

2014/5/4 Abstract: France and Clausewitz: perception and reception - an outline

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Clausewitz represents an important part of European military culture, although the perception and reception of Clausewitz and his body of thought has fluctuated in the course of time, due to the different perceptions of war in history as well as the French intellectual self-image. Misunderstandings are also recognition of a different military culture of thought and of a cross-border difficulty with the interpretation of Clausewitz's work. This study has been able to represent 150 years of approaching Clausewitz, the contradictory assessment and discussion of the human factor or the primacy of politics, and the exposure of uncertainty as a current element of theories. Altogether, in France there is not much renaissance of Clausewitz's body of thought; on the contrary, one can detect more profound and trespassing observance, philosophically and historically, politically, militarily and socio-scientifically, even economically, for the first time indeed. It is remarkable that this new observance just is merging with the development of the so-called "new wars", and Clausewitz would certainly be pleased. At the same time, this study has also been able to show – looking at the different French interpreters of Clausewitz – to which high extent, historically and notionally, the thinking in doctrines within the field of military sciences is ingrained, both in theory and in practice. This culture of thought, which contradicts Clausewitz, already was doomed to obfuscate understanding Clausewitz in the French reception. On the other hand, France's publications of recent years seem to indicate a less restricted, more downright, thus "floating" notional understanding. Clausewitz is considered to be a firmly located benchmark in a chronically unstable world, which is not coined by Newton's fixed axioms any longer, but on the contrary, due to the regularity of uncertainty inherent to human action – according to Montesquieu - forces us to examine every action alternative. For this purpose, it must be stated that the French culture of thought as a "thinking in structures" does not only extend as far as the military, but is also reflected in in other national and socio-political fields. One significant example for this is the still advocated conception of a socio-political "planification", which tries to systemize, calculate and thus officially arrange the unlimited play of economic and social forces. Eventually, returning to, or at least developing a common point of view concerning strategic issues would not only benefit the French-German relations, but entire Europe as well, together with avoiding the current "semantic inflation" of conflict configurations in the sense of Clausewitz's claim for clear concepts.

