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Peter Paret: Clausewitz and the State

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I. Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War

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IF THE VARIOUS campaigns and uprisings which have taken place in Italy have given the appearance that military ability has become extinct, the true reason is that the old methods of warfare were not good and no one has been able to find new ones. A man newly risen to power cannot acquire greater reputation than by discovering new rules and methods." With these words from the famous last chapter of *The Prince*—"The exhortation to free Italy from the barbarians"—Machiavelli expressed an idea that recurs frequently in his writings: new military institutions and new processes in warfare are the most urgent and the most fundamental requirement of his time. Machiavelli is usually held to have introduced a new era, the modern era, in the development of political thought; his conviction that the military organization of contemporary Italian states needed changing was a driving force, a central concern behind all his reflections on the world of politics. It hardly goes too far to say that Machiavelli became a political thinker because he was a military thinker. His view of the military problems of his time patterned his entire political outlook.

I

Machiavelli occupies a unique position in the field of military thought because his ideas are based on a recognition of the link between the changes that occurred in military organization and the revolutionary developments that took place in the social and political sphere. To the ordinary observer, the connection between cause and effect in military developments seemed obvious. The discovery of gunpowder and the invention of firearms and artillery suggested that the armor of the knight was doomed and the collapse of the military organization of the Middle Ages, in which knights played the decisive role, had become inevitable. In his epic *Orlando Furioso* (1516), Ariosto, Machiavelli's contemporary and Italian compatriot, narrates how Orlando, his hero and the embodiment of all knightly virtues, was forced to face an enemy with a firearm:

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was a very recent political formation and the older powers considered it as a kind of parvenu; therefore, Charles the Bold was particularly eager to legitimize the existence of his state by strict observance of old traditions and customs, and became in effect the leader of a kind of romantic revival of chivalry. It is the more revealing, therefore, that in this ballad, "knight, squire, sergeant and vassal" have only one thought, namely, "when will the paymaster come?" Here, behind the glittering façade of chivalry, is disclosed the prosaic reality of material interests.

In the armies of the greater powers, France, Aragon, or England, old and modern elements, feudal levy and professionalism, were mixed; but the great money powers of the period, the Italian cities, came to rely entirely on professional soldiers. Since the fourteenth century, Italy had been the "promised land" of all knights to whom war was chiefly a means of making money. The single groups, the *compagnie di ventura*, were supplied and paid by their leaders, the *condottieri*, who offered their services to every power willing to pay their price. Thus, in Italy soldiering became a profession of its own, entirely separated from any other civilian activity.

The impact of the money economy provided a broader opportunity for recruiting armies. New classes of men, free from the preceding military traditions, were attracted to the services by money, and with this infiltration of new men, new weapons and new forms of fighting could be introduced and developed. Archers and infantry made their appearance in the French and English armies during the Hundred Years' War. This tendency toward experimentation in new military methods received a further strong impetus from the defeats that the armies of Charles the Bold suffered at the hands of the Swiss near the end of the fifteenth century. In the battles of Morat and Nancy (1476), the knights of Charles the Bold, unable to break up the squares of Swiss foot soldiers and to penetrate into the forest of their pikes, were thoroughly defeated. This event was a European sensation. Infantry had won its place in the military organization of the period.

The importance of the invention of gunpowder has to be evaluated against the background of these general developments: first, the rise of a money economy; second, the attempt of the feudal overlord to free himself from dependence on his vassals and to establish a reliable foundation of power; and third, the trend toward experimentation in military organization resulting from the weakening of feudal bonds.

Firearms and artillery were not the cause of these developments but they were an important contributory factor, accelerating the tempo of the evolution. First of all, they strengthened the position of the overlord in relation to his vassals. The employment of artillery in a campaign was

a cumbersome task; many wagons were needed for transportation of the heavy cannon and for their equipment, mechanics and engineers became necessary, and the whole procedure was extremely expensive. The accounts of military expenditures for this period show that the expenses for artillery constituted a disproportionately large part of the total.³ Only the very wealthy rulers were able to afford artillery. Also, the principal military effect of the invention of artillery worked in favor of the great powers and against the smaller states and local centers of independence. In the Middle Ages, the final sanction of the position of the knight had been that, in his castle, he was relatively immune from attack. The art of fortification was much cultivated in this period.⁴ Small states protected themselves by establishing at their frontiers a line of fortresses that enabled them to hold out even against superior forces. These medieval fortifications were vulnerable, however, to artillery fire. Thus, the military balance became heavily weighed in favor of the offensive. Francesco di Giorgio Martini, one of the great Italian architects of the fifteenth century, who was in charge of the building of the fortresses for the Duke of Urbino, complained in his treatise on military architecture that "the man who would be able to balance defense against attack, would be more a god than a human being."⁵

These changes in the composition of armies and in military technique also transformed the spirit of military organization.⁶ The moral code, traditions, and customs, which feudalism had evolved, had lost control over the human material from which the armies were now recruited. Adventurers and ruffians who wanted wealth and plunder, men who had nothing to lose and everything to gain through war, made up the main body of the armies. As a result of a situation in which war was no longer undertaken as a religious duty, the purpose of military service became financial gain. The moral problem arose whether it was a sin to follow a profession that aimed at the killing of other people. In the most civilized parts of Europe, such as Italy, people looked with contempt on soldiers and soldiering.

³ Cf. for instance "Ordine dell'Esercito Ducale Sforzesco, 1472-1474," *Archivio storico Lombardo*, ser. I, vol. 3 (1876), 448-513.

⁴ Cf. Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages* (London, 1924), 1:358.

⁵ Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Trattato di architettura civile e militare*, ed. Carlo Promis (Torino, 1841), 131.

⁶ In general, see Piero Pieri, *Il Rinascimento e la crisi militare italiana* (Torino, 1952), and see also the chapters "Military Development and Fighting Potential" and "Soldiers and the State" in M. E. Mallet and J. R. Hale, *The Military Organization of a Renaissance State* (Cambridge, 1984), 65-100, 181-98.

II

The circumstances of Machiavelli's personal life were a crucial factor in his becoming aware of the situation and the problems that had emerged in his time.

Machiavelli's career as a political writer began when the Medici returned to Florence in 1512 and ousted him from the Florentine Chancellery, where he had served the Florentine republic for fourteen years. His writings, as many have said, beginning with Machiavelli himself, present the lessons that he had drawn from his "long experience of the affairs of his time."⁷ They reduce to prescripts, rules, and laws his observations of the political scene made in the course of his work in the Florentine Chancellery.

In the Italian cities of the Renaissance, chancellery officials usually were somewhat bloodless civil servants who wrote down and carried out the measures on which the ruling circle had decided. Machiavelli was an exception; he was a person of political importance in the Florentine republic between 1498 and 1512. As Guicciardini wrote to him teasingly in the years of his disgrace, when he had accepted a minor, almost ridiculous mission to a chapter of the Franciscan Order—"in other times [you] negotiated with many kings, dukes and princes."⁸

There were several reasons why Machiavelli had played a greater political role before 1512 than Chancellery bureaucrats usually did. The Machiavelli were an old, highly regarded family with twelve Gonfalonieri and sixty-six high magistrates among them. Niccolò Machiavelli was descended from an illegitimate branch of this family and could not be a member of the ruling councils or of the policy-making magistrates, but his name and his friendship with Niccolò di Alessandro Machiavelli, a leading politician, set him apart from other Chancellery officials.⁹

The principal reason, however, for Machiavelli's prominence was his close relation to Piero Soderini, the lifetime Gonfaloniere.¹⁰ The office of a lifetime Gonfaloniere had been created in 1502 by a group of Florentine patricians who had hoped that the Gonfaloniere would restrict and reduce the influence of the Great Council in which the middle classes had the upper hand. But Soderini disappointed the patricians because he viewed his election as a mandate to maintain and stabilize the popular

⁷ From Machiavelli's dedication of *The Prince* to Lorenzo de' Medici: "lunga esperienza delle cose moderne."

⁸ Francesco Guicciardini to Niccolò Machiavelli, May 18, 1521.

⁹ See Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Niccolò Machiavelli*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London, 1963), 29; this is the best recent work on the facts of Machiavelli's life.

¹⁰ On Machiavelli's position in the times of Soderini, see my *Machiavelli and Guicciardini* (Princeton, 1965; pbk., New York, 1984), particularly ch. 2.

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At once the lightning flashes, shakes the ground,
The trembling bulwarks echo to the sound.
The pest, that never spends in vain its force,
But shatters all that dares oppose its course,
Whizzing impetus flies along the wind.

When the invincible Orlando succeeded in overcoming this redoubtable enemy and could choose from the rich booty:

. . . nothing would the champion bear away
From all the spoils of that victorious day
Save that device, whose unresisted force
Resembled thunder in its rapid course.

Then he sailed out on the ocean, plunging the weapon into the sea and exclaiming:

O! curs'd device! base implement of death!
Fram'd in the black Tartarean realms beneath!
By Beelzebub's malicious art design'd
To ruin all the race of human kind. . . .
That ne'er again a knight by thee may dare,
Or dastard cowards, by thy help in war,
With vantage base, assault a nobler foe,
Here lie for ever in th' abyss below!¹

In short, if firearms had not been invented or could now be banished, the world of the knights would live on forever in all its splendor.

This dramatic explanation of the decline of the power of the knights hardly corresponds with reality. The history of military institutions cannot be separated from the general history of a period. The military organization of the Middle Ages formed an integral part of the medieval world, and declined when the medieval social structure disintegrated. Spiritually as well as economically the knight was a characteristic product of the Middle Ages. In a society in which God was envisaged as the head of a hierarchy, all secular activity had been given a religious meaning. The particular task of chivalry was to protect and defend the people of the country; in waging war the knight served God. He placed his military services at the disposal of his overlord, to whom the supervision of secular activities was entrusted by the church. Apart from its spiritual-religious side, however, the military bond between vassal and overlord also had its legal and economic aspects. The knight's land, the fief, was given to

¹ Lodovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, trans. John Hoole (London, 1783; Philadelphia, 1816), bk. 1, canto 9.

him by the overlord, and in accepting it, the knight assumed the obligation of military service to the overlord in wartime. It was an exchange of goods against services as was fitting to the agricultural structure and manorial system of the Middle Ages.

A religious concept of war as an act of rendering justice, the restriction of military service to the class of landholding knights and their retainers, and a moral-legal code which operated as the main bond holding the army together—these are the factors that determined the forms of military organization as well as the methods of war in the Middle Ages. The medieval army could be assembled only when a definite issue had arisen; it was ordered out for the purposes of a definite campaign and could be kept together only as long as this campaign lasted. The purely temporary character of military service as well as the equality of standing of the noble fighters made strict discipline difficult if not impossible. A battle frequently developed into fights between individual knights, and the outcome of such single combats between the leaders was decisive. Because warfare represented the fulfillment of a religious and moral duty, there was a strong inclination to conduct war and battles according to fixed rules and a settled code.

This military organization was a typical product of the whole social system of the Middle Ages, and any change in the foundations of the system had inevitable repercussions in the military field. When rapid expansion of a money economy shook the agricultural basis of medieval society the effects of this development on military institutions were immediate. In the military field those who were the protagonists of the new economic developments—the cities and the wealthy overlords—could make great use of the new opportunities: namely, to accept money payments instead of services, or to secure services by money rewards and salaries. The overlord could accept money payments from those who did not wish to fulfill their military obligations and, on the other hand, he could retain those knights who remained in his army beyond the period of war and for longer stretches of time by promises of regular payments. Thus he was able to lay the foundations of a permanent and professional army and to free himself from dependence on his vassals. This transformation of the feudal army into a professional army, of the feudal state into the bureaucratic and absolutist state, was a very slow process and reached its climax only in the eighteenth century, but the true knightly spirit of the feudal armies died early and quickly. We possess an illustration of this change in a fifteenth-century ballad, describing life in the army of Charles the Bold of Burgundy.² In the fifteenth century Burgundy

² Ballad by Emile Deschamps, "Quand viendra le trésorier?" in E. Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Saint Hilaire (Paris, 1884), 4:289.

introduction immediately enunciated some of Machiavelli's favorite ideas: the foundation of a republic is "justice and arms," and long experience, great financial expenses, and dangers have shown us that mercenary armies are of questionable usefulness. The law, called the *Ordinanza*, provided for the formation of a militia of 10,000 who were to be selected by a government committee from males between eighteen and fifty years, living in the rural districts of Tuscany under Florentine rule. The militia was to be divided into companies of three hundred men, who were to be drilled—in the pattern of German lansquenets—on festival days. Conscription was limited to rural districts because arming the inhabitants of the towns in the Florentine territory would have made it easier for these towns to revolt. It was not expected that the citizens of Florence could be persuaded to accept for themselves the burden of some military service, although Machiavelli hoped that at some future time this would come about. He considered the *Ordinanza* merely a beginning. He worked—without success—toward adding a levy of horsemen to the levy of foot soldiers. His final aim was an army composed of men from the city of Florence, the towns of the territory, and the rural districts, under a unified command.

The unreliability of the condottieri and of mercenaries was only one reason for Machiavelli's passionate interest in the creation of a conscript army. He expected it would have important consequences for Florentine foreign and domestic policy: greater independence in foreign affairs and stabilization of the domestic situation. Machiavelli had learned on several of his diplomatic missions that the necessity of relying on mercenaries or foreign troops limited freedom of action and created dependence on other powers. He had been forced to ask other Italian rulers to allow Florence to engage the services of their condottieri and mercenaries; on a mission to France his task was to implore the French king to send French troops who would help to reestablish Florentine authority in areas that had revolted. The dangers arising from military weakness loomed particularly large in the first decades of the sixteenth century. The overthrow of the Italian balance of power by the French invasion in 1494, followed by the rise of Cesare Borgia supported by the pope and the French king had brought about an unstable and fluid situation in which every larger power believed it might be able to expand and to absorb its weaker neighbors by the use of force. In Machiavelli's first political memorandum, written soon after he became a member of the Chancery, he stated that a state had two ways only to attain its goal: "o la forze o lo amore,"¹⁵ and he immediately explained that negotiations and agree-

¹⁵ Marchand, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, 403.

ments—and that is what he understood by “amore”—would never lead to the desired goals; governments had to rely on force.

Furthermore he knew only too well that the hiring of a condottiere, the determination of his salary, and the calculations about the number of troops needed for a particular military operation always increased internal tension. The required sums were provided primarily through loans and taxes imposed on the wealthier citizens; accordingly the upper classes tried to keep these extraordinary expenses to a minimum. In a memorandum to the Gonfaloniere, Machiavelli bitterly attacked the wealthy citizens who always raised difficulties when they were expected to make sacrifices.¹⁶ In his draft for the Ordinanza, Machiavelli gave much attention to the financial aspects of this law. He discussed the administrative apparatus that ought to be established to secure regular payments; because the conscripted men needed to come together for a few hours of military training only once or twice a month, and otherwise had to be paid only in wartime when they were absent from home, the expenses of the Ordinanza seemed to him foreseeable and could be provided from regular taxes. The concrete result would be a diminution of the influence of the wealthy elites, hostile to Soderini, and a shift away from their domination over foreign policy. At the outset, the Florentines, Machiavelli among them, limited conscription to the peasants, who were suppressed by the towns and looked to Florence for recourse and accordingly were loyal. That a militia would fight willingly, perhaps even enthusiastically, only if its members were well treated by the state in which they lived was evident to Machiavelli. Machiavelli expected—or at least hoped—that, after the militia had stood its first tests, the advantages of a conscript army would become clear and the resistance to the extension of the Ordinanza to the city of Florence could be overcome. With arms in the hands of the people, the influence of the wealthy upper classes would be diminished and the popular regime would be stabilized.

Machiavelli took an intense interest in the formation of the militia. In some districts he himself selected the men who were to serve in the militia, and supervised their drill. He arranged for a parade of the militia on the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. Machiavelli was in actual command of the various militia companies when they were employed before Pisa in the last stages of the siege. The surrender of the city confirmed him in his conviction of the correctness of his military ideas. Even the return of the Medici, after a disastrous defeat of the militia before Prato, did not shake him in these convictions.

In his *Florentine History* Machiavelli took particular pleasure in

¹⁶ Ibid., 412-16.

describing the battles fought by the condottieri on Italian soil in the fifteenth century. In 1423, in the battle of Zagonara, a victory "famous throughout all Italy, none was killed except Lodovico degli Obizzi and he, together with two of his men, was thrown from his horse and suffocated in the mud." In the battle of Anghiari "lasting from the 20th to the 24th hour, only one man was killed and he was not wounded or struck down by a valiant blow but fell from his horse and was trampled to death." This contemptuous and derisive picture of the Italian condottieri is obviously unfair; some of them were competent soldiers, courageous, with a strong feeling for honor and reputation.¹⁷ But Machiavelli's aim was not historical truth and objectivity. During his years in office three battles had been fought that had aroused wonder and fear all over Italy: Cerignola, where Gonsalvo da Cordoba's superbly drilled Spaniards defeated the French and drove them out of Naples, the French victory of Agnadello where the discord of their condottieri cost the Venetians their *terra ferma*, and Ravenna, where the tempestuous attack of Gaston de Foix brought the French victory over the Spanish and papal troops and which is believed to have been the bloodiest battle of the entire century. Machiavelli made it evident to his contemporaries, to whom these battles were a subject of much discussion, that a new era of war had opened.

III

In *The Prince* Machiavelli promised fame to a new ruler who would introduce new laws of warfare; the reader can have little doubt that Machiavelli was the man who knew what these new rules were. And it is also clear that the new revolutionary doctrine will be presented in his book *The Art of War*. But the student of this book will be astonished and perhaps disappointed because he will find in this book something very different from a "new" modern theory. The problem lies in the word "new." In our illusionistic belief that the future must be better than the past and the present, "new" seems to us the opposite of "old." But before the idea of progress had taken hold over the European mind people saw what happened mainly as a decline from a high point that lay in the past. The situation at the beginning set the ideal norm for humanists of the Renaissance: a perfect world had existed in classical times.

Machiavelli was a humanistically educated man: it was particularly Rome that demonstrated to him the possibility of the rise of a city-republic to world power, and therefore was for him the embodiment of an ideal

¹⁷ Battle of Zagonara: *Florentine History*, bk. 4, ch. 6; battle of Anghiari: *ibid.*, bk. 5, ch. 33. For a more positive evaluation of the condottieri see Michael E. Mallett, *Mercenaries and Their Masters* (London, 1974).

republic. A characteristic example of the extent to which he modelled his views in accordance with those that he believed the Romans had held is a memorandum he wrote as Secretary of the Office of Ten in answer to the question how the people of Arezzo, who had revolted against Florence, ought to be treated after Florentine rule had been restored. The memorandum began by explaining what, according to Livy, Lucio Furio Camillo had done after the people of Latium had rebelled.¹⁸

The *new* laws of warfare therefore, which Machiavelli wanted to see introduced in Italy, were the *old* laws of the Roman military order. To a large extent his true principles of military warfare are attempts to show on the basis of ancient sources how the Romans conducted war. However, it ought always to be kept in mind that Machiavelli's aim was not a historically correct reconstruction of facts. He wanted to deduce the laws and principles that stood behind the facts of Roman military history, and show their applicability to the present. Certainly Machiavelli's idea of Rome is a utopia and he used facts to build up the picture that was already in his mind. But in his steady striving for discovering the general rule behind a particular event or an individual action, he penetrates to the basic issues of war and military order.

Of Machiavelli's political writings, only *The Art of War* was published during his lifetime. In all likelihood Machiavelli wrote this book with its impact on the public of his time in mind. It fit the literary and scholarly conventions of the time.¹⁹ His ideas are presented in the form of a dialogue among Florentine patricians and the condottiere, Fabrizio Colonna.²⁰ The organization of the Roman army and the Roman methods of warfare are described on the basis of ancient sources, particularly Vegetius, Frontinus, and Polybius, from whose works sometimes lengthy passages are translated.²¹ According to Machiavelli or, perhaps more precisely, according to Fabrizio Colonna, the main speaker of the dialogue, the Roman armies were a carefully selected militia whose soldiers came from rural areas. The Roman armies were of moderate size, and foot soldiers were their backbone; the value of the cavalry in a battle

¹⁸ Marchand, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, 427.

¹⁹ For recent discussions of Machiavelli's indebtedness to humanist notions, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975) and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1978).

²⁰ An English translation of Machiavelli's *Arte della guerra*—with the title *The Art of War*—has been published in the Library of Liberal Arts by the Bobbs-Merrill Company (Indianapolis, 1965). The translation is the revised text of an eighteenth-century translation and is not always correct. The edition has an excellent introduction by Neal Wood and contains a useful selected bibliography.

²¹ For a special investigation of Machiavelli's dependence on these sources, see L. Arthur Bird, "Le fonti letterarie di Machiavelli nell'Arte della Guerra," *Atti della Accademia dei Lincei*, series 5, vol. 4 (1896), pt. 1, pp. 187-261.

was very limited, although they were useful in reconnoitering and in preventing supplies reaching the enemy. Machiavelli's emphasis on the infantry as the core of the Roman army implies criticism and rejection of the condottieri, the core of whose armies was formed by heavy cavalry; moreover, because, as the Ordinanza had proved, Italian cities could organize a militia, imitation of the Roman example was in the realm of possibility. For Machiavelli this possibility of resurrecting the Roman military system justified a very detailed description of Roman army practice. He described the different units into which the army was divided, the chain of command, the drawing up of the army in battle order and its operations during the battle, the selection of campsites, and the attack and defense of fortified places. Machiavelli clearly delighted in establishing with precision how the Romans proceeded, and the Renaissance admiration for everything that came from the classical world might have enabled his sixteenth-century readers to take interest in all these details. For today's student of Machiavelli, *The Art of War* is not his most exciting work.

It could not be entirely limited to an explanation of the Roman military system because Machiavelli had to discuss an obvious objection to the applicability of the Roman model to his own times: the invention of artillery, which had introduced an element in warfare that seemed to make the Roman methods obsolete. Fabrizio's answer to this objection is brief because, as he explains, this issue had been discussed at length at other places—an allusion to the seventeenth chapter of the second book of Machiavelli's *Discourses*.

Fabrizio's chief argument was that artillery is inaccurate; its shots are frequently too high or too low. Moreover artillery is slow and difficult to move: in a battle it would be easy to take the artillery by storm; a battle is decided in hand-to-hand fighting in which there is no room for action by artillery. Finally, artillery is of greater use to the attacker than to the defender, particularly in the siege of a town, and since the great strength of the Roman army was its capacity for attack, artillery might be used to reinforce the Roman methods of warfare. It does not invalidate them.²²

But the discussion or—more correctly—the refutation of the revolutionary significance of the invention of gunpowder does not entirely remove the modern world from encroaching upon Machiavelli's ideal Rome. Machiavelli states that the aim of war must be to face an enemy in the field and to defeat him there; this is the only way “to bring a war to a happy conclusion.”²³

²² This discussion follows the description of a battle in book 3 of *The Art of War*.

²³ “. . . non condurrà mai una guerra a onore;” from book 1.

Machiavelli's *Art of War* is divided into seven books and a good part of the third book, which is in the center, is taken up with the destruction of an imaginary battle. Moreover this fictitious battle is placed in the present and is reported from the point of view of an eyewitness. "Do you not hear our artillery. . . . See with what virtù our men charge. . . . See how our general encourages his men and assures them of victory. . . . Behold what havoc our men wreak among the enemy; see with what virtù, confidence and coolness they press upon the enemies. . . . What carnage! How many wounded men! They are beginning to flee. . . . The battle is over; we have won a glorious victory.'" ²⁴ Although the rest of *The Art of War* is concerned with the technical aspects of military organization—weaponry, marching order, line of command, fortifications—the section on the battle concentrates on the human qualities needed in war: courage, obedience, enthusiasm, and ferocity.

We have said that in *The Art of War* Machiavelli makes compromises with convention. In the preface of the book he wrote that the rulers of ancient times took care to inspire all their subjects, and particularly their soldiers, with fidelity, love of peace, and fear of God. "Who ought to be fonder of peace than soldiers whose life is placed in jeopardy by war?" ²⁵ Readers of *The Prince* and the *Discorsi* will doubt that these sentences reflect Machiavelli's true sentiments. *The Prince* and the *Discorsi* are books on political rules and behavior and not on military organization and war, but when we want to enter into Machiavelli's ideas about war, we must study them. We find nothing about the desirability of peace; in *The Prince* and the *Discorsi* war appears as an inescapable, grandiose, and terrifying force. In these works the world appears in permanent flux. Machiavelli does not share the widespread belief of his time that man is entirely in the hands of Fortuna, but he acknowledges Fortuna's power; only when people and states make themselves as strong and powerful as possible can they resist becoming a helpless toy in her hands. It is very natural, therefore, for states and their rulers to wish to expand and to conquer. War is the most essential activity of political life.

The continued existence of struggles and uncertainties patterns the character and the methods of war: there is no safe course. Risks must be taken in these surroundings of uncertainties and dangers, wars ought to be ended as quickly as possible with the attainment of a definite result: the complete defeat of the enemy. Wars ought to be "short and sharp." ²⁶ A quick decision, however, can be reached only in a battle. Because

²⁴ From book 3; in the English translation pp. 92-94 (see note 20).

²⁵ "In quale debbe essere più amore di pace, che in quello che solo dalla guerra puote essere offeso?"

²⁶ "Fare le guerre, come dicano i Franciosi, corte e grosse," *Discorsi*, II, 6.

everything depends on the outcome of the battle, you ought to do everything to make sure of victory; you should use your full forces even if the enemy seems of inferior strength. Decision by battle is the aim of every military campaign, which must be a planned and coordinated operation. Command, therefore, must be in the hands of one man. If the state is a monarchy, the ruler himself ought to be the commanding general. But republics too should entrust their army in wartime to one commander who should have unlimited authority; that is what the Romans had done who had left all the details of a campaign "to the discretion and authority of the consul."²⁷

Machiavelli fully recognized that the "short and sharp" war that he envisaged demanded involvement of the soldiers' passions, and would be a ferocious war. For Machiavelli the brutality inherent in war had its ambiguous consequences. It had dangers but also possibilities. The dangers were that the great masses of soldiers, when the struggle became confused and vehement, would no longer obey but think only of their own salvation. They might start looting, hoping to exploit the struggle for their personal advantage. The army would disintegrate. The importance of discipline and training is emphasized again and again in *The Prince* and the *Discorsi*. Military success depends on order and discipline. Natural courage is not enough. Machiavelli observed with approval that the German cities "hold military exercise in high repute and have many regulations for maintaining them."²⁸ Training is never finished or completed. A wise leader should keep the necessity of training always in mind and insist on it in peacetime as well as in wartime. But even the bonds that training and discipline create cannot guarantee obedience. They must be reinforced by fear of harsh punishment. Severity and harshness are needed to hold a political body together.²⁹ "A prince must not mind incurring the charge of cruelty for the purpose of keeping his subjects united and faithful"; "it is much safer to be feared than loved." According to Machiavelli this general political rule was particularly appropriate to the command of an army. Hannibal's "inhuman cruelty" was necessary to keep his forces, "composed of men of all nations and fighting in foreign countries," united; writers who admire Hannibal as a mighty hero and blame him for his cruelty are thoughtless; his cruelty was a principal cause of his success.

Coercion, however, needs to be supplemented by measures of a very different character. A spiritual bond that will inspire heroic action must

²⁷ *Discorsi*, II, 33.

²⁸ *The Prince*, ch. 10.

²⁹ For this and the following, see the famous chapter 17 of *The Prince*: "An sit melius amari quam timeri, vel e contra."

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be created among the soldiers of an army. Such a bond is most directly produced by necessity; even if a situation is not hopeless, a general ought to emphasize that the dangers of defeat are great, so that the soldiers fight with the courage of desperation. The strongest incitement to courage and enthusiasm, however, is aroused by a feeling of personal involvement and moral obligation. War service must be considered fulfillment of a religious duty.³⁰ Machiavelli believed that in the ancient world the pomp and show of religious ceremonies—"the ferocious and bloody nature of the sacrifice by the slaughter of many animals and the familiarity with this terrible sight"—intoxicated men with bellicose zeal. The Christian religion has created difficulties to the development of warlike virtues because it "places the supreme happiness in humility, lowliness and a contempt for worldly objects"; it has made men feeble. However, even if the relationship between religion and martial courage that existed in the ancient world cannot be revived; religion is compatible with love for one's country in Christianity, and sacrificing one's life for one's *patria* has been compared to the martyrdom of saints. In Machiavelli's thought the appeal to patriotism could be and was one of the most powerful forces in inspiring an army to heroic deeds.

However, patriotic enthusiasm could be expected only of an army composed by men fighting for their native land. Machiavelli's most fundamental thesis, emphasized in all his writings, is that the military forces of a ruler or of a republic must be composed by the inhabitants of the state that the army is expected to defend. "The present ruin of Italy is the result of nothing else than reliance upon mercenaries."³¹ "They are disunited, ambitious, without discipline, disloyal, overbearing among friends, cowardly among enemies; there is no fear of God, no loyalty to men." The necessary prerequisite of success in war—confidence and discipline—"can exist only where the troops are natives of the same country and have lived together for some time." Thus, the first crucial step in military reform which Machiavelli envisages is that the state forms an army composed of its own inhabitants, that a state has its "*proprie armi*."³²

Machiavelli is convinced, however, that citizens will be willing to fight and die for their ruler or government only when they are content in the society in which they live. "There is a great difference between an army that is well content and fights for its own reputation and one that is ill disposed and has to fight only for the interests of others." This thesis

³⁰ *Discorsi*, II, 2; for patriotism as religious duty also in Christianity, see Ernst Kantorowicz, "Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Political Thought" in his *Selected Studies* (New York, 1965), 308-24.

³¹ For this and the following, see particularly *The Prince*, ch. 12.

³² *Discorsi*, I, 43.

of the close connection and interrelationship between political and military institutions is the most important and also the most revolutionary argument of Machiavelli's notions.³³ From the draft of the law for the establishment of a Florentine Ordinanza on, the statement that "la justitia et le armi" belong together can be found in almost all his writings. In *The Prince* he wrote that "there must be good laws where there are good arms, and where there are good arms there must be good laws,"³⁴ and at the end of the *Discorsi* he gave this notion of the interdependence of military and political organization its most categorical formulation: "Although I have elsewhere maintained that the foundation of states is a good military organization, yet it seems to me not superfluous to report here that without such a military organization there can neither be good laws nor anything else good."³⁵

IV

Machiavelli's *Art of War* was a successful book: in the course of the sixteenth century twenty-one editions appeared and it was translated into French, English, German, and Latin.³⁶ Montaigne named Machiavelli next to Caesar, Polybius, and Commynes as an authority on military affairs.³⁷ Although in the seventeenth century changing military methods brought other writers to the fore, Machiavelli was still frequently quoted. In the eighteenth century, the Marshal de Saxe leaned heavily on him when he composed his *Reveries upon the Art of War* (1757), and Algarotti—though without much basis—saw in Machiavelli the master who had taught Frederick the Great the tactics by which he astounded Europe.³⁸ Like most people concerned with military matters, Jefferson had Machiavelli's *Art of War* in his library,³⁹ and when the War of 1812 increased American interest in problems of war, *The Art of War* was brought out in a special American edition.⁴⁰

³³ Ibid. Sometimes it is difficult for Machiavelli to separate the usefulness of military measures from their impact on domestic policy. Machiavelli is very skeptical about the value of fortresses, but the question whether they serve to strengthen or to undermine a regime plays a crucial role in these discussions; see "To Fortify or Not to Fortify? Machiavelli's Contribution to a Renaissance Debate" in J. R. Hale, *Renaissance War Studies* (London, 1983), 189-209.

³⁴ *The Prince*, ch. 12.

³⁵ *Discorsi*, III, 31.

³⁶ See Sergio Bertelli and Piero Innocenti, *Bibliografia Machiavelliana* (Verona, 1979).

³⁷ Montaigne, *Essais*, bk. 2, ch. 34: "Observations sur les moyens de faire la guerre de Julius Caesar."

³⁸ Francesco Algarotti, lettres 8 and 9 of his work *Scienza militare del Segretario Fiorentino*, in F. Algarotti, *Opere*, vol. 5 (Venice, 1791).

³⁹ Catalogue of the Library of Congress 1815, i.e., Thomas Jefferson's library.

⁴⁰ *The Art of War in Seven Books Written by Nicholas Machiavel . . . to Which Is Added Hints Relative to Warfare by a Gentleman of the State of New York* (Albany, 1815).

This continued interest in Machiavelli as a military thinker was not only caused by the fame of his name; some of the recommendations made in *The Art of War*—those on training, discipline, and classification, for instance—gained increasing practical importance in early modern Europe when armies came to be composed of professionals coming from the most different social strata. This does not mean that the progress of military art in the sixteenth century—in drilling, in dividing an army into distinct units, in planning and organizing campaigns—was due to the influence of Machiavelli. Instead, the military innovators of the time were pleased to find a work in which aspects of their practice were explained and justified. Moreover, in the sixteenth century, with its wide knowledge of ancient literature and its deep respect for classical wisdom, it was commonly held that the Romans owed their military triumphs to their emphasis on discipline and training. Machiavelli's attempt to present Roman military organization as the model for the armies of his time was therefore not regarded as extravagant. At the end of the sixteenth century, for instance, Justus Lipsius, in his influential writings on military affairs, also treated the Roman military order as a permanently valid model.

However, it ought also to be admitted that in several respects Machiavelli misjudged what was possible and feasible in his own day.

In the past, and sometimes still in our time, Machiavelli has been assigned a prominent place in the development of military thought because of his advocacy of conscription: his military thought was of a seminal character; he was able to foresee what would happen in the future. Although the assumption of the prophetic character of Machiavelli's military ideas might be pleasing to students and admirers of Machiavelli, it would be a mistake to attribute great importance to his advocacy of conscription. His idea of a conscript army was that of a city-state militia, a part-time military service patterned on the model of the ancient city-republics, but hardly suited for the army of a territorial state. Moreover, the future, at least in the two or three centuries following Machiavelli, did not belong to conscript armies but to that kind of soldier whom Machiavelli despised and ridiculed: the mercenary, the professional.

A factor that Machiavelli clearly misjudged in its importance contributed decisively to this development: the equipment of soldiers with firearms, and the increased role of artillery. As a result, specialized personnel and permanent military establishments formed the necessary core of any army. Expenses, particularly expenses for artillery, grew. Although Machiavelli was aware of the financial needs of any military organization, he certainly had not taken fully into account the growing costs of military equipment with guns and rifles, the interrelationship between economic

strength and military strength. Only rulers of larger territories could afford an army, and with its help force the estates or their smaller neighbors under their control. Absolutism had to rely on standing armies; each was dependent upon the other.

But Machiavelli's influence on military thought reached far beyond the technical-military sphere. If his view of the exemplary character of the Roman military organization might have misled him in underestimating the impact of new weapons and of the economy on military developments, his admiration for Rome was crucial in opening his eyes to the role of war in modern times. In the centuries of the Middle Ages, the conduct of war had been the function of a particular class of society and had been shaped by its values and code of honor. The first and crucial lesson that Machiavelli drew from his study of the ancient world was that defense of a state was the task not of a special privileged group but should be the concern of all those who live in the same society.

It was of even greater importance that the study of Roman historians helped him to understand the international system of his time: states were steadily growing and expanding; they were permanently involved in war, seeking to extend their power and territories, and fighting for their existence in fending off others trying to subdue them. Machiavelli was one of the first to grasp the competitive nature of the modern state system—that as his reluctant follower, Frederick II of Prussia, wrote: “s’agrandir” is the “principe permanent” of the policy of a state—and to conclude that the existence of a state depends on its capacity for war.

Because the life of the state depends on the excellence of its army, the political institutions must be organized in such a manner that they create favorable preconditions for the functioning of the military organization. That is one thesis that permeates all of Machiavelli's military discussions—in *The Art of War*, *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. The other thesis is that the aim of war is to subject the enemy to your will; a military campaign therefore must be a planned operation, under a unified command, culminating in a battle of decision. What the appropriate means are—what the correct strategy is—to carry out this aim will depend on the particular circumstances under which a campaign is conducted.

Machiavelli's insight into the nature of war and the role of the military establishment in the structure of society is the foundation of his military thought; the problems that these questions raise are not bound to a particular historical period. Thus, even when, with the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon, military organization and the conduct of war had assumed new forms, Machiavelli's ideas retained their vitality.

To a surprising degree, military thought since the sixteenth century

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has proceeded on the foundations that Machiavelli laid. This is not to say that Machiavelli's recommendations were accepted as final truth. Yet further discussion did not develop in opposition to his view, but rather as an expansion and enlargement of his ideas. For instance, however important Machiavelli's idea of the decisiveness of battle was, it soon became clear that there was a real need for a much more thorough analysis of its consequences. Military theory could not stop with making rules for the formation of the correct battle order; it had also to scrutinize the course of events during the combat action. On the other hand, if a battle constituted the climax of war, it is clear that the whole campaign had to be planned and analyzed in respect to the decisive battle. Such considerations show that the role which theoretical preparation and planned direction of military action played in modern war was much greater than Machiavelli had envisaged. He had made a perfunctory acknowledgment of the importance of the role of the general, but in reality he had hardly said more than that a general should know history and geography. Later, the question of planning in military leadership and of the intellectual training of the general became central problems in military thought. In developing these problems, military thought advanced far beyond Machiavelli, yet these more modern conclusions were a logical continuation of the inquiry that he had started.

Nevertheless, there is one aspect in modern military thought that not only cannot be connected with Machiavelli's thought, but is in sharp contrast to it. Machiavelli was mainly concerned with a general norm, valid for the military organizations of all states and times; modern military thought emphasizes that actions under different historical circumstances must differ and that military institutions will be satisfactory only when they are fitted to the particular constitution and conditions of an individual state. Moreover, Machiavelli's emphasis on the establishment of military institutions and conduct of war according to rational and generally valid rules gave great weight to the rational factor in military matters. Although Machiavelli began as a vehement critic of the chesslike wars of the fifteenth century, eighteenth-century generals returned to some extent to wars of maneuvering, and this development is not entirely against the line of thought in military science that Machiavelli had started. When war is seen as determined by rational laws, it is only logical to leave nothing to chance and to expect that the adversary will throw his hand in when he has been brought into position where the game is rationally lost. The result of considering war as a mere science or at least of overvaluing the rational element in military affairs leads easily to the view that war can be decided quite as well on paper as on the battlefield.

It has since been realized that war is not only a science but also an

art. With the end of the eighteenth century and of the Age of Reason, there was a sudden recognition of the importance of other than rational factors. Not the general element, but the individual and unique feature of a phenomenon was considered as of supreme importance; the imponderables were seen as no less influential than the rational and calculable elements.

The introduction of these new intellectual trends—of the realization of the importance of uniqueness and individuality, of the recognition of the creative and intuitive element aside from the scientific—into military theory is connected with the name of Clausewitz. It is remarkable, however, that Clausewitz, who usually is extremely critical and contemptuous of other military writers, is not only very careful in examining suggestions made by Machiavelli but concedes that Machiavelli had “a very sound judgment in military matters.”⁴¹ This is an indication that, despite the new features which Clausewitz introduced into military theory and which are outside the framework of Machiavelli’s thought, he agreed with Machiavelli in his basic point of departure. Like Machiavelli he was convinced that the validity of any special analysis of military problems depended on a general perception, on a correct concept of the nature of war. All doctrines of Clausewitz have their origin in an analysis of the general nature of war. Thus, even this great revolutionary among the military thinkers of the nineteenth century did not overthrow Machiavelli’s fundamental thesis but incorporated it in his own.

⁴¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *Strategie*, ed. Eberhard Kessel (Hamburg, 1937), 41. See also the discussion of Clausewitz’s response to Fichte’s essay on Machiavelli in Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (Oxford and New York, 1976; repr. Princeton, 1985), 169-79.