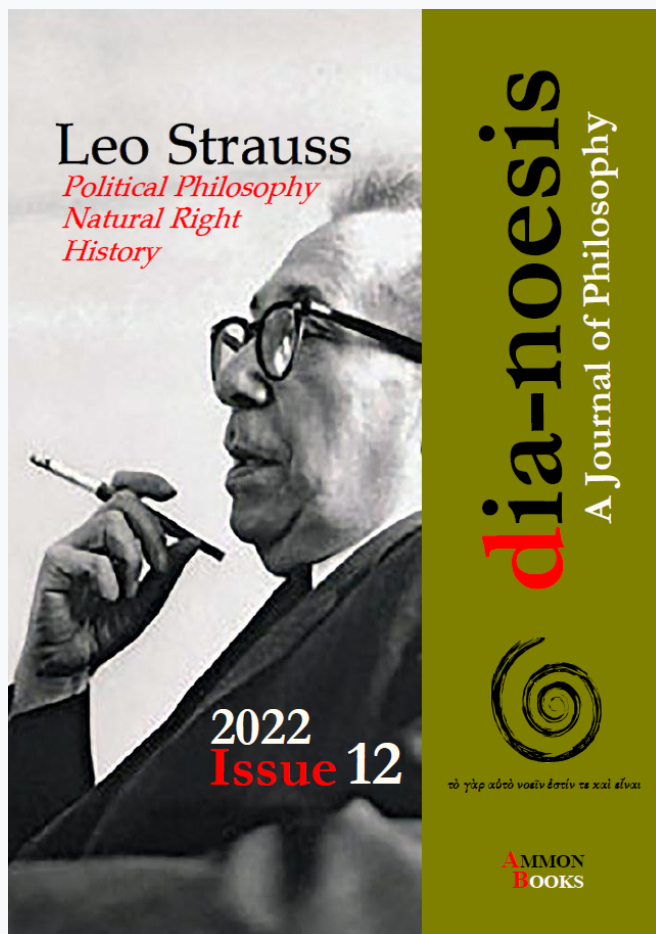


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*Pedro Valdés Guía*

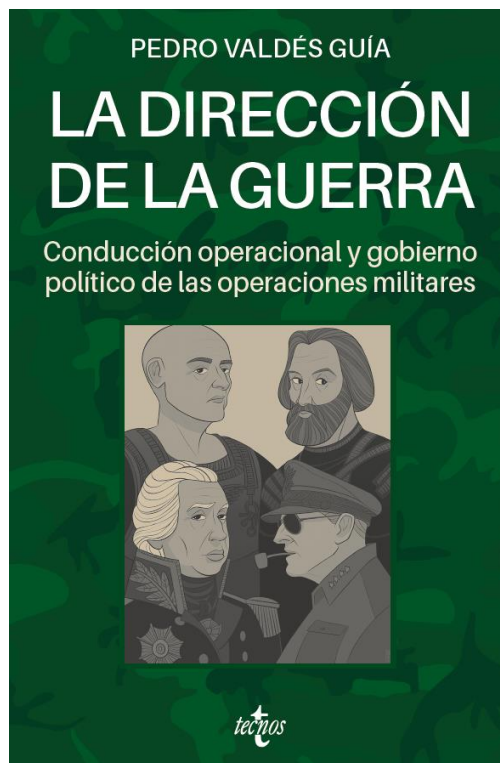
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## **Command in war: Operational conduct of war and political control of military operations**

(La dirección de la guerra: conducción operacional y gobierno político de las operaciones militares).

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At a time when advances in technology are accelerating the trend towards blurring the boundaries between the different levels of conduct of military operations, this work provides a comprehensive analysis, with a historical perspective, of the subject of command in war. The book addresses the issue of the command of military operations during armed conflict, in order to elucidate whether its "operational occurrence" is a mere continuation of politics, when it brings its most serious means into play, or whether, on the contrary, it introduces a new logic into the political process, which could not be managed according to the parameters of instrumental reason.

Aware that the hierarchical-instrumental subjection constitutes the "normal paradigm" of Western political-military relations for the conduct of war, the novelty of this book lies in the judgement of this paradigm, not from the political logic that, obviously, would like to express itself with a docile and versatile grammar, but from the intrinsic demands of its operational occurrence.

The book begins by analysing Clausewitz's work, at the core of which is a new level of warfare, baptised a century later as "operational", responsible for conducting military operations in a given theatre as a whole. A level that the Prussian author links to the notes of systematicity and complexity that have since characterised contemporary operational thinking. In the following three chapters, the book addresses the evolution of this concept in contemporary military thought, grouped into three categories, according to whether the root of this operational complexity lies in the structural, interactive or chaotic nature of reality. A distinction in categories compatible with their common denomination as "grammars", in accordance with the "instrumental" character assigned to them by the aforementioned "normal paradigm" of political-military relations.

The first category, elaborated in chapter two, is that of 'outcome' grammars, designed to conduct operations in a structurally complex theatre: from the systems analysis employed by McNamara's team during the Vietnam War to

the Revolution in Military Affairs, essential to understanding US military thought in the closing decade of the last century. The second category, explained in chapter three, is that of the "dialectical" grammars, which emphasise the dynamics of violent confrontation between systems: from the Soviet theories of "deep operations" that founded operational art to the American doctrine of "Air-Land Battle" of the 1980s, which develops a multidimensional approach to conventional confrontation. And the third category, the most current addressed in chapter four, is that of the grammars of decision, as necessary condition for confronting a chaotic complexity that characterized asymmetric warfare. It is a decision-making capacity oriented towards a profound existential transformation of the socio-political environment of the enemy. A decision-making capacity in permanent tension between those political purposes that have motivated and sustain the intervention, and those requirements so intimately linked to the concrete potentialities of the theatre.

In relation to these three chapters, one of the book's merits is to group operational theories according to how they conceive complexity; because in this "concept of complexity" lies the key to assessing the "instrumental" or "grammatical" character of the operational. Insofar as the essence of the operational lies in directing as a whole the military operations of a given theatre, each of these chapters (devoted to structural, dialectical and decision grammars) concludes with an assessment of their capacity to interweave all these actions inside that joint operations area. And it is precisely in this core consideration where it becomes clear that the more authentic the complexity that challenges them, the closer their elements, and the way in which they are organised and combined, come to that autonomous and complete rationality, possessing its own ends, which characterises all logic. In this sense, the greater the complexity of the theatre, the greater the incoherence of this presupposed grammatical character, as it increasingly weighs down the actual conduct of war with inconsistencies and contradictions.

The more authentic the complexity that challenges operational warfare, the closer it comes to an autonomous

rationality that incorporates its own ends linked to the existential transformation of the enemy's reality. In this sense, chapter five of the book argues for the need to add the adjective "instituting" to the notion of "duel" as the first and most fundamental of those essential notes that make up the "objective nature of war". War is not just any "duel", but a very specific one, it is an "instituting duel", understood as a confrontation with the intention of transforming "the enemy's reality", in the sense of making it compatible with our own. Of course, to transform requires penetrating and destroying, that is the duel, but with a desired "end" that conditions, from within, the nature and scope of that destruction.

Conflict is not a "continuum"; the "outbreak of hostilities" introduces a new logic, of an instituting nature. The political purpose is at the origin: war is born or engendered in the political, in a distinction and in a judgment of incompatibility, but inasmuch as that incompatibility comes from an existentially different and strange plane in a particularly intense way, it is incapable of indicating how to transform it. It knows that it is unconscionable for its own essential way of life, but it lacks the criteria and power to bring about that transformation. It is precisely this powerlessness that leads it to turn to an "institution" alien to its nature: war, as an "instituting duel" capable of bringing about that transformation of the enemy that will resolve the incompatibility.

Although the political logic continues before, during and after the war, the hostilities inaugurate a new logic of existential confrontation. But being external does not equate to being unimportant, because since war is engendered in politics, it adopts the character of that particular political logic, a subjective nature that leads it to seek a "peace treaty" or a "victory". A first determination of the character of "each war" in which its "political matrix" does play an essential role. First, because that matrix dynamically determines the scope of its instituting dimension: the type of decision sought, which can affect a specific or more general aspect, and even go as far as the extinction of a political subject. And second because it also determines the how of its materialization, from

the acceptance of the "ritualized" confrontation between armies, to the bellicose imposition of a new order. Two determinations that already belong to the most basic or fundamental dimension of the subjective nature of war.

Although chapter five of the book devotes many pages to the study of these two war itineraries: that of the peace treaty and that of victory, the fundamental thesis that war is something new is always present and goes even further. War not only introduces an entirely new logic that coexists with political logics external to the confrontation, but this coexistence also conditions and deeply transforms the political matrices that are generating it. War, insofar as it not only transforms the reality of the theatre, but also the rational element of the Clausewitzian trinity that triggered it, constitutes the collapse rather than the continuation of politics. When political logic turns to war as the only institution capable of transforming unsustainable antagonistic positions into instituting acts: "peace treaty" or "victory", it crosses a boundary that cannot be calculated or controlled either from the initial political parameters or from outside the theatre of war.

After affirming the "logical" status of war rationality, and its relative position in relation to political logic established, chapter six of the book seeks to answer "the decisive question" which, according to Aron, remains unanswered in the Clausewitzian approach: "up to what point is [...] the supreme principle of a decision by arms, of the destruction of enemy armed forces, reconcilable with the two types of war, with the threefold definition of war, with the primacy of policy? (ARON, Raymond. Clausewitz: Philosopher of War, New York, Touchstone, 1986: 277).

In order to answer this question, the book argues that the relationship between both logics must do justice to two essentially different but closely interrelated dimensions, and must be consistent with the primacy of one of them, politics, which is generating the war throughout the duration of the conflict. The author refers to this relationship as symbiotic, by analogy to the form of biological interaction which refers to the close and persistent relationship between organisms of

different species. Similar to biological symbiosis, this is a peculiarly unequal relationship between host-generator and an associated symbiont. A close interrelationship that is essential for the survival of the symbiont, and generated or imposed on a host that aspires to benefit from it. But in any case, an inevitably tense relationship, because there is neither a hierarchical relation nor instrumental manipulation, it is impossible to have the minimum degree of control that allows the host to plan a result of the hosted dimension that it itself has generated.

Finally, this last chapter proposes to materialise this symbiotic relationship by means of a dialogue which, following Cohen (COHEN, Eliot A. *Supreme Command*, New York: Anchor Books, 2003: 208-224), it describes as "unequal", to emphasize that the political host is continuously generating, and therefore modulating, the hosted symbiont. An "unequal dialogue" in which the political logic does not "dictate", because there is no hierarchical relationship nor instrumental manipulation, but it does "dominate", without impositions nor servility, because it constitutes the logic of an all-knowing totality that becomes heterogeneous when in its interior war occurs.

In order to articulate this unequal dialogue between two heterogeneous logics the author proposes to return to one of the most characteristic categories of military thought, strategy, which must resume its intermediary role between political and operational extremes, as an eminently practical and prudential knowledge. Strategy must restore its original pragmatic vocation as a bridge that harmonizes two different logics and, in many cases, two different existential planes. A bridge firmly anchored in a clear understanding of the nature of the confrontation, charged with creating the right frame for operational success, but ensuring political dominance in that unequal dialogue, so that the war effort is commensurate with the significance of the political goals pursued.

All in all, throughout the book, various theories such as John Boyd's "OODA loop", Warden's "Five Rings", or "Mao's Revolutionary Warfare" are put into context and linked together to produce a work that could be considered a

Handbook on the Direction and Conduct of Military Operations. The author illustrates the necessity of the "authority" that the commander must receive from political power to achieve a "peace treaty" or a "victory", the importance of understanding the systems in theatre in order to adapt the war effort to what those systems demand, the link between spatio-temporal depth and operational shaping, as well as the inevitable tension between "political logic" and "operational logic" in their "unequal dialogue".





