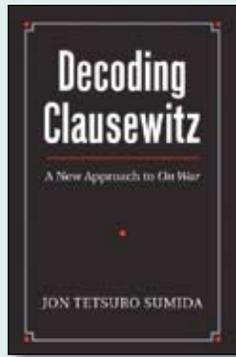


Sunni insurgents shifted to the American side because AQI was so ideologically fanatical and so murderously repressive as to make American forces seem comparatively benign. In this respect, the presence of AQI is analogous to North Korea's invasion of the South in 1950, which conjured an overwhelming external threat that made South Koreans belatedly view the United States as their protector.

Although *Occupational Hazards* is analytical rather than prescriptive, Edelstein does acknowledge some policy implications relevant to the present situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a low-external-threat environment, and in such cases Edelstein finds coercion an essential requisite for successful occupation. In this respect, the Soviet occupation of northern Korea forms an interesting contrast to the U.S. occupation of southern Korea. The Soviets faced an identical situation—a Korean population desirous of independence and unconvinced of any major external threat—yet succeeded because they began with an initial program of vicious coercion, designed to underscore the lethal consequences of resistance, combined with subsequent accommodations that made their occupation palatable. The result was the establishment of a stable indigenous regime friendly to Soviet interests. It is doubtful that such a program is politically possible or morally acceptable to the United States and its allies. And in its absence, by Edelstein's analysis, the prognosis for a successful occupation of Afghanistan is not good.

Mark Grimsley is the Harold Keith Johnson Chair of Military History at the U.S. Army War College and an Associate Professor of History at The Ohio State University.



Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to *On War*
by Jon Tetsuro Sumida
Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008
199 pp. \$29.95
ISBN: 978-0-7006-1616-9

Reviewed by
JOHN T. KUEHN

One is tempted to ask: why should I read another study or article about Carl von Clausewitz's masterpiece *On War*? After all, there are wonderful essays by Peter Paret and Michael Howard (that accompany their definitive translation), Bernard Brodie, Michael Handel, Alan Beyerchen, and a host of others that offer a great deal of valuable information about *how* a modern reader (usually a military professional or a military historian) can make some practical or theoretical use of, and get something of value from, this rather imposing book.

Fortunately, this is exactly the question that Jon Tetsuro Sumida addresses first in *Decoding Clausewitz*. He argues that most interpreters think of *On War* as essentially incomplete. According to this view, only chapter one of Book I, or Book I—depending on whom you read—was finished, and the rest must be read with a sort of decoder ring to understand the bulk of the text. Because of this assertion, new readers of *On War* have tended to come to the table with a pre-existing bias. Sumida makes a strong argument for the case that *On War* was more of a finished product than most interpreters

imply (pp. xiii–xv). He also identifies two other chief differences in his approach. First, he emphasizes that the line between theory and history that most interpreters draw is problematic to a clear reading of Clausewitz. Instead, he proposes that Clausewitz's theory is one of "practice," rather than an attempt at an all-encompassing description of war as a "phenomenon" (p. 5). Second, Sumida emphasizes Clausewitz's extensive writing on defense as the stronger form of war, arguing for this concept's primacy as a way of understanding *On War* as a theory of practice (p. 4).

The implication of these conclusions is, as Sumida claims, that any "selective engagement"—that is, cherry-picking key passages in *On War*, especially from the first book—does Clausewitz and the reader an injustice (p. xii). For example, some historians have argued that Clausewitz makes an argument in favor of absolute war when he does nothing of the sort. Therefore, one must read *On War* comprehensively. The good news is that Sumida offers a methodology, a framework, for doing so. This does not mean that he has found the "holy grail" of how to make the book *easy* to read, but that he offers a way to make it more *fulfilling* to read. He regards *On War* as:

a set of instructions on how to engage in serious learning of a highly personal nature rather than an impersonal representation of the totality of that which is to be learned. Clausewitz's approach to theory may be seen not only in terms of how it might improve an individual's decision-making capacity in war and politics, but also in terms of how it might be a pedagogical model applicable to the development of the ability to do anything that is difficult, complex, contingent, and dangerous (p. 5, emphasis in original).

Sumida wants us to spend our time reading his book to divest ourselves of what he calls "pre-conceptions" and then to prepare ourselves mentally for the

personal development ahead (p. 6). This approach makes *Decoding Clausewitz* that much more useful, as not only the novice but also those with varying degrees of familiarity can pick up *On War* and look at it through a different lens—Clausewitz's lens.

Sumida gives a structural preview of the book's four main chapters in the introduction and covers all the ground mentioned above. He also provides a cogent review of the historical context of the man himself as well as key elements of the literature about Clausewitz since his death in 1831. It is worth noting that Clausewitz is not the first theorist that Sumida has subjected to this sort of ambitious revisionism. In 1997, he offered a similar set of proposals about Alfred Thayer Mahan in *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command*. Sumida's larger arguments in both these books make a convincing case for the practicality of studying military history to inform and develop judgment in strategic leaders.

I have been teaching *On War* to field grade officers since 2000. The rereading of Clausewitz that I have done as a result of Sumida's book has made me revise my own views and will almost certainly cause me to revise my presentation. I advise my students to continue to read Clausewitz and engage his ideas on a regular basis. Sumida articulates coherently why we (especially military professionals) should develop such habits. *On War* should not be confined to war and staff colleges—it needs to be fundamental reading for any leader who aspires to high political office. I have always believed that *On War* deserves as broad and educated a readership as possible. The same holds true for Sumida's insightful and practical book—for both Clausewitz veterans and those who have not yet discovered *On War*'s hidden treasures.

Dr. John T. Kuehn is an Associate Professor of Military History at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.