become quite blasé about them, but the experience of Linebacker 2 was qualitatively different from any previous bombing campaign. North Vietnamese expectations were not in line with the reality the United States created—and the basis of North Vietnamese fear was surprise. Spurred by surprise and fear, the North Vietnamese returned to the negotiating table. Emotions are generated by unexpected environmental changes and individual appraisals of those changes, including whether they are relevant, positive or negative, and whether the individual can live with, or seeks to deny, those changes.

Emotion consequence

Although written with a focus on international relations decision-making, Markwica's summary of emotion consequences remains apt and useful for war termination. As discussed, emotions affect both cognition and behavior. These effects are achieved through each emotion's own specific "appraisal tendencies" and "action tendencies." Emotional influence on appraisal tendencies suggests that current emotions affect current or near future appraisals, which in turn feed into future emotions and emotional change or continuity. Action tendencies determine the likely range of behavior stemming from a particular emotion. Ultimately, these are only *tendencies* and individuals do have considerable, albeit incomplete, control over how their emotions affect their subsequent actions. Markwica focused on five emotions in coercive diplomacy: fear, anger, hope, pride, and humiliation.³⁶ Concerning the emotional effects of *battle*, however, it seems useful to focus on two emotions: fear and anger, the latter particularly as part of the more complex emotional state of depression, which also includes anxiety, guilt, and shame. Unlike diplomacy, battle takes place in the adversarial setting of war. Considerations such as offending pride or humiliating the enemy become meaningful once the two sides start talking, but prior to the adversarial will being broken those specific emotions are less relevant. Hope also remains relevant, as the results of battle may hearten strategists, even defeated ones, but is beyond the scope of this inquiry.

Fear is a potential emotional reaction to perceived threats. Its appraisal tendencies include: hyper-vigilance toward the environment to detect current as well as potential other threats, which may as a by-product amplify the emotional experience of fear; inhibition of complex cognitive tasks which may interfere with that hyper-vigilance, but which also leads to less mental flexibility; and environment appraisal which stresses the apparently low level of certainty and low ability to control.³⁷ Fear is typically considered to have three main action tendencies: fight, flee, or freeze. These are self-explanatory: if one is afraid of a threat, one may decide to fight it or flee from it. Freezing is slightly ironic as an action tendency because its essence is in *not* acting—that is, being overwhelmed and cognitively shutting down. In war, at least on the battlefield, "[b]iologists and

military analysts are now fairly certain that freezing is a more common response than either fighting or fleeing.”³⁸ The individual experience of combat, with threats plausibly emerging in quick succession from many directions, can easily overwhelm one’s senses and cognition, resulting in temporary but effective paralysis. Yet military analysts sometimes add one more response to fear which remains as relevant to the command of armies as to the individual soldier on the battlefield: *fussing*, or engaging in manageable tasks which do not directly involve engaging the enemy, the source of danger. These are tasks such as assisting crew-served weapons, carrying ammunition, etc: “simple jobs that a man can do instead of the really hard job he is supposed to be doing.”³⁹ Unlike the three classic F responses, *fussing* may be characterized as an oblique denial of the danger, yet it can nonetheless affect strategy and strategic performance.

Anger may arise from any number of potential appraisals, but most relevant for battle is when another party blocks the achievement of an actor’s goals. The main appraisal tendencies springing from anger include increased confidence in (re)gaining control of a situation; more optimistic risk assessments and minimization of potential negative futures; and activation of heuristic processing resulting in less attention focused on quality of arguments and more on superficial cues. Anger’s primary action tendency is to confront and attempt to remove or defeat the source of the anger.⁴⁰ Anger is an important element of depression, which has been described as

the result of a sense of hopelessness about restoring a worthwhile life following major loss. While being emotional, it is not a single emotion but a complex emotional state, a mixture of several emotions that come and go depending on where one is in the process of grieving and what has happened to produce the loss. The emotions of depression consist of anxiety, anger, guilt and shame. These are the emotions of struggle against one’s fate because we have not yet given up on changing it.⁴¹

Besides anger, anxiety is a state of heightened concern regarding an uncertain future; guilt is experienced for transgressing some identified imperative; and shame is felt when one is unable to live up to some identified ideal. Often, guilt is associated with behavior—guilty of failing to do something expected—while shame is associated with being—being someone who cannot achieve that thing. Guilt is thought to increase empathy with others whereas shame may result either in the deterioration of social relations as blame for failure is externalized, or, conversely, in self-improving behavior.⁴²

Taking emotions to war

Given the two primary emotions relevant to war, fear and anger, considering a handful of cases will portray a plausible range of emotional consequences for strategy from battle—or, more generally, from the engagement—with particular interest in how the adversarial will of one side or another is affected. Three historical examples will follow: General Benedek during the Königgratz campaign, Ludendorff during the Amiens campaign of 1918, and Louis XIV and England during the War of the Spanish Succession. Each demonstrates different but instructively interacting dynamics among battle, emotions, and adversarial will.

Königgratz: stress, fear, and fussing on campaign

The Königgratz campaign of the 1866 Austro-Prussian War is a sterling example of stress in the Austrian command, resulting in the emotional breakdown of the Austrian General Ludwig August Ritter von Benedek and his onset of fear. The story begins seven years earlier, during the Second Italian War for Independence in 1859, when Austria was trounced. Benedek, at the time a corps commander, was one of the few Austrian generals to distinguish himself in the war. He was also a popular military figure both in the army and publicly, in part for his flamboyant professional disinterest in military affairs. As a result of his battlefield performance and popularity, Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph felt compelled to promote Benedek to the position of Chief of

the Quartermaster General. This was a level of military command which was ultimately beyond his grasp, and he did himself no favors by appointing General Baron Alfred Henikstein, a similarly incompetent and professionally disinterested soldier, to be chief of the Austrian General Staff. Benedek was fixated on his public image, including for posterity: “[f]ar from a Great Man, he was a nervous, insecure, vain, and jealous officer.”⁴³

Once war with Prussia began, Benedek was made commander of Austria’s Northern Army and Henikstein was also determined to participate in the northern campaign. Yet given the previous peacetime performances of both men, Archduke Albrecht imposed another general on them as an operations chief, General Gideon Krismanic, who had a reputation for strategic excellence—at least academically and professionally—and so was the complete opposite of Benedek and Henikstein. This alienated and worried the already misplaced Benedek, but “[r]ather than question Krismanic, ... Benedek took refuge in a vacuous routine of inspections, reviews, and luncheons at Olmütz.”⁴⁴ Already the stress of being in command—but not feeling in control—of an entire army was causing Benedek to fuss rather than act. When it came to campaigning and performing strategically, Benedek had already “subsided into a weary fatalism and resolved merely to stand at Olmütz.”⁴⁵ He was also already routinely finding other factors responsible for his decisions, or lack thereof, and the consequent results—he was more worried in crafting his image for the public and for posterity than winning the actual campaign.

Opening the campaign went poorly for the Austrians, and Benedek continued to be out of his depth and increasingly bewildered by the character of the Prussian advance. The Austrian Northern Army was herded toward Königgratz but remained on the wrong side of the River Elbe. By that point, Benedek apparently gave up and 1 July 1866 fell into despair; he sent the Emperor an urgent telegram to demand an immediate armistice, which shocked Franz Joseph. Benedek had backed his army into a corner which would be inescapable as soon as the rapidly nearing Prussians arrived. Rather than remedy the army’s situation, Benedek busied himself with trivial camp business—that is, more fussing—and denial of the danger. Confronted by a subordinate about the immediate prospect of battle in the following days, Benedek laughed and replied “And when did *you* become a prophet?”, and then followed up by suggesting that “[y]ou youngsters *always* have ideas.”⁴⁶ The battle occurred, Benedek continued to abdicate command in favor of fixating on minor matters, and the Austrian army was routed and practically disintegrated. Franz Joseph sought French intervention, failed to attain it, and sued for peace.

Most notable about the Königgratz campaign is that the interesting emotional story occurs *prior* to the battle itself, demonstrating the importance of understanding strategy as a process of ongoing performance ultimately punctuated by decisive battle and the resulting emotional break. It is a compelling example of how stress can accrue to military command not merely through battles lost, but simply through the limits of competence at the army level, together with other command arrangements for the campaign made beyond one’s purview. This occurred because Benedek was not primarily concerned with winning the battle, but with how others perceived him. As long as he emerged from the war reputationally intact, the results would be sufficient. The Königgratz example puts a slightly different perspective on Michael Howard’s statement that “the complex problem of running an army at all is liable to occupy his mind and skill so completely that it is very easy to forget what it is being run *for*.”⁴⁷ Running the army itself may provide much of the stress that leads to the mental withdrawal of a general from a campaign even before a shot is fired. Running the army may also provide psychological refuge, albeit counterproductive, for a general conducting a disastrous campaign and more interested in his own public image.

Ending world war I: Ludendorff, stress, depression, and panic

The collapse of the German war effort in the late summer and autumn of 1918 probably comes closest to Rosen’s thesis of distress leading to the collapse of the army, which in turn cannot be

ignored and forces the strategists and politicians to sue for peace. The collapse of the German army was quite pronounced and the process had already begun by late 1917 as German soldiers became increasingly demoralized, as evidenced by a refusal to fight, one way or another. Most shocking to the German high command was a sudden trend toward surrender: “A sudden spike in unforced surrender in the autumn of 1917 led the German high command to launch an inquiry on why the army was losing so many men captured.”⁴⁸ *Unforced* surrender means surrender before being wounded in combat; that is, German soldiers surrendered either because of a lack of will to fight or because of tactical mistakes which made fighting futile. Even during Germany’s final serious throw of the dice with Ludendorff’s offensives of March 1918, discipline was poor, “with entire units turning to looting and drinking during the recent offensives.” The arrival of American formations was also a major shock to the Germans on the frontlines.⁴⁹

Despite the deterioration of the German army, Ludendorff remained adversarially optimistic. Together with his effective co-dictator, Hindenburg, Ludendorff “long since had declared that defeatism would not be tolerated either in the army or on the home front. Their definition of defeatism meant that any solution short of a German military victory was anathema.”⁵⁰ Hardly recognizing the parlous state of the German army, prior to March 1918 Ludendorff clung to expansive war goals and could not conceive of a compromise peace of any sort. Prodded by Prince Max of Baden to consider the consequences of the failure of Germany’s upcoming offensives, Ludendorff’s response demonstrated how deeply mired he continued to be in the adversarial mindset: “Germany will just have to suffer annihilation.”⁵¹ He was demonstrating a zero-sum mentality on an existential level. The German army was not equal to Ludendorff’s level of ambition. By summer 1918, Germany’s offensive capabilities had all been frittered away and its defensive capabilities were deteriorating at a significant rate.

Entente offensive successes in June and July impaired Ludendorff’s mental stability. These successes were swiftly followed by the opening of a fresh Entente offensive on 8 August 1918, which Ludendorff subsequently called the black day of the German army; in the early days of the offensive tens of thousands of German troops surrendered. “This second setback within a few days proved to be too much for Ludendorff. He had been suffering from a severe depression for some days, and was now in a state of extreme nervous agitation and was no longer able to think clearly or to give decisive commands.”⁵² His inability to make decisions in turn exacerbated German strategic and operational performance. Yet he actively hid the true situation at the front from the Kaiser, the chancellor, and the foreign minister until the very end of September, when he suddenly pressed Hindenburg to report to the Kaiser that all was lost and peace had to be achieved immediately, as otherwise Ludendorff could not be responsible for the military situation.

Ludendorff suffered depression as a response to the string of German defeats in 1918, all the more since he had involved himself so deeply even in tactical issues that he bore substantial personal responsibility for those defeats. His erratic behavior and mood in headquarters reflect the emotional complexity of depression. At times he seemed to give up before bouncing back and grasping at absurdly optimistic ideas, meanwhile keeping his nominal superiors deceived about the true situation, and—once the German government began actively seeking an armistice and peace—trying (quite successfully) to shift the blame for defeat in war to the civilians, the socialists, and other subversive elements through enunciation of the stab-in-the-back myth with the ultimate purpose of hiding both his guilt and his shame over the result. Yet Ludendorff’s emotional state was a direct response to the collapse of the German army, which by the end of summer 1918 even he could no longer ignore, despite being wedded to wholly unrealistic war goals.

Louis XIV and recognizing the end of adversariality

French King Louis XIV’s experience of strategy and war termination toward the end of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) against the Grand Alliance is a cautionary tale about the

difficulty of ending adversariality. Because war is *interactive*, just because one side succeeded in breaking the adversarial will of the other side does not mean that negotiations to terminate the war will naturally ensue.

Over a period of four years between 1704 and 1708, the Anglo-Austrian forces individually or together won major victories over the French army: Blenheim (1704), Ramillies and Turin (1706), and Oudenarde (1708). During the first half of the war, British domestic politics was dominated by the stridently anti-French Whigs. Britain's allies, Holland and Austria, had their own concerns largely distinct from the actual Spanish succession. This enabled the Whigs to play an exaggerated role in determining acceptable war termination: "The allied decision to commit to a 'No Peace without Spain' policy was, therefore, made by the English, a decision encouraged by naval strength" as well as by the myriad goals England had across Europe's maritime world.⁵³

Thus when France in winter 1709-10 suffered a major famine on top of the past years of military defeat and Louis XIV sought terms, the allies—primarily the English, led by the Whigs—attempted to impose what have been characterized as rapacious demands.⁵⁴ Louis XIV actually agreed to most of them; he refused only to evict his own grandson from the Spanish throne with French arms but did offer to subsidize the Anglo-Austrian war effort in Spain. The Whigs persisted, seeing French refusal to bend completely and utterly to England's extreme terms as duplicitous diplomacy, and the war continued.

Ultimately, Louis XIV found a competent general, Marshal Claude Louis Hector de Villars, who forced the Grand Alliance to accept a pyrrhic victory at Malplaquet in 1709 and defeated the Austrians at Denain in 1712. Other French generals also scored victories. This reversal of military fortunes combined with two other developments. First, the Habsburg emperor died in 1711, leading the then-claimant of the Spanish throne to become Emperor Charles VI of Austria. The resulting prospect of the unification of Austria with Spain was a development which England regarded as even more unfavorable than a Bourbon ruling Spain. Second, in England the Whigs lost power to the Tories, who were more interested in negotiating peace with France, which proceeded from 1711-1713. The ultimate result was the Treaty of Utrecht and the end of the war.

This example offers two instructive lessons about ending adversariality in war. First, breaking the adversarial will of the enemy does not necessarily lead to war termination, as that break needs also to be recognized by the opposing party. The Grand Alliance, specifically the English Whigs, refused to recognize that the French adversarial will had been broken after 1709-10, which effectively continued the war. Sometimes, recognizing that the enemy's adversarial will is broken, or being prepared to exploit that break, may be just as difficult as breaking it. Second, breaking the adversarial will does not foreclose the possibility of continued fighting; it does not mean that the fighting stops. After all, even though war is adversarial, it is also instrumental. The adversarial zero-sum frame of mind may no longer exist, but any political actor still has its own core interests and bottom lines which it will be unwilling to transgress, especially if the strategic situation is bleak but not actually fatal—which describes France in 1709-10. Breaking the adversarial will opens up a mental awareness of life after compromise or even after defeat, but only up to a point. The War of the Spanish Succession continued until *Allied* adversarial will was also broken, albeit more by a change of government in London than by any French victory in battle. The war only ended when both sides had lost their adversarial will.

Conclusion

If the human element is truly the font of the most enduring dimensions of war, then one must be interested in the human experience of strategy. This necessarily includes both stress and the emotions it engenders. Any strategy in practice as well as any account of it will always have an emotional aspect, to any strategy in practice and to any account of strategy in practice, including how strategy contributes to breaking the adversarial will of the enemy and ultimately to war

termination. The emotional focus devolves onto fear and anger, and also onto stress, and depression, this last as a complex and fluid mixture of anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, and shame.

The example of Benedek suggests that a buildup of stress in command may sometimes encourage disconnection from the challenges of engaging with the enemy, whereas the example of Ludendorff indicates that stress may first take effect at the frontline and only affect high command through a continuous deterioration of combat performance. In either case, stress ultimately resulted in emotional breakdown and immediate demands for an armistice. Both cases also indicate how powerfully selfish reputational motives may be at the time, with both Benedek and Ludendorff assigning responsibility for defeat to other factors and other participants. The case of Louis XIV during the War of the Spanish Succession is instructive on the point of actual war termination; it shows that the two sides need to be equally ready to take advantage of the breaking of adversarial will. In 1866, Bismarck was ready, as was the Entente in autumn 1918. The English in 1710 were not yet ready and prolonged the war despite having successfully broken Louis XIV's adversarial will.

All of these examples also highlight both the importance and the difficulty of studying individual appraisal, or how the key figures appraised the situations. Benedek was fixated on his public image, whereas Ludendorff was more balanced in his determination both to win and to protect his reputation, with the latter rising in importance only after the black days of August. Studying emotions in strategy requires breaking into the inner life of the commander, which Clausewitz rightly recognized is often lost to history because no records are—or, sometimes, can be—kept.

Moreover, the emotions of strategy range far more broadly than those mentioned, especially once one dives into the weeds of command and of individuals actually practicing strategy over prolonged periods of time. Could not pride negatively affect strategy in execution, if generals were too proud to cooperate, if the emotional weight of their rivalry were greater than the need to achieve victory together? The effects of battle, even in defeat, may spark hope if the performance was sufficiently close between victor and loser or vice versa, as even the winners in battle may despair after an overly costly victory. The emotional tales inherent in strategy are myriad, but exploring them will deepen our understanding of strategy and perhaps even make us better strategists.

Notes

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28. *Ibid*, 33.
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Author's note

This is a longer and differently focused version of a paper “The Emotions of Adversarial Interaction” in Robert Johnson, Martijn Kitzen, and Tim Sweys (eds). *The Conduct of War*, to be published by Routledge.

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