

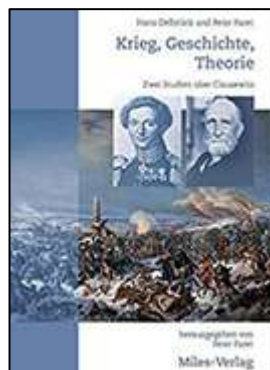


ClausewitzStudies.org

Dr. Lars Erikson Wolke, "Clausewitz in Sweden," pp.321-328, in Clausewitz Gesellschaft [Hamburg, Germany], Reiner Pommerin, ed., *Clausewitz Goes Global: Carl von Clausewitz in the 21st Century, Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Clausewitz Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Carola Hartmann Miles Verlag, 2011), ISBN: 9783937885414.

LARS ERICSON WOLKE, Ph. D. and Professor in Military History at the Swedish National Defence College, Stockholm and Assistant Professor in Military History at Åbo Academy (the Swedish University at Turku, Finland). He is president of the Swedish Commission for Military History and since 2005 member of the Board of the International Commission for Military History (since 2009 its 2nd Vice President) He is also a member of the Royal Swedish Academy for Military Sciences. He has published some 25 books, including *The Ideas of War. Swedish thoughts about warfare, 1320-1920* (Published in Swedish in 2007 as *Krigets idéer. Svenska tankar om krig 1320-1920*). His latest books are: *Swedish Sea Battles. A Naval History through 500 years* (2009); and *Bomb and Burn them. Tactic and Terror in Aerial Warfare during 100 Years* (2010), both published in Swedish. He currently is working on a Study of Sweden's Operational and Tactical Experiences from its participation in the International Operations in former Yugoslavia, 1992-2007. E-mail: lars.ericsonwolke@fhs.se.

This article is posted to *The Clausewitz Homepage* and to *ClausewitzStudies.org* with the kind permission of the publisher, [Miles Verlag \(Berlin\)](#), and of the [Clausewitz Gesellschaft](#). See [two reviews in German](#).



SEE ALSO: Hans Delbrück and Peter Paret: *Krieg, Geschichte, Theorie. Zwei Studien über Clausewitz*. Herausgegeben von Peter Paret (Berlin: Miles-Verlag, 2018), 76 Seiten, erschienen als Hardcover mit Schutzumschlag und Paperback. Paperback: ISBN 978-3-945861-82-0, Preis: 16,80 Euro. Hardcover: ISBN 978-3-945861-80-6

IN THE USA:

<https://www.amazon.com/Krieg-Geschichte-Theorie-Studien-Clausewitz/dp/3945861802/>
<https://www.amazon.com/Clausewitz-goes-global/dp/3937885412/>

CLAUSEWITZ IN SWEDEN

Lars Ericson Wolke

In January 1833 a reviewer in the Journal of the Swedish Academy for Military Sciences wrote that “A just published work, with the title: *Vom Kriege* ... has resulted in a lot of attention, which with reference to the part of the text we have seen, is highly justified.” In December the same year, the editor-in-chief of the Journal, Johan August Hazelius, meant that this new book could be regarded as “one of the most excellent that our profession owns”.

These two quotations imply that Clausewitz and *Vom Kriege* had a vast impact on Sweden and Swedish military thinking already from the very beginning.¹ Nothing could be more false. The review in 1833 could be seen as a lonely, although very positive, public mention of the book. But then it was not mentioned again in this Swedish military journal until 1856, a quarter of a century later. This long silence very much reflects the destiny of Clausewitz and his great book in Sweden; sometimes it was highly regarded, sometimes almost forgotten in silence.

However, Clausewitz was read in Sweden also during the “decades of silence”. The two most influential military theoreticians in Sweden during the first half of the 19th century were Johan Petter Lefrén and Johan August Hazelius. They both wrote influential books and manuals and for decades taught young officers at the War Academy at Karlberg’s castle. We know that both of them studied the works of Clausewitz and Jomini, but the influence of the later was higher than the Clausewitzian influences. Both Lefrén and Hazelius discusses the importance of the “enthusiasm of the people” and the importance of moral factors. Especially by Hazelius we can trace obvious influence from Clausewitz in these matters.

In 1809 a large military disaster in a war against Russia led to Sweden’s loss of Finland. Finland had for some 650 years been an integrated part of Sweden, and the military collapse in 1809 led to, among other thing, a revival for studies in military theory, in order to initiate reforms within the army and navy. In this respect the situation in Sweden was similar to that in Prussia after the disastrous defeats against Napoleon and before the war of 1813.

But it was Antoine Henri Jomini that became the most influential international military theorist in Sweden during the first half of the 19th century,

not Clausewitz. However, during the 19th century Sweden more and more became oriented towards Germany, away from her traditional military ally and inspiration, France. This process was more evident after 1870-71. For the next decades, until 1918, yes, to large extends all the way to 1945, Germany was the by far most important professional inspiration for the Swedish army; the navy and later the air force tended to look more towards Great Britain. The first foreign language studied in Swedish schools was, until 1945, German, and much of the cultural and scientific world in Sweden was oriented towards Germany. In the late 19th and early 20th century Swedish officers were used to read military books in German. All this of course paved the way for an introduction of Clausewitz, although it was somewhat delayed.

The man who reviewed *Vom Kriege* in 1831 was Johan August Hazelius, one of Sweden's most influential officers and military theorists throughout the 20th century. He wrote several books on military theory and also started a private school for young officers as a complement to the War Academy at Karlberg outside Stockholm. However, not even the influential Hazelius could guarantee a continuous success for Clausewitz and his book.

But in 1856 Clausewitz was once again mentioned in the Journal of the Academy for Military Sciences. A new book by an influential infantry officer and writer, Julius Mankell, was reviewed in the Journal. In his text the reviewer says that the earlier works of Clausewitz "are so well known, that nothing have to be mentioned about them here". Despite the silence about it, Clausewitz's book seems to have been read and discussed in Sweden during the 1830's to the 1850's. In the coming decades Clausewitz would inspire not only the development of military theory in Sweden, but also military historians.

Step by step Clausewitz made entrance in the Swedish military education system. Around 1880 he was a much read writer at the Artillery and Engineers College. In his education the teacher in art of war and war history, Carl Warberg made the following reference when he discussed the "popular war": "... I allow myself to quote the by myself several times mentioned military writer Clausewitz".

In 1883 Carl Otto Nordensvan, then teacher in tactics and war history at the War College in Stockholm wrote about *Vom Kriege* also in the Journal of the Academy for Military Sciences. He meant that the book described "not that one would like to learn, but what can not be learned. My whom, who will learn the basics of war, not be tired and, as good as he can, make himself familiar

with the great war philosopher” (i.e. Clausewitz). Nordensvan was also the editor of Helmuth von Moltke’s letters and orders from the war 1864-1871, so he can be regarded as Sweden’s best expert in contemporary German military theory and practice.

The officers that studied at the War College (founded in 1878) obviously didn’t read Clausewitz as a part of their curriculum, but they got familiar with him through the lectures given by their teachers, or by quotations of Clausewitz in the much read *Kriegskunst des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* by Friedrich Wilhelm Rüstow.

In the first autumn semester of the new War College in 1878 several of the students chose to write papers about the subject “A short overview of the literature in war science”. Not so few of them highlighted Clausewitz as a central writer in military theory, but they also regarded him as very philosophical and difficult to read. The Prussians ideas about the relationship between war and politics were discussed by many of the students. Also writers as Jomini, von Bülow and Rüstow were mentioned in the student papers. But all the students pointed out the British 18th century theorist Henry Lloyd as the first one who tried to make a systematic writing about the war. “He forces the reader to think more than read”, as one of the students describes his experience of Lloyd. That could also have been said about Clausewitz.

During the following years we can see a process in the use of Clausewitz. In papers written by students at the War College in 1907 and 1911 many of them discussed Clausewitzan thoughts about the importance of defeating the main forces of the opponent or just described the war as the outmost form of politics.

Both in these papers as in several editions of the tactical manuals of the army written by the general Lars Tingsten, we can trace a development towards more stressed demands that the military leadership should be given more strategical freedom of movement by the politicians.

Tingsten was teacher in general staff service at the War College, and later became both chief of the College, minister of war and, finally, chief of the general staff. The first edition of his book *Taktikens grunder* (*The fundamentals of tactics*) was published in 1892-1893 and it came in constantly new editions until the 1920’s. For the Swedish army Tingsten’s book was *the* tactical manual, with large parts also about operational and strategical matters.

In his book Tingsten discusses military theory in a way that clearly is influenced by Clausewitz. According to Tingsten all decisions about war should be made by the political leadership after advice from the military leadership, while the later should lead the military operations. “There should from the very beginning of the war be an appropriate interaction between politics and warfare”, he writes. The influences from Clausewitz, and to an even higher degree from contemporary German thinking, can also be traced in a text where Tingsten describes the way to a “decisive victory in field”. This decisive victory was not only a possibility, but desirable aim.²

When he discussed the borderline between politicians and the military in his book *Kriget och krigsinrättningarna* (*The War and the war institutions*) in 1893 the above mentioned Carl Otto Nordensvan quotes Clausewitz. But in his 1907 published book *Krigsföringen i dess olika former* (*Warfare in it's different forms*) Nordensvan has abolished Clausewitz and instead refers to Helmuth von Moltke.

So we can establish as a fact that Clausewitz was discovered and read in Sweden at a very early time, but it was not until after the victorious German wars during the 1860's and 1870's that he became more intensively studied in Sweden, especially at the War College. But after the turn of the century 1900 Clausewitz more and more came in the background. Instead it was the more or less perverted version of Clausewitz's text about the relationship between politics and war that was put forward by Moltke and his colleagues in the German general staff that was studied. However, this change should probably be seen as an independent Swedish development, and not a nondependent Swedish imitation of the German development. As late as in 1915 students at the War College, that “underestimated” the importance of a form the political leadership independent military operations were corrected by their teachers. This very Clausewitz- and even more Moltke-inspired view of the relationship between the political and military spheres began to change just a couple of years later.

We can say that Clausewitz during the three last decades of the 19th century was very much read and discussed in Sweden; yes to some extent he dominated the theoretical discussion within the military. But his *Vom Kriege* was never translated to Swedish, partly because most Swedish officers were expected to read and understand German. His ideas about the relationship between politics and war were debated, but in general Clausewitz and his *Magnum Opus* never became an integrated part of the terminology of military sci-

ence in Sweden, in contrary to the conceptions and ideas of Jomini and, to an even greater extent, of Alfred Thayer Mahan.

After the end of the Great War in 1918 the interest for military theory declined dramatically in Sweden, and especially that in Clausewitz, whom for many was regarded as the very symbol of the collapsed Prussian militarism. Instead theories about the new technological “machine war” were discussed in the military journals.

In 1939, when the dark clouds once again gathered over Europe, a Swedish naval officer, G E F Boldt-Christmas, published a book with the title *Från Clausewitz till Liddell Hart. A strategical study*. In this book, published in November 1939, he uses Clausewitz and the contemporary Liddell Hart to understand the strategical situation in Europe and the world after the Collapse of Poland but before the German invasion of Scandinavia and Western Europe. Boldt-Christmas belonged to the pro-British circles in the Swedish officer corps, a then minority especially in the army. In 1945 he published a much debated book in which he argued that Sweden’s neutrality during World War Two was far too friendly towards Nazi-Germany. Now, in 1939, Boldt-Christmans meant that the Swedish armed forces still were too much influenced by Clausewitz’s thoughts, and as a consequence of that by Prussian militarism. Bold-Christmas argued that many Swedish army officers, in accordance with Clausewitz’s fundamental ideas, wanted to muster as large units as possible in order to destroy the enemy’s main force. For Boldt-Christmas this could never be a rational purpose for a small nation’s army. Instead he argued that all the effort should be focused on stopping an invader at the beaches or along the land border, not necessarily do destroy his main forces.³

A short selection of minor parts of *Vom Kriege* was translated into Swedish and published in Sweden in 1942. This edition was made by one of the most skilful, Swedish speaking, Finnish historians Jarl Gallén.⁴ But his edition and it’s preface is, not so surprisingly, very much influenced by the political and military situation for Finland in the year 1942.

The decline of military theory in general and Clausewitz in particular became even more after 1945. The Cold War meant for Sweden, among other things, that the interest in military theory almost totally disappeared. Only a handful of officers and scholars kept the interest going. One of the few were the historian Gunnar Artéus, who in his dissertation 1970 discussed the influence from war theory by Clausewitz, Jomini and the influential German histo-

rian Hans Delbrück on the way a number of Swedish historians between 1855 and 1935 analysed and discussed the invasion of Russia by Charles XII and the Swedish army in 1707-1709. His result was that many historians were influenced by military theory, not the least by the one of Clausewitz, and this affected the way we study and understand their books on military history.⁵

But the general view was that the Swedish defence force very well knew who the enemy was, his capabilities and his equipment. It was only a question of if, when and where an eventual war should be fought. Instead of looking for guidelines in military theory it was for many Swedish officers, at all levels, only a matter of being on the right landing beaches in time to stop and throw back the Soviet invader. You didn't have to read Clausewitz in order to accomplish that.

But after the end of the Cold War 1989-1991 and the collapse of first the Warsaw Pact and then the Soviet Union all this changed. The traditional enemy disappeared, and in order to keep the orientation in a changed world, Sweden's armed forces began to read and discuss military theory again. This was especially true for the National Defence College (the former War College), where the department for Military History became an important actor in this revival of theoretical studies in war and warfare.

In 1991 *Vom Kriege* was translated to Swedish for the first time in the 160 years it had existed. The translation was made by Colonel Hjalmar Mårstenson – in 1975-1981 Sweden's military attaché in Bonn – with comments written by the two distinguished historians Klaus-Richard Böhme and Alf W Johansson.⁶ The 670 pages thick book made it suddenly possible for Swedish officers and student, to study Clausewitz's text despite how good the English or German was. This meant a lot for the military theory revival and debate in Sweden in general and at the National Defence College in particular. One can note that the edition of the book was made by a commercial publishing company, and since 1991 this Swedish edition has arrived in several more printings.

In order to promote the study of Clausewitz and his book, the three men behind the translation in 1995 published a guide to the study of *Vom Kriege* including the translation of a paper by the American professor Bernard Brodie.⁷

Alf W. Johansson at that time published a much read book about war and warfare in Europe during the 19th and 20th century, in which he discusses Clausewitz and the role that Clausewitz's ideas has played in the European

military development during some 150 years since the time of Napoleon. This book has been used and is still used in most of the courses at the National Defence College since its first edition and has also been a large commercial success.⁸

As a consequence of that edition of *Vom Kriege* the National Defence College in 1994 arranged a minor seminar about Clausewitz. Two lectures discussed Clausewitz's role for a number of Swedish military historians in the decades around 1900 and the perception of Clausewitz's ideas in Sweden before 1914.⁹ This indicates a new born interest in Clausewitz and *Vom Kriege* in Sweden, and from that time Clausewitz has been read and discussed in the courses at the National Defence College.

Since the autumn 2009 the National Defence College has been giving courses on a higher level than before, a so called "Higher Staff Education", i.e. a kind of general staff course. In these courses advanced military theory has a very important role. That moment includes a lot of reading about the historical development of military theory, but also, and that is important, original texts written by thinkers like Clausewitz, Jomini, Mahan, Corbett, Douhet, Warden and others. The purpose is twofold. First it gives the student a first hand notion about the texts and their writers, i.e. our historical heritage. Secondly and most important is for the students to discuss in written and in verbal presentations how they regard the actuality of these texts. Do they have anything to give to today's officer to develop his professional skills, and if so (or not) how do they motivate that? Here we of course come very close to the very essence of military theory, namely its usefulness, direct or indirect, for the military profession.

It is not *what* Clausewitz says that is in focus today, rather more *how* he says it that is of importance. By reading Clausewitz officers and students try to find (if possible) terms and thoughts from the text that can help us as a tool to shed light upon the reality of warfare of today. This is the principal way Clausewitz is used today at the National Defence College in Stockholm. Lectures and studies about his writing discuss to what extent his texts can be used to analyse the modern theatre of war, especially with regard to counterinsurgency warfare (COIN). In short: the question asked to Clausewitz's text is the following: "Has Clausewitz anything to tell those who today conduct operations – conventional, COIN or PRT – for example in Afghanistan?" Whatever the answer on this question may be the very existence of it shows that

Clausewitz still plays a role in the military theory debate in Sweden, some 180 years after the first Swedish review of *Vom Kriege*.

Notes:

¹ For a general overview of the development of military theory in Sweden in general and Clausewitz's role within that process see Lars Ericson Wolke, *Krigets idéer. Svenska tankar om krigföring 1320-1920* (Published in Swedish: *The Ideas of War. Swedish thoughts about Warfare 1320-1920*), Stockholm 2007, pp. 279-285.

² See Lars Tingstens manuscript *Avgörande seger i fält (Decisive victory in field)*, kept at the Military Archives, Stockholm, *Lars Herman Tingsten's collection* volume 4.

³ G. E. F. Boldt-Christmas, *Från Clausewitz till Liddell Hart. En strategisk studie (From Clausewitz to Liddell Hart. A Strategical Study)*, Stockholm 1939, pp. 38-39 and passim.

⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *Krig och krigföring (War and Warfare)*. Edited and translated by Jarl Gallén, Stockholm 1942.

⁵ Gunnar Artéus, *Krigsteori och historisk förklaring. I. Kring Karl XII.s ryska fälttåg (War theory and historical explanation. I. About the Russian Campaign of Charles XII)*, Göteborg 1970.

⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *Om kriget (On War)*. Translated and commented by Hjalmar Mårtenson, Klaus-Richard Böhme and Alf W. Johansson, Stockholm 1991.

⁷ Hjalmar Mårtenson, *von Clausewitz om kriget. Kommentarer, definitioner och register (von Clausewitz about war. Commentaries, definitions and register)*, Stockholm 1995.

⁸ Alf W. Johansson, *Europas krig. Militärt tänkande, strategi och politik från Napoleontiden till andra världskrigets slut (Europe's war. Military thinking, strategy and politics from the Napoleonic Era to the end of the Second World War)*, Stockholm 1988 and several later editions.

⁹ Gunnar Artéus, Clausewitz och forskningen om Karl XII.s ryska fälttåg (Clausewitz and the research about Charles XII's Russian Campaign) and Gunnar Åselius, Clausewitz-receptionen i Sverige intill första världskriget (The Reception of Clausewitz in Sweden before World War One), in *Militärhistorisk Tidskrift* 1994, pp. 24-34 and pp. 35-53.