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CLAUSEWITZ'S *ON WAR*: REFLECTIONS
ON THE BALKAN WARS (1991-1995)

Colin M. Fleming

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
MAX WEBER PROGRAMME

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Abstract

In the opening chapter of Carl Von Clausewitz's *On War* (1831), he explains to readers that 'only one more element is needed to make war a gamble – chance...No other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance.' He continues: 'And through the element chance, guesswork and luck come to play a great part in war'. Yet, how should the reader of *On War* interpret Clausewitz's inclusion of chance into his general theory? Why is war so 'universally' bound to the pervasive tendencies of chance? In fact, what does Clausewitz actually mean by 'chance'? Why is it important at all? To answer these questions, this paper explores Clausewitz's comprehension of chance within his wider ideas regarding the nature of war. Locating the manifestation of chance as a natural part of war fueled by its own reciprocity the article grounds Clausewitz's idea to the experience of real conflict – the wars of former Yugoslavia 1991-1995.

Keywords

Clausewitz, on war, 'chance', and the problem with probabilities – Lessons from the Balkan wars (1991-1995).

Introduction

In the opening chapter of *On War* (1831), Carl Von Clausewitz explains to readers that ‘only one more element is needed to make war a gamble – chance...No other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance.’ He continues: ‘And through the element chance, guesswork and luck come to play a great part in war’.¹ Yet, how should the reader of *On War* interpret Clausewitz’s inclusion of chance into his general theory? Why is war so ‘universally’ bound to the pervasive tendencies of chance? In fact, what does Clausewitz actually mean by ‘chance’? Why is it important at all? To answer these questions, this article explores Clausewitz’s comprehension of chance within his wider ideas regarding the nature of war. Locating the manifestation of chance as a natural part of war fueled by its own reciprocity, the article grounds Clausewitz’s idea to the experience of real conflict – the wars of former Yugoslavia 1991-1995. It is not the purpose of the paper to recreate a chronological history of the wars in question; these wars have generated a huge volume of literature that deals specifically with that task. Moreover, such an article sits outside of the parameters of the question at hand. Rather, focusing on Clausewitz’s idea of interplay, reciprocity, and uncertainty the paper explores how the Clausewitzian identification of chance as part of war’s natural interaction can provide an alternative frame of reference to the conduct and complexity of this case. Acting as foundation to our understanding of war in the contemporary era, it highlights the underlying sense of complexity that makes war so difficult and deadly.

Although recent years have seen a rediscovery and interest in Clausewitz, the discourse regarding the place of chance in Clausewitzian thought takes place as part of a wider debate on his idea of ‘friction’. More recently it has been debated as one part in his ‘Wondrous Trinity’, comprising the interplay of hostility, chance and reason/policy.² Rephrasing the influence of chance in this way is extremely beneficial. Identifying chance as a major component in his theory of war provides a clear signal as to the importance attached to this element. This is important. Clausewitz’s major treatise *On War* has been repeatedly represented as an expression of the author’s belief that war follows a rational means-end calculus that dismisses complexity, emphasizing political instrumentality instead. This is premised on a deeply flawed misinterpretation of his work. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, Clausewitzian theory may articulate the idea that war is an instrument of policy, but more than any other theorist Clausewitz was cognizant that it was influenced by irrational and neutral factors. His tome was an attempt to explore war in its entirety, highlighting complexity rather than simplicity.

The renewed interest in Clausewitz has gone a long way to address this problem, and recent scholarship particularly regarding his ‘Wondrous Trinity’ of hostility, chance and policy (rationality) offers a strong riposte to those who attack the validity of Clausewitzian ideas in the twenty-first century.³ It is especially pertinent regarding the suggestion that US innovation in the shape of military technology, the driving force behind the still advancing American Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), is leading to a purely rationalized version of war where technological mastery overcomes the previously pervasive tendencies of chance and uncertainty.⁴ The RMA remains a useful concept, and technological innovation has the capacity to alter the way in which war is fought; a fact underpinned

¹ Clausewitz, Carl von (1882) *On War*, translation by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Everyman's Library Edition, 1993), 96

² Christopher Bassford, & Edward J. Villacres, ‘Reclaiming The Clausewitzian Trinity’, *Parameters* (Autumn, 1995), 9-20; Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ See in particular: Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), esp. 31-60.

⁴ For important works specifically linked to Clausewitz, see: Williamson Murray, ‘Clausewitz Out, Computers In: Military Culture and Technological Hubris’, *The National Interest*, (Summer, 1997). See also: Steven Metz, ‘A Wake for Clausewitz: Toward a Philosophy of 21st Century Warfare’ *Parameters*, (Winter, 1994-1995), 126-32. For an excellent discussion of the utility of Clausewitzian thought in the information age see: David Lonsdale, ‘Clausewitz and the Information Age’, in Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (ed.), *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 231-250.

by the present robotics revolution that many believe is transforming warfare.⁵ Yet, as Williamson Murray and MacGregor Knox have warned, the RMA must be understood as something shaped by politics and doctrine, as well as technology.⁶ The RMA forms part of a larger political and strategic context that is influenced by politics and culture, and the often visceral emotions and complexity that the reciprocity of war produces. It may be true that much of recent Clausewitzian scholarship overemphasises the irrational and complex aspects of Clausewitz's theory, unduly delimiting the core political, functional message explicit throughout *On War*.⁷ Nevertheless, re-discovery of the Clausewitzian Trinity, in particular, has helped refocus attention on the forces that drive war at the micro-level, helping scholars and policy-makers distinguish between war's character (the way war is fought) and its timeless nature, as 'a continuation of policy.'

The purpose of this article is not to cast doubt on the centrality and importance of chance within wider Clausewitzian concepts such as his 'Trinity', or 'friction'. Chance is wedded to the interactive and dynamic nature that all war inheres, and a central component in both elements in Clausewitzian theory. Rather, by drawing out the saliency and significance of chance by juxtaposing Clausewitz's understanding against real war, the paper underpins the centrality of these very concepts. However, by applying Clausewitz's understanding of 'chance' as part of war's interactive nature the paper also provides a more solid foundation from which to understand the role 'chance' in its own right, highlighting its importance as part of Clausewitzian thought, and emphasizing its critical significance as a basis for knowledge of contemporary war and strategic thought. Applying Clausewitz's understanding of chance as a consequence of reciprocity to the wars of former Yugoslavia, the essay explores the influence and impact that chance has on belligerents, their aims and their outcomes. The paper by-passes the ongoing RMA debate, and instead explores the foundations of chance and uncertainty that exist and pervade war beneath the technological wizardry and sophistication of the RMA. Consequently the paper also fills a major gap in the literature regarding Clausewitz's identification of chance, which, with legitimate reasons is often subsumed within a wider exploration of his theoretical claims, something that blurs its centrality in Clausewitz's theory.⁸ In short, the paper highlights 'interaction' as the foundation of Clausewitz's understanding of chance and uncertainty. By tying the exploration of chance to one particular conflict we can better understand the often confused causal chain that the reciprocity of war entails; a reciprocity that undermines the linear rationalization that the RMA seeks to present. Designed to highlight the importance and often misunderstood aspect of Clausewitzian thought, the paper underlines Clausewitz's conclusion that chance is part of the fabric of war, a result of the interaction of belligerents. Clausewitz's inclusion of chance in his theory of war reflects his intention to understand war as a 'whole' and was designed to remind practicing soldiers that war is governed by its own logic. The first lesson for the strategist

⁵ See: P. W. Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (Penguin, 2009) ; David Axe & Steve Olexa, *War Bots: How US Military Robots Are Transforming War in Iraq, Afghanistan, And the Future* (Nimble Books, 2008); Antoine Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity* (London: Hurst & Co, 2009). For more on this debate and its implications for doctrine, and with reference to Iraq and Afghanistan, see; Max Boot, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, And The Course of History 1500 to Today* (Gotham Books, 2006). For counter argument, see: Stephen Biddle, 'Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare: The Afghan Model in Afghanistan and Iraq', *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (winter 2005/06), 161-176.

⁶ MacGregor Knox & Williamson Murray, 'Thinking about revolutions in warfare', in MacGregor Knox & Williamson Murray (ed), *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 180-181

⁷ Colin M. Fleming, 'Testing the Clausewitzian Trinity: A Theory of War for The Modern World? Unpublished PhD. Royal Holloway University of London. 2009.

⁸ This is especially the case in reference to Clausewitz's famous conceptualisation of 'friction'. See in particular; Stephen J. Cimbala, *Clausewitz and Chaos: Friction in War and Military Policy* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001), (and) See also, Christopher Bassford, 'Tip-Toe Through the Trinity, or The strange persistence of trinitarian warfare. www.Clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/TRINITY/TRINITY8.htm, (2007), in which the author fails to identify chance as part of interaction. One important work which does locate the interactive feature is Katherine Herbig. See: Katherine L. Herbig, 'Chance and Uncertainty in *On War*', in Michael Handel (ed.), *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*, (London: Frank Cass, 1986), 95-116. However, this is limited, and is unable to fully explore this factor fully.

should be that war is complex and unpredictable. Grounding these ideas to experience, this article underpins that claim and acts as a counter-argument to the idea that war follows a purely linear means-end calculus devoid of risk.

The paper proceeds as follows. In order to explore the manifold effects of chance, in the subsequent section I first examine Clausewitz's inclusion of 'chance', locating it in his wider theory in *On War*. The second section then provides essential information on the wars in question, particularly regarding the role of the international community and their influence on the conflict. Although the conflict on the ground is equally bound by chance and uncertainty, the article provides a frame of reference at the international level. By not restricting the analysis to the combatants themselves, the article is able to convey how complex inter-relationships reaching beyond the battlefield had a major impact on the war. The international dimension of the Balkan conflicts also offers a rich exposition of the reciprocal interdependent features which give life to chance, and which prevented early settlement of this conflict. After providing a framework from which to base the evaluation, sections three and four investigate the ways in which the unfolding and non-linear nature of the war provided opportunities and disadvantages to the belligerents, with chance and uncertainty weaving their 'way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry.'⁹ Section three focuses on the Serb position, tracing the twists and turns of chance and its relationship to Serbian policy and strategy. Using the Serbian experience as the cornerstone of this part of the paper, the fourth section highlights the effects of reciprocity and chance on Croat and Bosniak aims and outcomes. By highlighting the many inter-relationships and the effects of these relationships the paper highlights complexity in war and therefore supports the Clausewitzian position by grounding his ideas to experience.

Clausewitz On Chance and Uncertainty

Clausewitz's introduction of chance as an integral component of war's nature is a direct refutation of what he believes are perfunctory and misleading elements found in the theoretical works of his own generation. He firmly rejected earlier theories on war, most notably the works of his contemporaries, Antoine Henri de Jomini and Dietrich von Bülow, both of whom he derided because they sought exact and immutable rules able to prescribe the blueprint for military success.¹⁰ Clausewitz shunned the proscriptive markers he has since come to represent. Criticizing his contemporaries, Clausewitz reflects:

Perhaps it would not be impossible to write a systematic theory of war, full of intelligence and substance; but the theories we presently possess are very different. Quite apart from their unscientific spirit, they try so hard to make their systems coherent and complete that they are stuffed with commonplaces, truisms, and nonsense of every kind.¹¹

Bülow and Jomini both sought to uncover the secret laws of war, the key to strategic success that all future strategists would follow. Although Jomini concedes the existence of chance, he dismisses its importance – the key to strategic success would be revealed by the identification of set laws of action.¹² They were in good company. Reflecting on this notion, Ian Hacking reflects on the Enlightenment thinkers' belief; the world 'might look haphazard, but only because we do not know the inevitable workings of its inner springs.'¹³ Indeed, according to the Scottish Enlightenment's, David Hume, 'chance is nothing but a secret and conceal'd cause.'¹⁴ Clausewitz's contemporaries sought to

⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 97.

¹⁰ Jomini, Antoine Henri de, (1862) *The Art of War*, edited with an introduction by Charles Messenger (London: Greenhill Books, 1992). For an discussion of the limitations of Bulow's work in the context of a changing military environment, see: R. R. Palmer, 'Frederick the Great, Guibert, and Bulow: From Dynastic to National War', in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986), 91-119.

¹¹ Clausewitz, 'Note Between 1816-1818', *On War*, 70.

¹² See: John Shy, 'Jomini', in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 145-185.

¹³ Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1

¹⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London, 1739), L. A. Selby-Bigge (ed.) (Oxford, 1888), 130, cited in Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*, 13.

reveal these veiled principles. Their focus on probabilities rested on a lack of knowledge which could be replaced by hard facts as and when these became available.¹⁵ Clausewitz is critical of these writers because they sought fixed rules where none existed. He explains, 'In short, absolute, so-called mathematical, factors never find a firm basis in military calculations'.¹⁶ He reminds readers, 'Military activity is never directed against material force alone; it is always aimed simultaneously at the moral factors which give it life, and the two cannot be separated'.¹⁷ Just as today's proponents of the RMA seek technological fixes to overcome complexity, so did Clausewitz's rivals believe war could be truly controlled by uncovering underlying scientific rules. These would then provide the strategic blueprint for military victory. Such views, like those of the current infatuation with technology fail to realize that complexity is bound to war's nature, a fundamental and irremovable element of the natural interaction that it entails.

As in other aspects of his thinking, Clausewitz was not the first to explicate the importance of stochastic principles.¹⁸ A product of the Enlightenment, he was also influenced by the ideas of the Counter-Enlightenment; particularly the ideas of German Romanticism.¹⁹ Although he never fully embraced this movement, he was influenced by its ideas regarding the place and influence of psychological factors; a response to the increasingly statistical theorising which dominated military and scholastic writing.²⁰ In many ways, by including chance as an integral element of war Clausewitz was stating the obvious, even commonplace. Chance is everywhere. Yet, this point had been regularly overlooked by earlier thinkers. In the Clausewitzian sense, armies are not automatons, and war is not linear. Like the rest of life, strategy and war are prone to the pervasive tricks of chance. Clausewitz was introducing the real world, a reminder that war doesn't take place in a separate realm subject to alternative laws. War is a product of the social, not physical world.

In itself this inclusion is important; it reminds strategists of the peculiarities of real life. However, Clausewitz goes further. He states: 'No other human activity [war] is so continuously or universally bound up with chance'.²¹ Why is this? The answer, as always, lies in war's interactive form. Clausewitz exclaims, 'war is not waged against an abstract enemy, but against a real one who must always be kept in mind'.²² It is a normal and indelible component of the nature of war, and it pervades every element of conflict.²³

However, the real significance of Clausewitz's identification of this tendency lies in war's interactive and constantly evolving form. This cause-and-effect relationship that results is very different to that commonly associated with Clausewitzian thought today, which is misinterpreted as an exemplar of Clausewitz's rationalist model; the consequence of his argument that war must be understood as a continuation of policy. Basing his theory of war on interaction, Clausewitz does not prescribe an easy means-ends rational calculus; something that can provide strategic success. As Clausewitz was aware, causes may result in effects, but these will probably be other than expected. In war, any action and counter-reaction moves the original strategy away from its intended goal. In other words, we should understand war as a constantly moving, evolving phenomenon, different in every case, yet universal in its core elements. Unless the strategist has a clear grasp of this fact, and is able to undertake the constant re-correlations between ends and means, disaster will be a constant

¹⁵ Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 71-72

¹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 97.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁸ Clausewitz used the work of earlier writers as a foundation for his own work, Machiavelli and Thucydides in particular. Machiavelli discusses the subject in *The Prince*, vol. 1, 89-92.

¹⁹ Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State. The Man, His Theories, and His Times*, 2007 edition (Princeton University Press, 2007), 149.

²⁰ Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 189.

²¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 96.

²² *Ibid.*, 187.

²³ Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 41.

companion. This is the message evident throughout *On War*; it is conveyed as a general theory in the Trinity. Clausewitz's work highlights complexity rather than simplification. It is a theme running through the entirety of his opus, rooted in his appreciation that war is a multi-lateral, reciprocal and vitalistic activity.

Beginning in the very first paragraph of *On War* Clausewitz emphasises the importance of considering the 'whole'. From this starting point he introduces reciprocity: 'War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale...but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imaging a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other side to do his will.'²⁴ War on paper may appear easy, but war in the real world, with the impact of chance, friction and not least passion and hostility, is decidedly more fickle. As he explains:

The essential difference is that war is not an exercise of the will directed at inanimate matter, as is the case with the mechanical arts, or at matter which is animate but passive and yielding, as is the case with the human mind and emotion in the fine arts. In war, the will is directed at an animate object that reacts.²⁵

When the multi-layered forces in war are conflated by reciprocity, the result is uncertainty; war is a fluid, unstable, and non-linear activity. Furthermore, comprehension of that complexity and instability must be the starting point if strategy is to use war instrumentally, as a continuation of policy. This is not an easy task. As Clausewitz remarked, 'Bonaparte was quite right when he said that Newton himself would quail before the algebraic problems it could pose.'²⁶

It is in this interaction that chance reigns. The result of myriad 'intersecting lines' which are constantly being re-framed by the interplay between belligerents.²⁷ He warns:

From the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry. In the whole range of human activities, war most resembles a game of cards.²⁸

War 'consists of a continuous interaction of opposites'. The result is uncertainty and chance.²⁹ The more intersecting lines the more uncertainty. From the moment war commences, a dynamic relationship begins which is constantly developing its inimitable form, constantly in motion, changing as the motivations and passions of the belligerents fluctuate, and conflating and expanding further as the interaction converges with the other forces in a reciprocal interplay with hostility and policy. As Alan Beyerchen argues:

In a profoundly unconfused way, he (Clausewitz) understands that seeking exact analytical solutions does not fit the non-linear reality of the problems posed, and hence that our ability to predict the course and outcome of any given conflict is severely limited.³⁰

Comprehension of such complexity in turn focuses attention towards finding a suitable strategy, albeit one which needs constant reflection and adaptation. Chance interferes with every aspect of war, from resistance encountered in the military machine; it is a component exemplified by Clausewitz famous conception of 'friction', and central to his Trinitarian theory of war. Clausewitz observes, 'Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by

²⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 83.

²⁵ Ibid, 173-174.

²⁶ Ibid, 708.

²⁷ Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*, 12.

²⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 97.

²⁹ Ibid., 136.

³⁰ Alan D. Beyerchen, 'Clausewitz, 'Nonlinearity and the Unpredictability of War'', *International Security*, Vol 17, No. 3 (1992), 61

producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war.³¹ Under such conditions, one can never entirely be sure what our opponent is planning.³² Uncertainty pervades the decision-making process as a result.³³ War, Clausewitz explains, 'is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty'.³⁴ Reiterating the point once more, he states:

War is the realm of chance. No other human activity gives it greater scope: no other has such incessant and varied dealings with this intruder. Chance makes everything more uncertain and interferes with the whole course of events.³⁵

It was this uncertainty which brought Clausewitz to conclude that military decisions should not be premised solely on intelligence. He notes, 'Many intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain'.³⁶ Clausewitz explains further:

Since all information and assumptions are open to doubt, and with chance at work everywhere, the commander continually finds that things are not as he expected... We now know more, but this makes us more, not less uncertain... They constantly impinge on our decisions, and our mind must be permanently armed, so to speak, to deal with them.³⁷

In Clausewitz's Trinity this intuitive side of war's nature is dialectically opposed to the rationality which underpins policy. However, through the interaction of purpose and hostility, chance mingles and converges, percolating into every pore of war's nature. As this phenomenon is actually formed through the reciprocal interplay of opposites which Clausewitz describes, it creates and then exacerbates the problems of complexity and unpredictability which all wars, in all periods, exhibit. It was this complexity that Clausewitz believed could be conquered only by the 'genius' of the great commander, the person able to overcome complexity 'that the mind would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection'.³⁸ He dedicated an entire chapter, 'On Military Genius', to this very issue. Just as uncertainty could be ruinous, so could the 'genius' turn uncertainty into opportunities to be exploited, a trait that Clausewitz attributed most to Napoleon himself – the 'god of war'.³⁹

Chance, and the nature of the Yugoslav wars - 1991-1995

Yet, how did chance and uncertainty affect the opposing actors in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina? In order to answer this question this section provides context, underpinning the following discussion by highlighting the multitude of 'intersecting lines' that fed the wars of former

³¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 138.

³² Despite this, Clausewitz dedicates part of book eight to this topic. Although he gives detailed principles on planning, these should be thought of as guidelines rather than fixed maxims. For an interesting contradistinction on the topic of planning in *On War*, see: Terrence M. Holmes, 'Planning versus Chaos in Clausewitz's *On War*' *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (February 2007), 129 -151

³³ See: Stephen J. Cimbala, *Clausewitz and Chaos: Friction in War and Military Policy*

³⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 117.

³⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 117. See also: Katherine L. Herbig, 'Chance and Uncertainty in *On War*', in Michael Handel (ed.), *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*, 95-116.

³⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 136.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 117.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁹ *Ibid*, Book 1, Chapter 3. See: Holmes, 'Planning versus Chaos in Clausewitz's *On War*', 129-151. Holmes argues that to much of recent Clausewitzian scholarship projects the view that Clausewitz deemed war a totally non-linear phenomenon. Holmes makes the very convincing argument that while Clausewitz highlighted complexity, he also provided 'genius' as framework for overcoming this element of war's complexity.

Yugoslavia. As such it illuminates the process of interaction that produces chance and complicates strategy.

The political fragmentation of Yugoslavia and subsequent wars of secession in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (1991-1995) resulted from complex interrelated causes.⁴⁰ Beginning in June 1991 with the Yugoslav National Army's (JNA) invasion of Slovenia, the conflict quickly widened. Low level violence in Croatia throughout the summer escalated into full-scale hostilities in the autumn. As that conflict was brought to an end by the Vance Plan, signed in Sarajevo in January 1992, the war moved over the border into Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Bosnia alone, an estimated 100,000 people were killed and many more times that number were forced to leave their homes as the conflict tore apart the existing social fabric of the Federal Republic.⁴¹

In a world stripped of Cold War anxieties it was a 'crisis' that the UN could conceivably manage without the overt threat of escalation into nuclear war. Yet, although involved from the initial phases of the war in Slovenia, the external powers were beset by their own interests and never fully understood the motivations of the belligerents; for outside observers the war seemed to be about ethnic hatreds rather than political interest. This resulted in a catalogue of errors made by the international community, which only averted complete failure after renewed US interest in the Clinton era – which was predicated by the reciprocity of international politics and the realist foundations that drive it, rather than overt humanitarianism. All these factors played into the war, producing a strategic environment where it was profitable to gain maximum concessions from one's opponent. In Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular, the three way split between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, and their occasional willingness to realign their allegiances, was seen as evidence of duplicity.

Understanding the participation of the international community is central to our comprehension of the nature of the wars in former Yugoslavia. In a very real way the involvement of external states and international organisations became a tangible part of the fabric of the conflict and their actions and disagreements fed into the calculus of the combatants. As Warren Switzer has pointed out:

When the combatants perceived a continued reluctance [by the international community] to become involved, they began matching each other, if not in scale, certainly in increasingly barbaric forms and techniques. This was partly because of a perception that the external powers would not forcefully intervene. Or, if intervention did come, the map dividing the territory would probably reflect the battle lines at the conflict's end. Thus the deliberate practice of 'ethnic cleansing' was accelerated to realize revanchist aspirations, to terrorise and burden opponents (real and potential), and to break the will of those who saw their salvation in terms of external intervention.⁴²

The international response to these wars took on different forms and went through several stages throughout the duration of the conflict. Beginning with rhetorical statements about the sanctity of the Yugoslav state, international opinion became divided as independence for Slovenia and Croatia became a real prospect. In terms of tangible action by the international community, the conflict

⁴⁰ Particularly those related to the 1974 Constitution, which re-aligned the Yugoslav state. .See: Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Washington D.C: The Brookings Institute, 1995), 21-46.

⁴¹ Figures for the number of dead are disputed, however, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia estimates that 102,622 died. This roughly mirrors the Sarajevo Research and Documentation Centre (SDC) estimation of 97,207, half the original estimate. Details can be accessed at: <http://www.idc.org.ba/presentation/index.htm>. Interestingly, although the new war idea is constructed around a key claim that war has become de-institutionalized and where the targets of choice are civilian, the break-down of casualties provided by the SDC confirms that the number of civilians who lost their lives was, although high, still significantly lower than that of the number of soldiers to lose their lives. The number of civilian dead during the period 1991-1995 was 39,685 (21, 814 of whom died in 1991). Casualties for soldiers over the same period were 57,523 (23,297 of whom died in 1991).

See: <http://www.idc.org.ba/presentation/index.htm>, research results for 'civilians' and 'soldiers'.

⁴² Warren Switzer, 'International Military Responses to the Balkan Wars: crisis and analysis', in Magaš & Žanić (ed.), *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina*, in Branka Magaš & Ivo Žanić (ed.), *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1991-1995* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 228.

exhibited not just the brutality of war, but also how problematic it was to attain international consensus. Beginning with the initial moratorium on independence negotiated by the European Community's (EC's) Trojka, external intervention helped facilitate a solution to the war in Slovenia in 1991. However, although the causes of the conflict in Slovenia were rooted in the same process of fragmentation and dissolution, the strategic picture in Slovenia was very different to that in the rest of Yugoslavia. Throughout UN peacekeeping missions in Croatia, and later in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), the international community struggled to find a solution to the conflict until firmer US involvement resulted in the Dayton Agreement in 1995.⁴³ Alongside the various UN operations in Croatia and BiH during the period, several high level diplomatic missions tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a viable peace settlement. Following on the heels of EC success of in Slovenia, the UN was invited by the combatants to bring about a ceasefire to the war in Croatia, which it successfully achieved when the Sarajevo ceasefire was signed in January 1992. However, the Vance Plan which brought a cessation to the hostilities negated ongoing diplomatic discussions which aimed to avert a wider conflagration in the region, as well as bringing the war in Croatia to a suitable conclusion.⁴⁴ The international community consistently failed to understand that the combatants did not necessarily view international diplomacy in the same way as did the international powers. As Switzer again points out, 'To them (the combatants), negotiations were part of the arena of struggle, not a path to peace'.⁴⁵ The inability of the international community to form policy consensus actually exacerbated the conflict by multiplying 'uncertainty'.

As noted above, the international Community met with collective failure in its attempts to bring about peace agreements until 1995. The Vance Plan which brokered the UN sponsored ceasefire and deployment of UN peacekeepers into the Croatian Krajina only came about after the failure of Lord Carrington's earlier peace initiative in the autumn and winter of 1991. Thus, several high ranking missions, among them Lord Carrington's Peace Plan, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP) in spring 1993, the Owen-Stoltenberg Agreement of September 1993, and the Contact Group plan of July 1994, all met with failure. The reasons for these failures are complex and are interlinked to the conflict and the wider political environment of the international system at the beginning of the post-Cold War period. However, we can directly relate the failure of the international community, broadly defined, to their inability to reach consensus. The lack of international success in bringing about a negotiated settlement was a pattern formed at the very beginning of the conflict.⁴⁶

It is also important that the international response be measured against the wider changes to the international community brought about by the end of the Cold War. Although it proved premature, Jacques Poos's vatic proclamation that 'This is the hour of Europe' had signalled the EC's willingness to tackle serious security issues in the post-Cold War security environment.⁴⁷ This was also the view held by the US, which was preoccupied with the fall-out from the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, and the job of realigning NATO for the post-Cold War world. This set the international scene for much of the conflict. US policy vis-à-vis former Yugoslavia was to allow the EC and the UN to bring about an end to the conflict. Despite initial European eagerness to exert greater influence in their own 'backyard', the Yugoslav crisis was too big a test too soon and the absence of US influence undermined European attempts to end the hostilities.

The European Community, and the Member States which comprised it, were unable and unwilling to force a solution. For many, international involvement was presaged on the need to contain

⁴³ Ivo H. Dalder, *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America's Bosnian Policy* (Brookings Institute: Washington D. C., 1999). For information on the settlement at Dayton and its effects, see: Sumantra Bose, *Bosnia after Dayton, Nationalist Partition and International Intervention* (London: Hurst and Company, 2002); and: David Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

⁴⁴ For a full examination, see: Richard Caplan, *Europe and the Recognition of New States in Yugoslavia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

⁴⁵ Warren Switzer, 'International Military Responses to the Balkan Wars: crisis and analysis', 228.

⁴⁶ A good account of diplomatic efforts can be found in Laura Silber & Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 190-204.

⁴⁷ John Zametica, 'The Yugoslav Conflict', *Adelphi Paper*, 270 (Summer, 1992), 59.

a crisis, rather than satisfactorily resolve one.⁴⁸ In fact, a clear flaw in each of the seemingly perennial rounds of negotiations was the focus on bringing about an end to the conflict because international prestige was at stake. At the height of the siege of Vukovar for instance, Douglas Hogg, then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, exclaimed to the UK parliament that there has been 'repeated ceasefire violations', and this demonstrated the hopelessness of the situation. In 1994, the then Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd argued that, 'the only people who can stop the fighting are the people doing the fighting. You have at the moment, alas, three parties in Bosnia, who each of them believe that some military success awaits them'.⁴⁹ Hurd's observation was undoubtedly correct, yet he failed to realise that the inaction, or at least semi-involvement of the external powers, was fuelling the most brutal aspects of the war.

The international community was wracked by domestic and international issues which impinged on their collective engagement in the Balkans. In this way, 'uncertainty', 'chance' and 'friction' which resulted from changes in the international balance of power at the end of the Cold War, the non-linear and fluid nature of the international system, filtered into and conflated the nature of the wars in Croatia, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The combatants were constantly reacting to and shaping the international response. Although this produced opportunities for each of the groups to win important concessions from the external powers, it also produced an acute and unremitting sense of uncertainty. The complexity at the heart of this interactive cause-effect nexus had a direct bearing on the war which is impossible to factor accurately into a rational calculus model. Yet it was just such complexity that brought Clausewitz to opine that the direction and even success of a war may be down to 'chances and incidents', the result of intersecting lines, that are out-with the control of the combatants themselves.

Chance, non-linearity, and the 'ripple' effect

The above discussion is designed to illustrate how widespread uncertainty results in war being pervaded by chance. As Clausewitz observed, 'issues can be decided by chances and incidents so minute as to figure in histories simply as anecdotes'.⁵⁰ The present section highlights the Serb position, tracing the twists and turns of chance and its relationship to Serbian policy and strategy. Using the Serbian experience as the cornerstone of this part of the paper, the following section then highlights the effects of reciprocity and chance on Croat and Bosniak aims and outcomes. We can sense that uncertainty by assessing the participation and interaction of the international community and their own involvement with the combatants. The continual interaction of all of the actors provided opportunities, if only the combatants could make the right decision. However, as Clausewitz suggests it must, 'with chance working everywhere, the commander continually finds that things are not as he expected'.⁵¹ For Clausewitz only a 'genius' had the ability to comprehend the array of advantages and disadvantages, and make the correct decision. This is clearly not an easy thing to do; yet, whether one describes this as 'genius', or simply as yet another example of chance, it is useful to explore some of the key decisions made by the combatants as the war unfolded.

Throughout much of the conflict in Croatia and Bosnia, it was the Serbs rather than their adversaries who were best able to take advantage of the unfolding drama. They correctly inferred that the international community was unwilling to commit itself in a manner which might escalate the conflict or risk international national troop contingents. By depicting the conflict as an intractable result of ancient cultural anomie, and by invoking the memory of the partisan struggle, the Serbs tapped into international unease regarding military intervention. They enjoyed rich rewards as a result. For long periods of the conflict, the Serbs disruptive approach to the diplomatic endeavours of the external powers made sense and they were quick to seize on international disunity and work it to their own advantage.

⁴⁸ Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour, Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia* (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

⁴⁹ 'Eye of the storm' (interview), *Crossbow* (magazine of the Conservative Bow Group), February 1994, 4. Cited in Simms, *Unfinest Hour*, 26

⁵⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 720.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 117.

As the war in Croatia escalated and looked likely to engulf Bosnia-Herzegovina, we see a direct example of the paralysing lack of international unity over the unfolding crisis, the Carrington Plan was usurped by two alternative international initiatives. The first of these, the Vance Plan, fell under the auspices of the UN – it was the Vance Plan which brought a cessation of hostilities in Croatia in January 1992. The other was a German initiative, and exemplified a renewed German foreign policy contribution to international diplomacy. Following fast on the heels of the stuttering Carrington Plan, Cyrus Vance's role as the UN's chief negotiator was anticipated to compliment Lord Carrington's ongoing negotiations. In fact the two plans differed considerably. The most important distinction was that the Vance Plan had the option of contributing UN peacekeepers as a way of bringing a cessation to the conflict in Croatia. By offering guarantees for minority rights in the republics and thus maintaining a loose federal Yugoslav state, Carrington's proposal sought to end hostilities and prevent the conflict from spilling over into BiH. The German proposal, which campaigned for the early recognition of Slovenia and Croatia, would negate Carrington's initiative. For the German government the Carrington proposals would legally permit a continued JNA presence in Croatia. However, if Croatia was recognised by the international community the JNA would be considered an occupying force under international law. Recognition would thus presage the removal of JNA and Serb irregulars, ending the conflict as a result. The problem with having such an array of initiatives was that it offered the combatants different options to choose from, consequently making the chances of reaching consensus even harder – each side simply opted for their favourite choice.⁵² Determined that the German option would be accepted, German Foreign Minister, Hans Dietrich Genscher, made it a priority of the new German foreign policy.⁵³ If Germany's European partners failed to recognise Slovenia and Croatia, Germany threatened to do so alone; risking the prospect of further European integration. Preoccupied with developing a coherent European defence and security policy, the other EC states accepted Germany's ultimatum.⁵⁴ It consequently also resulted in a negation of the Carrington Plan. The problem with early recognition was that it made the prospect of war in BiH more immediate than ever.⁵⁵ This had been the view of the then UN Secretary General, who in May 1991 had underlined his personal reservations vis-à-vis recognition to the Dutch Foreign Minister; noting that: 'I am deeply worried that any early selective recognition could widen the present conflict and fuel an explosive situation, especially in Bosnia...'.⁵⁶ Commenting on the situation, Lord Carrington lamented:

It would make no sense at all...If they recognised Croatia and Slovenia then they would have to ask all the other parties whether they wanted their independence. And if they asked the Bosnians whether they wanted independence, they inevitably would have to say yes, and that this would mean a civil war (in Bosnia).⁵⁷

Of course, recognition made it more likely that the Vance Plan would be agreed, which it was through the Sarajevo Agreement signed in January 1992. However, rather than bringing finality to the war, the combination of the Vance Plan and international recognition triggered a wider conflagration which may have been preventable. The Serbs agree to the Vance Plan. However, it is evident that Milošević had already determined that the war in Croatia should be brought to a conclusion. By the winter of 1992 it was clear that Croatian resistance was stiffening. Although Serb forces had eventually captured

⁵² Ibid., 197.

⁵³ For background on the unfolding events which led to German recognition, see: Markus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War; second edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 261-274.

⁵⁴ See: Markus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War; second edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 261-274.

⁵⁵ Although the EC agreed to consider all applications submitted by 24 December 1991, to then be considered by the Badinter Commission, Germany issued a statement that it would recognise Croatia regardless of the Commission's findings. Although the US withheld its own recognition, it did not intercede to derail German or European recognition.

⁵⁶ (10 May 1991), Trifunovska, Snezana (ed.), *Yugoslavia Through Documents From Its Creation to its Dissolution* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1994), 428.

⁵⁷ Cited in Silber & Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, 199-200.

the Croat city of Vukovar in November 1991, it came at a cost and demonstrated that a quick Serb victory was unlikely. Despite superior capabilities, the JNA did not display the same will to fight. As one study has put it, the JNA 'discovered that it is not possible to make war without the consensus of the entire population.'⁵⁸

Prolonging the conflict indefinitely risked a reversal of fortunes; the JNA and Serb forces had gained as much territory as was possible. To avoid getting bogged down in an unprofitable war in Croatia, Milošević looked for ways to extract his forces. The Vance Plan offered the perfect solution. Serbia could redeploy its forces for the coming war in Bosnia without worrying about the security of Serb occupied Croatia. Integral to this agreement was the inclusion of UN troops into Croatia. Ostensibly these would police the occupied areas of the republic; however, their involvement also legitimised Serb claims to the Croatian Krajina. Because the UN policed the Serb-Croat frontline, Milošević's was able to maintain territorial gains at the same time as he redeployed the army to BiH, in preparation for war there.

Reactive rather than pro-active, the international response was plagued by a lack of consistency throughout the war. This meant that the combatants were able to gauge the weaknesses of international resolve and exploit this for their own strategic interests. The same problems were clearly evident throughout the Contact Group negotiations in 1994. Like previous rounds of talks, the Contact Group plan envisaged the return of territory to correspond to a pre-war demographic position – it proposed the separation of Bosnia into two mini-states, the Muslim-Croat Federation, which would receive fifty-one per cent of territory, and Republika Srpska, which would receive the remainder. The architects of the plan again failed to accurately gauge the resolve of the combatants to get what they wanted. Rejection of the proposal by Bosnian Serbs ended another round of negotiations. The involvement of the external powers reflected a desire for international prestige. Finding a meaningful solution came second to international positioning and the national interests of the external powers.

This failure to reach consensus also created a political vacuum which was exploited by the combatants – particularly the Bosnian Serbs and their patrons in Belgrade. Although the international community was united in its condemnation of the apparent intransigence of the combatants, it failed to agree on a coherent policy which could bring about an end to the conflict. Debates about the use of force were particularly contentious and ranged from disagreements on the use of air-power to the lifting of the arms embargo, which had effectively paralysed the Bosnian Muslim forces from repelling the Serbs.⁵⁹ The lack of cohesion is again evident when assessing the response to the Markale market bombing in Sarajevo, which was shelled by the Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) with the loss of sixty-six people on 5 February 1994.⁶⁰ The initial international outcry was met with the tacit approval by NATO that air strikes would follow against Serb positions if they failed to comply with a NATO ultimatum. The Serbs were ordered to withdraw heavy weapons to a distance of twenty kilometres from the city centre, or place weapons at specified sites under the jurisdiction of the UN. They had ten days to comply with the ultimatum. If they failed to do so, NATO would use air strikes against them for the first time in the history of the alliance. This time the opposition to NATO airstrikes came from Lord Owen, in his capacity as chief UN negotiator. Owen was concerned that Russia would react badly to the unilateral use of NATO air power. If NATO acted outside the UN mandate, it had the potential to risk East-West relations, and so Owen believed, even trigger a new Cold War. Agreement on the use of NATO met a further blow when the UK questioned the efficacy

⁵⁸ From the outbreak of war the JNA suffered from mass desertions which the army failed to stop. National polls carried out in August suggested that 80 per cent of the population wanted to maintain peace at any cost; in further polls, 54 per cent stated that they did not want to fight, and 23.3 per cent claimed that the war in Croatia was not their war. Ofelia Backović, Milos Vasić, and Aleksander Vasović, 'Who Wants to be a Soldier? The call-up crisis – an analytical overview of media reports, in Magas & Zanic, *The War In Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 329.

⁵⁹ The embargo divided international opinion and left the Serbs with a material advantage throughout the conflict.

⁶⁰ The Serbs accused the Bosnian Muslim government of shelling its own people in an attempt to trigger international condemnation of the VRS. The subsequent UN investigations pointed the finger at the Serbs and the loss of life was attributed to the VRS.

of air strikes. UK objections were overruled at a meeting of the North Atlantic Council on February 7 and NATO proceeded to make its ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs.

Concurrently, however, British Lt. General, Michael Rose, working as commander of UN forces in BiH, was attempting equally hard to prevent NATO airstrikes, should they derail the UN sponsored peace process being negotiated by Owen and Stoltenburg. Rose's alternative to NATO was the UN's 'Four-Point Plan, which suggested: (i) an immediate ceasefire, (ii) the withdrawal of heavy weapons to at least twenty kilometres from Sarajevo, or their surrender to UN control, (iii) the interposing of UN troops between the two front lines, and (iv) the establishment of a joint committee to agree the details of the Plan's implementation. Meeting considerable resistance from the Bosnian Serb and Muslim governments, the Serbs only agreed to the proposal when the international fallout over the NATO ultimatum resulted in renewed Russian participation in the mediation process. The result of which was the dispatch of four hundred Russian peacekeepers to uphold Rose's 'Four-Point Plan'. The NATO ultimatum was intended as a show of international commitment and strength, forcing the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table. In effect, the agreement reached by Rose not only complied with NATO's ultimatum, it officially partitioned Sarajevo into Serb and Muslim areas; which would be policed by the UN. The Serbs agreed to the provisions of Rose's plan, prevented a NATO attack and brought the Russians back into the fray – on their side. They also acquired the de facto partition of Sarajevo, a long-term war aim. As Laura Silber and Allan Little put it,

Thus did Radovan Karadžić play a bad hand very well. He had been seen, by the international community, to compromise on weapons withdraw. His guns had fallen silent; the killing in Sarajevo stopped. The partition he so badly wanted was beginning to take real shape, and he did not even have to supply troops to defend the urban frontier of his state – the UN was doing it for him. The Bosnian government felt out manoeuvred and humiliated. Karadžić incredible though it seemed, had emerged as the principle beneficiary of the NATO ultimatum to use force against him.⁶¹

This is a wonderful example of the unexpected consequences of actions having the wrong effect, and reflects Clausewitz's identification of the pitfalls and opportunities of reciprocity. Using another example, when NATO applied force to stave off the Serb attack on Goradže in March and April 1994), US General Shalikashvili made a public declaration that NATO would not issue a 'Sarajevo' ultimatum. Yet, with immediate freedom from air strikes, Mladić simply escalated his offensive against Tuzla. Although these examples are by no means exhaustive, they are indicative of the way in which at different times the JNA and then VRS were able to out-manoeuvre the entire international community. Reflecting on the Vance Plan which brought about the end of the war in Croatia, Borisav Jović later revealed that, 'at that point the war in Croatia was under control...Slobodan and I after many conversations decided now was the time to get the UN troops into Croatia to protect the Serbs there'. He continued, 'when Croatia would be recognised, which we realised would happen, the JNA would be regarded as a foreign army invading another country. So we had better get the UN troops in early to protect the Serbs'.⁶² The Serbs simply used the UN to police the 'Serbian Krajina', leaving themselves clear to concentrate on the unfolding crisis in Bosnia. The Serbs took advantage, annexing two thirds of Bosnian territory in the first year of the war.

Chance Rebounds – the problem with probabilities

Perhaps owing to their preponderance of heavy weaponry, and certainly buoyed by their early successes, the Bosnian Serbs failed to discern the subtle signs that the political and military tide was turning against them throughout 1994-95. Chance is apt to rebound; the run of events produced by uncertainty may bring great rewards, but these will even out over time.⁶³ This is not always easy to identify when war is ongoing and, as Clausewitz tells us, the 'commander' may often believe that 'he

⁶¹ Silber & Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, 318.

⁶² Cited in *Ibid*, 197.

⁶³ Katherine L. Herbig, 'Chance and Uncertainty in *On War*', 110.

will be able to reverse his fortunes just once more'.⁶⁴ The problem with such a view is axiomatic, being seduced by the prospect of overturning lost gains, the commander or leadership will often try to ride out the storm in a futile attempt to wait for some mercurial change in fortune. Of course, the difficulties confronting the political and military leadership are capacious.⁶⁵ This is precisely why Clausewitz believed intuition and genius so important. He dismisses anything which attaches immutable rules. It is the unfathomable and chaotic exemplars of chance and complexity that make war more like a 'gamble'; like a game of cards rather than a game of chess. Although Clausewitz expects the commander or leadership to act on probabilities, able to demonstrate individual skill and dexterity, by their nature probabilities are less than certain. It is therefore extremely difficult to gauge when the correct decision is being taken.

Although international inaction emboldened the Serbs in many instances throughout the war, the levels of violence perpetrated by them gradually fostered consensus between the external powers, and by the end of 1994 it was widely accepted that they were the principal aggressors. The Serbs had used brutal tactics from the outset, in the Krajina, Slavonia, and in the Bosnian towns of Bilejina and Zvornik they practiced indiscriminate violence as a means of ethnically clearing territory. After the seizure of the Srebrenica enclave in July 1995, world opinion eventually hardened. Although the ubiquity of uncertainty which engulfed the conflict had provided the Serbs with a strategic context in which to maximise their qualitative military advantage, ultimately they failed to recognise that 'chance' has a tendency to work in the opposite direction. Although the Croats and Bosnian Muslims tried to draw the international powers into the conflict in order to ameliorate an often shaky strategic position, there appears to have been an acceptance that the participation of the external powers was incongruous; favouring containment rather than overt military intervention against any one side.⁶⁶

Despite this, the non-compliant and refractory behaviour exhibited by the Serbs in much of their dealings with diplomatic and military missions was suggestive of a more sinister anomie, perhaps inspired by cultural and ethnic hatred. This intransigence consistently pitted them against international opinion as well as their immediate opponents, even causing a split within the wider Serbian project.⁶⁷ Anxious that sanctions against Serbia were beginning to bite and therefore risking not only the dream of a Greater Serbia, but also of his own position as Serbian President, Milošević put enormous pressure on the Bosnian Serb leadership to negotiate the termination of the war throughout 1994 and 1995, even placing sanctions on the Bosnian Serb statelet.⁶⁸ Buoyed by a series of easy victories in the early years of the conflict, the Bosnian Serbs were in no mood to surrender their prize.

In fact, if one was to place themselves in the shoes of the Serb leadership in BiH, there would be little incentive to comply with international efforts to end the conflict on a model which would see the return of territory already safely in the hands of the VRS. The Contact Group Plan in 1994 is a case in point. The Serbs were expected to surrender thirteen towns, and considerable chunks of territory won in 1992. Yet at this juncture the Serbs held seventy per cent of the territory in BiH. Furthermore, the eastern Muslim enclaves of Srebrenica, Goradže and Žepa would remain in Muslim control, and would therefore remain a strategic threat to the Serbs. The Republika Srpska Assembly at Pale rejected the plan, precipitating the split with Belgrade. The schism revolving around the Contact Group Plan mirrored earlier disagreements regarding the negotiations of the Vance-Owen Peace Plan and then the Owen-Stoltenberg plan. Following the Serb offensive at Srebrenica in 1993, the UN Security Council passed a resolution which tightened the sanctions on Serbia. This ordered Serb

⁶⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 250.

⁶⁵ This is precisely why Clausewitz believed intuition and genius so important. While Clausewitz's contemporary and rival, Jomini, believed war to be like a game of chess, or Sun Tzu like a game of *Go*, Clausewitz dismisses anything which attaches immutable rules; it is the unfathomable and chaotic exemplars of chance and complexity that make war more like a 'gamble'; like a game of cards. Michael, I. Handel, *Masters of War, third edition* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 240.

⁶⁶ Switzer, 'International Military Responses to the Balkan Wars', 289.

⁶⁷ See: James Gow, *The Serbian Project and its Adversaries* (London: Hurst and Company, 2003).

⁶⁸ Despite sanctions, military cooperation continued throughout the conflicts. See: Bob De Graff, 'The wars in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s: bringing the state back in', in Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Jan Angstrom (ed.), *Rethinking the Nature of War* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 159-176.

assets to be frozen abroad and trans-shipments through Yugoslavia were banned.⁶⁹ According to Lord Owen, this brought Milošević to the decision that the war should be brought to a conclusion.⁷⁰ Despite this, Milošević found it impossible to rein in his formal proxies until combined NATO, Croatian, and Bosnian Muslim operations began to force the Bosnian Serbs back into Belgrade's political ambit. As Clausewitz would put it, 'in war more than anywhere else, things do not turn out as we expect'.⁷¹

Confronted with an unfolding crisis in Yugoslavia, a combination of factors resulted in a hesitant international response. There was little to prepare the international community for such a crisis and the difficult balancing act between domestic and international politics impinged on the utility of collective international resolve. Anxiety that the war would escalate should the international community lean too firmly on the belligerents was palpable, and the US in particular had reservations post-Vietnam about being dragged into an un-winnable war, a feeling the Serbs did their utmost to foster. This fit the Serb war aims perfectly; as long as the international community believed that the wars were intractable and that the belligerents would put up a fight, the chances of them intervening robustly were slim. This was a political tactic to avoid international action. They successfully managed to maintain the illusion that they were a guerrilla force capable of defeating the great powers should they intervene militarily.⁷² While initially successful, the consequences of Serb tactics presaged firmer action, with a more robust policy led by the US being followed from 1994 – 1995.

Although the US had consistently sat on the sidelines, when they were involved they consistently opted for the use of airpower and thus clashed with the British and French position. Like the British, the French and the Dutch – the main troop contributing states in UNPROFOR – worried that escalation would increase the likelihood that UN personnel would be targeted by the combatants: each had been subjected to the humiliation of having personnel held hostage. Conversely, the US did not have any troops in theatre with which to complicate their attraction to using air-power. Nevertheless, American involvement gradually strengthened as the war became protracted and as it became clear that European attempts to end the conflict were proving futile. The failure of the Europeans to bring about a suitable conclusion to the war through UN channels resulted in renewed calls for stronger NATO participation. If the US continued to sit on the fence it risked losing its status as the leader of NATO, derailing the alliance's outreach to former Soviet states, which were in the process of being brought closer into the Western sphere of influence. The failure to act may have even put NATO's very future at stake.⁷³ Commenting at the time, the then Secretary General of NATO, Manfred Woerner tried to provoke a greater NATO role. He noted that: 'We all wish that diplomatic means alone would succeed. But diplomacy needs to be backed up with determination to use force if this is to be credible...In short: you need NATO. The United Nations are overstretched and underfunded'.⁷⁴ Woerner died before NATO acted decisively in Operation Deliberate Force in August 1995, however, there was increasing pressure for NATO to take a key role. There was also a feeling that the US needed to exert its authority if NATO was to retain its legitimacy. Leaving BiH to its fate was not a political option. As Richard Holbrooke, the Clinton Administration's special envoy to Bosnia-Herzegovina, argued:

Bosnia will be the key test of American policy in Europe. We must therefore succeed in whatever we attempt. The Administration cannot afford to begin with either an international disaster or a quagmire. Despite the difficulties and risks involved, I believe that inaction or a continuation of the Bush policies in Bosnia by the Clinton Administration is the least desirable course. Continued

⁶⁹ Silber & Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, 276.

⁷⁰ David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 151.

⁷¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 227.

⁷² Norman Cigar, 'The Serb Guerrilla Option and the Yugoslav Wars: Assessing the Threat and Crafting Foreign Policy', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol, 17, No. 3 (2004), 485-562.

⁷³ Ryan Hendrickson, 'Leadership at NATO: Secretary General Manfred Woerner and the Crisis in Bosnia', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol 27, No. 3, (September 2004), 515.

⁷⁴ Cited in *Ibid*.

inaction carries long-term risks which could be disruptive to US – European relations, weaken NATO, increase tensions between Greece and Turkey, and cause havoc with Moscow...⁷⁵

Holbrooke would later remark, 'It was not an overstatement to say that America's post-World War II security role in Europe was at stake.'⁷⁶ Exemplifying the complexity and uncertainty in which chance inheres, especially the notion that small decisions can have big effects, the US had agreed to provide the bulk – around 20,000 troops – to oversee the UN withdrawal should the need arise. Paradoxically, though the UNPROFOR risked collapsing in the spring of 1995, largely because it lacked clear policy or US military muscle, UN withdrawal would trigger the deployment of US ground troops to Bosnia.⁷⁷ The prospect of US troops being deployed as part of a withdrawal and thus signifying international failure was inconceivable if the US wanted to retain its international legitimacy. Holbrooke recounts, 'it was a terrible set of choices, but there was no way Washington could avoid involvement much longer'.⁷⁸ Although it took until the summer of 1995, a combination of US political power and NATO firepower put the Serbs under mounting pressure.⁷⁹ Providing leadership in BiH underpinned US and NATO legitimacy, opportunely, however, its involvement in BiH, and later in Kosovo also provided the organisation with a new post-Cold War role.

NATO's military intervention was not the primary reason for the reversal of fortune for the VRS in August and September 1995. That is more directly accredited to the coordinated offensives of the re-established Croat-Muslim alliance. Nevertheless, the two are intimately linked. The Croat and Muslim offensive was not only the product of Croat and Muslim bellicosity towards the Serbs, the very fact that there was an alliance at all was attributable to the prescience of the Washington Agreement, which successfully brought about a Croat-Muslim rapprochement in 1994. With the backing of the West, the Croat-Muslim offensives in 1995 were well organised, and executed.

Although the Bosnian Muslims remained the least able to profit from the collective international malaise, Croatia did. The Vance-Owen Peace Plan effectively handed over Western-Herzegovina, and it was viewed and used by the Croatian forces in BiH and their political masters in Zagreb as a *fait accompli*; the de facto annexation of Bosnian Croat territory. Although Zagreb fiercely defended the territorial integrity of Serbian held regions of Croatia, Tudjman's ambitions towards Bosnia-Herzegovina and the half-hearted attempts by the international community to find a solution to the conflict all contributed to Croatia's territorial aggrandizement at the expense of the Bosnian Muslims. As James Gow has observed, 'In an ideal world Croatia might have its cake and eat it'.⁸⁰ In terms of the VOPP agreement, the conflation of hostility and chance provided the Croats with the opportunity to pursue a more aggressive policy at the expense of the Bosniaks, condemning the idea of a unified multi-ethnic Yugoslavia in the process.

Though Zagreb's policy regarding Bosnia mirrored that of Serbia and their cohorts in Bosnia, Zagreb was more in tune with the twist and turns of war as it unfolded. Whether this was down to prescience or mere happenstance is unclear. Nevertheless, Zagreb appears to have been quick to take opportunities when they arose. By the start of the Dayton negotiations, Holbrooke admitted that Tudjman and Croatia had become the key factors in finding a solution. Reflecting on an earlier example, in a move which would have far reaching consequences for the outcome of the war, the US inspired Washington Agreement in 1994 brought an end to the Croat-Muslim war in Western and Central Bosnia. Although the combatants remained suspicious of each other, the end of hostilities was

⁷⁵ Richard Holbrooke, *To End A War* (New York: Modern Library 1999), 50

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁷ Plan OpPlan 40-104 had the authority to bypass the President, who was informed of it by Holbrooke.

⁷⁸ Holbrooke, *To End A War*, 65-66.

⁷⁹ Important works on NATO transformation include: Rachel A. Epstein, 'NATO Enlargement and the Spread of Democracy: Evidence and Expectations', *Security Studies*, (2004-5); Christopher Coker, 'Globalisation and Security in the Twenty-First Century: NATO and the Management of Risk', *Adelphi Paper*, Issue, 345 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Michael, J. Williams *NATO, Security and Risk Management. From Kosovo to Kandahar* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

⁸⁰ Gow, *The Serbian Project*, 230.

quickly followed by the re-establishment of the Croatian-Bosnian Alliance, which in late summer of 1995 proved so injurious to the idea of a 'Greater Serbian' State. From humble and unlikely beginnings, this alliance forced the Bosnian Serbs back under the control of Milošević's Serbia, and ultimately, to a negotiated peace at Dayton.

The Croats had much to lose if they didn't reach agreement over rapprochement with the Bosniaks. The US position was simple; it reminded Zagreb that it was committed to Croatian territorial integrity, but would not back Zagreb if they continued to annex territory legally belonging to the Bosnian government. If they did come to an agreement, Tudjman had much to gain.⁸¹ As Peter Galbraith, then on the negotiating team of Holbrooke, put it

If Croatia would give up its ambition for a separate Croat republic in Bosnia-Herzegovina....the United States would support generous power sharing for ethnic Croats in a Muslim-Croat Federation, would support Croatia's goal of closer political relations with the West, and would work diplomatically for a political solution within Croatia's internationally recognised borders of the Serb-occupied territories.⁸²

Tudjman complied, tying Croatian success with the prospect of further US diplomatic and military pressure. Holbrooke recounts that on several occasions during the Dayton negotiations he advocated to Zagreb that Croatian forces seize as much territory as possible. In one conversation with the Croat Defense Minister, he recounts:

"Gojko, I want to be absolutely clear", I said. "Nothing we said today should be construed to mean that we want you to stop the rest of the offensives, other than Banja Luka. Speed is important. We can't say so publicly, but please take Sanski Most, Prijedor, and Bosanski Novi. And do it quickly, before the Serbs regroup!"⁸³

Assessing the Bosnian Muslim situation, it is clear that there was a more limited range of options available. Even in terms of the conflict with the Croatia Defence Council (HVO), although the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiA) had a large quantitative advantage over the Croat forces, the HVO was backed by the increasingly powerful Croatian Army and had access to a better selection of arms and supplies. If the ARBiH continued to fight on two fronts, against the Croats on one hand and the Serbs on the other, then it risked being strangled by the forces ranged against it. Although international rhetoric frequently offered solace to the Bosnian Muslim position, berating the Serbs for their aggressive behaviour, the Bosnians relied on their own strength to survive the worst days of the war. They too must be given some credit for seeing the potential of the Washington Agreement. The Croat-Muslim war had been particularly dirty and displayed ethnic-cleansing and attacks against cultural and religious symbols. Most poignantly, the wanton destruction of the medieval Turkish bridge at Mostar by Croatian artillery conveyed the level of suspicion and hostility which was sustaining the conflict. Although Croat and Bosnian forces had tacitly agreed to suspend hostilities, a great amount of anger persisted on both sides.

Chance, and the problem with Probabilities

Chance and uncertainty exist within the matrix of real war. This is why Clausewitz believed the traits of genius were required so as to overcome the complexities which war naturally displays. As Clausewitz reminds readers, 'The conduct of war branches out in almost all directions and has no

⁸¹ Tudjman later revealed that a variety of promises and threats were used to coerce the Croatian President into acceptance of a renewed Croat-Muslim Federation. Included in these were the promises of closer Western support and provision of IMF loans. Interview with Franjo Tudjman. Croatian Television Satellite service, 24 February 1994. BBC SWB EE/1933/C, 28 February 1994.

⁸² Peter Galbraith, 'Negotiating peace in Croatia: a personal account of the road to Erdut', in Brad K. Blitz (ed), *War and Change in The Balkans: Nationalism, Conflict and Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 124-131.

⁸³ Holbrooke, *To End A War*, 167.

definite limits'.⁸⁴ This is why it is so difficult to accurately delineate an easy path to victory. Neutral factors such as chance exacerbate existing complexities. All war is pervaded by uncertainty; and the actions of all actors and combatants are restricted, buoyed, and directed by the chance and uncertainty that stem from war's interactivity. As Clausewitz argued, belligerents make decisions in 'a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty' and these decisions can have profound, if unlikely, impacts on the outcome of particular wars. The point Clausewitz was making is that once war is underway, the complex interrelationship between cause-and-effect produces an infinite number of consequences which must be judged and overcome.

Clausewitz's conception of chance lies in the interaction of the belligerents. By placing the assessment of chance against the background of wider external diplomacy and intervention in the wars of former Yugoslavia, it has been highlighted that uncertainty provided disadvantages and opportunities for each of the combatant groups. Additionally, in evaluating the role of chance and uncertainty as part of the interactive reality of conflict, we are able to get a sense of the array of intersecting lines which feed into and develop the nature of war. It is clear that the involvement of the international community contributed to the complexity of the conflict and it undoubtedly produced opportunities for the belligerents on the ground. These opportunities, of course, were not always clear and thus there was a danger that the tactics used to make the most of strategic opportunities could rebound at some later date. This is exactly what happened to the Serbs. It was a problem with which Clausewitz was familiar. He observes, 'We must evaluate the political sympathies of the other states and the effect war may have on them.' The problem in doing this is made so much more difficult as actors and motives interact and change. It was this capricious nature that brought Clausewitz to surmise that 'genius' – the natural ability of the commander to react to chance and overcome complexity by acting intuitively, was vital if strategy was ever to transmit into victory.

The Serbs took advantage of the initial inability and unwillingness of the international community to engage militarily in the conflict. In the early stages of the war this offered an opportunity and the Serbs maximised their military advantage. Although it was evident that the external powers would eventually oversee war termination, it was likely that the situation on the ground was a *fait accompli*. The problem with this approach was that the Serbs failed to constantly reassess the international community, their resolve, and growing irritation with the Serbian project. Although the Serbs' intransigence won rewards initially, in the long-term this approach backfired, helping to turn international opinion against them.

Although chance can offer rich rewards, the uncertainty with which it is entwined also produces dangers which have the potential to wreck previously hard earned gains. It is a problem explicit in Clausewitz's conceptualisation of the culminating point of success. The commander – or statesmen – must calculate what the best option will be, and then make the correct decision. Unfortunately for the Serbs, they failed to perceive the often subtle but changing circumstances in the international community, or equate these changes to the course of the war. While the Serbs sought to maximise their advantage, their actions inadvertently isolated them, pushing the external powers to embrace their enemies. As Clausewitz reflects, the leader must:

Guess whether the first shock of battle will steel the enemy's resolve and stiffen his resistance, or whether, like a Bologna flask, it will shatter as soon as its surface is scratched; guess the extent of debilitation and paralysis that the drying up of particular sources of supply and the severing of certain lines of communication will cause the enemy; guess whether the burning pain of the injury he has been dealt will make the enemy collapse or, like a wounded bull, arouse his rage, guess whether the other powers will be frightened or indignant, and whether and which political alliances will be dissolved or formed. When we realize that he must hit upon all this and much more by means of his discreet judgement, as a marksman hits his target, we must admit that such an accomplishment of the human mind is no small achievement. Thousands of wrong turns running in all directions tempt his perception; and if the range, confusion and complexity of the issues are not enough to overwhelm him the dangers and responsibilities may.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 154.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 692-693.

The VRS passed the culminating point of their success. Although it may not have been particularly apparent at the time, the Washington Agreement and resulting rapprochement between the formerly warring Croat and Muslim factions eventually brought the Serbs to the negotiating table. This is only one of many examples, but it serves to highlight how the course of a particular war can change through seemingly small ineffectual measures. The success of the Bosnian-Croat Federation hinged on the ceasefire between the two sides, and would not have been possible if it were not for US diplomatic efforts. In the same vein, this rapprochement would not have had the successful results that it did if the US and NATO had not become more centrally involved. Moreover, that both the US and NATO did become centrally involved had as much to do with US standing and NATO enlargement, of finding a new role in the post-Cold War security environment, as it did with alleviating the suffering in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The events and outcomes are all intertwined. The nature and course of a particular conflict is influenced by a dazzling array of factors, not always immediately obvious, but which are produced, and further produce, the complexity of conflict. As Tolstoy remarked, history is a 'succession of 'accidents' whose origins and consequences are, by and large, untraceable and unpredictable.'⁸⁶

Exposing the unpredictable course of war once again, it is useful to ponder further on how seemingly small events can go on to produce profound results. Although the Washington Agreement ultimately proved a successful mechanism for balancing the Serbs, it was not until the US felt compelled to take a leading role as a result of international pressure that real progress was made. It was the shuttle diplomacy led by special envoy Richard Holbrooke which eventually brought the competing sides to agree to the Dayton peace agreement. This was made considerably easier because of battlefield events. Although US diplomacy resurrected the peace process, this process was considerably propelled by the new-found operational coordination between the HVO and ARBiH during 1995. The prospects for a lasting peace were also bolstered, ironically, by the fact that territorial ethnic cleansing had also resulted in acceptable gains for the Serbs, who were now willing to negotiate the termination of the war. Although the seizure of Srebrenica and Žepa had eventually instigated a firmer international role, the fact that the Serbs had what they wanted made it easier to negotiate with them. Despite the label of 'safe area', it was widely accepted by the external powers and Bosnian government that the enclaves were ultimately indefensible.⁸⁷ For the Serbs, the enclaves posed a constant threat to the security of Republika Srpska. Despite international censure, the seizure of the safe areas made the prospect of a negotiated settlement more achievable.⁸⁸ It is evident that while changes at an international level brought unexpected results, chance and uncertainty pervaded the decision-making process of the external powers at every juncture. The everyday interactions of international relations, of relationships between states, international organisations, and individuals, all contributed to a feeling of malaise which fed into the war. These were unexpected and often unnoticed features, but they influenced the nature of the conflict nonetheless.

Conclusion

As highlighted in the introduction, that Clausewitz emphasises complexity does not mean that he thought war pointless. War may be non-linear, but Clausewitz's message is one of instrumentality, the intention of *On War* to engage fellow soldiers with the complexity of the phenomena, providing the theoretical foundation to deal with unpredictability and uncertainty first hand. Much of recent

⁸⁶ Cited from: Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's view of History* (New York: Clarion, 1970), 18-19.

⁸⁷ For example, the Bosnian government withdrew the military leadership from the enclave before the Serb offensive. It has been suggested that the Bosnian government gave up Srebrenica so as to engender international condemnation of the Serbs.

⁸⁸ See: Nicholas Sambanis, 'Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature', *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (July, 2000), 437-483; Other works include: Chaim Kaufmann, 'Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars', *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring, 1996), 136-175; Thomas Chapman & Philip G. Roeder, 'Partition as a Solution to Wars of Nationalism: The Importance of Institutions', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 101, No. 4, (2007), 677-691.

scholarship highlights Clausewitz's writing on complexity, but this should not overshadow Clausewitz's core message. By exploring the nexus between chance and interaction in the wars of former Yugoslavia, this article does not undermine Clausewitz's core political, instrumental message. Rather, by exploring his conceptualisation of chance as part of the fabric of war, the article acts as a basis to better understand the interplay, complexity, and uncertainty that all wars in all periods inheres. With so much of contemporary strategic studies scholarship examining changes in the character of war – of the methods used to fight, this article examined war at the micro-level, using Clausewitz's comprehension of chance and interaction as a basis to better understand the fraught relationship between the means and outcomes of wars.

By identifying Clausewitz's comprehension of chance as part of this interaction, the paper has highlighted the complexity of interaction and chance in war as it unfolds, often in unforeseen ways. Clearly, accurately identifying each and every consequence of chance is impossible and Clausewitz was quick to point out that moral and non-material factors though critical to our understanding of war, cannot be classified or counted. Only experience can enlighten their manifold effects.

Nonetheless, despite problems in tracking chance, knowledge of its effects and of its roots in the reciprocity of conflict forms a crucial foundation of our knowledge of strategic affairs. Like Clausewitz's Trinity of which chance forms part, the interaction that Clausewitz identified is not restricted by time. Reciprocity in war is timeless. Better understanding its interactive nature, is critical if we are to better understand the nature of war. Not least, an awareness of complexity provides a more realistic base from which to engineer winning strategy. What is the best strategy to pursue? How do effects and their consequences influence the balance between ends and means? Better understanding chance and interaction may not provide the secret formula, but it offers a good place to start. This remains a critical starting point for strategy and cognizance of its part in war offers insights which must be taken seriously by politicians and military alike.

Drawing discussion away from solely the battlefield and applying his basic understanding of interaction, and the cause-and-effect consequences that ensue is particularly relevant in an era of globalisation, where the impact and influence of one's actions can have profound and lasting effects, at once offering opportunities and posing problems. In an era when interactions can have instantaneous and long lasting effects, one thinks of the Abu Graib episode, thinking through actions is a priority. In a similar way, this point is made by David Kilcullen, in his recent monograph *The Accidental Guerrilla*.⁸⁹ Kilcullen's message is not particularly new, yet this does not delimit its strength. Highlighting the US pre-occupation with kinetic-effects, he reminds the US (and allied) military establishment that equating war solely as a clash of power misses the underlying complexity that has beguiled strategists for millennia. As Clausewitz was cognizant, every action has a counteraction and a consequence. Having a better understanding of this 'boomerang effect' is arguably even more important in a media dominated world of globalisation, where one's actions can be beamed around the world in seconds. In this type of strategic environment, where war in front of a global audience is more not less complex, Clausewitz's message is a potent one. The manner and implications of this element do not, as Clausewitz notes, 'yield to academic wisdom. They cannot be classified or counted. They have to be seen or felt'.⁹⁰

Colin M. Fleming
Max Weber Programme, 2009-2010

⁸⁹ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009).

⁹⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 216.

