



Revista

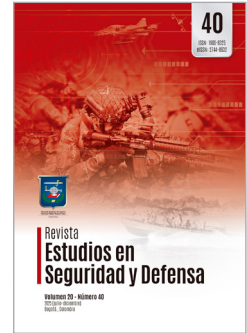
Estudios en Seguridad y Defensa

Volume 20, Issue 40, July-December 2025

Bogotá, D.C, Colombia

ISSN: 1900-8325 • eISSN: 2744-8932

Página web: <https://esdegestimas.edu.co/index.php/resd>



Classic Approaches to Contemporary Warfare: An Analysis Based on the Strategy of the Russian Ukrainian War

Planteamientos clásicos en la guerra contemporánea: Un análisis desde la estrategia de la guerra ruso-ucraniana

Jaime Ernesto Gutiérrez Murillo 

Ibero-American School of Political and Social Innovation, Santiago de Cali, Colombia

Juan Camilo Cárdenas Luna 

Ibero-American School of Political and Social Innovation, Santiago de Cali, Colombia

APA CITATION:

Gutiérrez Murillo, J. E., & Cárdenas Luna, J. C. (2025). Classic Approaches to Contemporary Warfare: An Analysis Based on the Strategy of the Russian Ukrainian War. *Estudios en Seguridad y Defensa*, 20(40), 223-240.

<https://doi.org/10.25062/1900-8325.5066>



Published online: **December 30, 2025**



[Submit an article to the Journal](#)



The articles published by the *Revista Estudios en Seguridad y Defensa* are Open Access under a Creative Commons: [Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives](#).

Classic Approaches to Contemporary Warfare: An Analysis Based on the Strategy of the Russian Ukrainian War

Planteamientos clásicos en la guerra contemporánea: Un análisis desde la estrategia de la guerra ruso-ucraniana

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25062/1900-8325.5066>

Jaime Ernesto Gutiérrez Murillo 

Ibero-American School of Political and Social Innovation, Santiago de Cali, Colombia

Juan Camilo Cárdenas Luna 

Ibero-American School of Political and Social Innovation, Santiago de Cali, Colombia

Abstract

This article analyzes the Russian Ukrainian conflict through the strategic approaches of Carl von Clausewitz, Henri Jomini, Basil Liddell Hart, and David Galula. It examines the strategic errors and virtues of both countries, such as the underestimation of Clausewitz's "point of culmination," the dispersion of forces contrary to Jomini, the ineffective use of brute force versus Liddell Hart's indirect strategy, and the failure to win over the civilian population in the areas of operations according to Galula. The analysis reveals the validity of classical principles in modern conflicts, highlighting the need for flexibility and adaptation. In addition, a new paradigm is proposed regarding the effectiveness of international humanitarian law in contemporary wars, underscoring its limitations in the face of nuclear powers and the reconfiguration of the global order.

Keywords: Geopolitics; International Security; Russia; Ukraine; War.

Este artículo analiza el conflicto ruso-ucraniano a través de los planteamientos estratégicos de Carl von Clausewitz, Henri Jomini, Basil Liddell Hart y David Galula. Se examinan los errores y virtudes estratégicos de ambos países, como la subestimación del "punto de culminación" clauswitziano, la dispersión de fuerzas contraria a Jomini, el uso ineficaz de la fuerza bruta frente a la estrategia indirecta de Liddell Hart y el fracaso en ganar a la población civil de las zonas del área de operaciones según Galula. El análisis revela la vigencia de los principios clásicos en conflictos modernos, destacando la necesidad de flexibilidad y adaptación. Además, se plantea un nuevo paradigma sobre la efectividad del Derecho Internacional Humanitario en guerras contemporáneas, subrayando sus límites ante potencias nucleares y la reconfiguración del orden global.

Palabras Clave: Geopolítica; Guerra; Rusia; Seguridad Internacional; Ucrania.

Resumen



Reflection article

Received: September 29, 2025 • Accepted: October 28, 2025

Contact: Jaime Ernesto Gutiérrez Murillo  consultoria@jaimegurierrez.co

Introduction

The Russian Ukrainian conflict, triggered by the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, represents a paradigmatic case for strategic analysis in the 21st century. This confrontation has not only reconfigured the European geopolitical landscape but has also tested the fundamental principles of classical military approaches in a scenario marked by the hybridization of conventional and asymmetric tactics, the use of advanced technology, and the centrality of information warfare. This paper aims to examine this conflict through the postulates of four classical thinkers whose ideas continue to offer relevant frameworks for analysis and analysis: Carl von Clausewitz, with his emphasis on the political nature of war; Henri Jomini, who systematized the operational principles of strategy; Basil Liddell Hart, advocate of indirect maneuver; and David Galula, theorist of asymmetric warfare and counterinsurgency. Their perspectives, although developed in different historical contexts, reveal surprising relevance when applied to the current conflict, demonstrating that the fundamentals of strategy transcend technological and temporal changes.

The document is structured into several sections that systematically analyze the Russian Ukrainian conflict from the strategic perspectives of Clausewitz, Jomini, Liddell Hart, and Galula. After an initial summary, there is an introduction that contextualizes the study. Next, a section is devoted to each theorist, detailing their key concepts and theoretical relevance: Clausewitz with his political view of war, Jomini with his scientific principles, Liddell Hart with indirect strategy, and Galula with asymmetric warfare. Subsequently, the conflict itself is analyzed, describing its development from 2022 and its geopolitical implications until the spring of 2025. The discussion applies the approaches to events, evaluating the errors and virtues in the strategies of the states in conflict. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings, reflects on the validity of classical principles, and raises questions about the effective application of international humanitarian law in contemporary conflicts.

Methodology

This work is based on a qualitative analysis exercise, in which the Russian Ukrainian conflict is examined as a contemporary laboratory to test the validity of classical strategic approaches. It is not a quantitative study or a strict empirical verification, but rather an interpretative approach that brings military theory into dialogue with recent events in the war.

The spatio-temporal delimitation places the analysis between the start of the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, and developments up to the spring of 2025. This period allows us to observe both the failure of the initial offensive and the subsequent transformation of the conflict into a prolonged war of attrition, a scenario conducive to applying the theoretical frameworks of Clausewitz, Jomini, Liddell Hart, and Galula.

The target population is understood in two dimensions: on the one hand, the states directly involved in the conflict—Russia and Ukraine—with their political-military structures and strategic decisions; and on the other, civil society, whose resistance and mobilization are an indispensable element in evaluating classical postulates, especially those of Clausewitz and Galula.

The method adopted is that of a case study, as it allows for in-depth exploration of a particular conflict and examination considering historical strategic traditions. The Russian Ukrainian war is not studied here as a succession of isolated military events, but as a complex phenomenon where political, logistical, social, and international dimensions converge.

The analysis was based on an extensive review of documents, including classic works by the authors studied, specialized academic literature, research center reports, the international press, and official sources. The methodological exercise consisted of cross-referencing and contrasting these materials with the events of the conflict, looking for patterns of continuity and rupture with respect to theory.

Finally, the analysis strategy combined content analysis and critical interpretation, which made it possible to identify the strategic errors, tactical virtues, and tensions inherent in a conflict that, despite its contemporary nature, continues to demonstrate the validity of principles developed more than a century ago.

Classical thought

Carl von Clausewitz's approach

Carl von Clausewitz was a 19th-century Prussian military theorist, known for his influential work *On War* (Vom Kriege, 1832). Although a classic work on strategy, Clausewitz develops several fundamental concepts that are particularly relevant to the analysis at hand. He is often associated with the phrase “*War is the continuation of politics by other means*”. For him, war is not an isolated or purely military phenomenon but is intrinsically linked to the political objectives of a state. The use of military force is therefore an instrument for achieving political ends that cannot be achieved through diplomacy or dialogue (Rodríguez, 2015).

In this regard, Clausewitz emphasizes that the conduct of war must be subordinate to political objectives, which determine the intensity of the conflict and the allocation of military resources. The latter is part of strategic thinking, which, according to Gallardo and Faundes (2014), combines critical thinking and creative thinking, allowing not only immediate problems to be solved, but also innovative and sustainable long-term solutions to be generated. In this sense, strategic thinking is not limited to the military sphere,

but encompasses political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, becoming a fundamental tool for governance and the comprehensive security of states. Thus, while strategy and tactics focus on the “what” and “how” of actions, strategic thinking deals with the “why” and “what for,” establishing the theoretical and practical foundations that guide collective action toward the achievement of higher objectives.

In summary, Clausewitz defines war as a “chameleon,” that is, a phenomenon that changes form depending on the political, social, and military context. This implies that there is no single or rigid formula for waging war, as each conflict has its own particular dynamics. This is where the genius of the strategist comes into play, who can contemplate the ability to adapt, both in the planning and execution of strategy in the political arena and in the theater of war. Far beyond any brilliant tactical implementation, which simply defines the outcome of a battle, it is this strategic genius that is essential to contemplate in military commanders and political leaders.

Henri Jomini’s Approach

Henri Jomini, a Swiss French military theorist, is recognized as one of the leading strategic thinkers of the 19th century. His most influential work, *“Précis de l’art de la guerre”* (1838), systematizes the principles of warfare and establishes a theoretical framework that has influenced generations of military strategists. Jomini focused on conventional warfare between states, emphasizing the importance of planning, organization, and the application of scientific principles to military strategy (Poczynok, 2012). He proposed a series of universal principles that, according to him, were applicable to any military conflict.

He was one of the first theorists to treat war as a science, arguing that its principles could be studied and applied systematically. For him, military strategy did not depend solely on the intuitive genius of commanders but could be learned and perfected through study and practice. This scientific approach contrasted with the more philosophical and chaotic view of war proposed by Carl von Clausewitz.

Jomini illustrated his principles with historical examples, particularly from the Napoleonic wars, in which he participated as an officer and observer. He analyzed campaigns such as Austerlitz and Borodino to demonstrate how the correct application of his principles could lead to victory, while ignorance or misapplication resulted in defeat. For example, at the Battle of Austerlitz (1805), Napoleon Bonaparte, whom Jomini admired, applied the principle of concentration of forces to defeat a numerically superior allied army. He argued that Napoleon’s victory was due to his ability to identify the decisive point on the battlefield and concentrate his forces there. Jomini’s legacy lives on in modern military doctrine, especially in strategic and operational planning, as “many of his theories have evolved, but their essence and purpose remain alive to this day” (Salinas, 2024).

Henri Jomini contributed significantly to the thinking on warfare by systematizing its principles and treating military strategy as a science. His emphasis on the concentration of forces, lines of operation, and the importance of strategic points remains relevant to understanding the dynamics of conventional conflicts. Although his approach has been criticized for its rigidity (Callhoun, M. 2011), his work provides an invaluable theoretical framework for analyzing warfare from a strategic and operational perspective.

Basil Liddell Hart's approach

Basil Liddell Hart was a British military historian and theorist whose ideas have had a profound impact on modern strategic thinking. Known for his focus on indirect strategy, Liddell Hart developed a theory of warfare that emphasizes maneuver, surprise, and minimizing physical and moral attrition. His most influential works, such as *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (1941), offer an analytical framework for understanding how to achieve strategic objectives at the lowest possible cost.

Liddell Hart (1941) criticized the obsession of many strategists with brute force and the destruction of the enemy, an approach he associated with theorists such as Clausewitz. Instead, he proposed that true strategy should focus on maneuvering and flexibility. For him, war was not simply a clash of forces, but a game of intelligence and adaptation. This approach is reflected in his analysis of historical campaigns, such as those of Hannibal Barca in the Second Punic War, whom he praised for his ability to destabilize Rome through bold and surprising maneuvers, rather than confronting it directly on its own territory.

Liddell Hart also emphasized the importance of morale in war. He argued that demoralizing the enemy could be as effective as defeating them physically. According to him, a demoralized army loses its combat capability, even if it retains its material strength. Therefore, indirect strategy seeks not only to damage the enemy's military capability, but also to undermine its will to fight, as he aptly states: "The supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without engaging in combat" (Liddell Hart, 1941).

His ideas can be seen in numerous historical and contemporary examples, one of the most notable being the German Blitzkrieg during World War II, where German forces used mobility, surprise, and concentration of forces to overwhelm their opponents (Hobson, 2010). Liddell Hart saw this combat practice as a validation of his ideas on indirect strategy. Furthermore, his ideas influenced the development of modern military doctrines, such as blitzkrieg and airborne operations. His emphasis on maneuver and surprise remains relevant in contemporary conflicts, where asymmetry and strategic, operational, and tactical innovation, associated with the grand strategic objective, are increasingly taking center stage.

Although Liddell Hart was widely recognized for his contributions, his thinking was not without criticism. Some argued that his focus on indirect strategy underestimated the importance of brute force in certain contexts, such as total wars or conflicts of attrition (van Creveld, 1991). Furthermore, his idealization of maneuver and surprise is not always applicable in scenarios where the enemy has significant advantages in resources or technology.

However, in the case under analysis, Liddell Hart's legacy endures and is applicable to the study of contemporary conflicts. His emphasis on flexibility, innovation, and exploiting the enemy's weaknesses has influenced strategists and commanders around the world. His work remains a benchmark for understanding the dynamics of modern conflicts and the importance of adaptation in strategy. Basil Liddell Hart revolutionized thinking about war by proposing an approach focused on indirect strategy, maneuver, and surprise. His emphasis on minimizing attrition and exploiting enemy weaknesses provides a valuable framework for analyzing both historical and contemporary conflicts.

David Galula's approach

David Galula's thinking on asymmetric warfare is developed in his work *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (1964), where he mainly addresses insurgency and counterinsurgency wars. This type of conflict is characterized by the disparity of forces and tactics between the actors involved, typically a conventional state and an insurgent group operating outside the traditional paradigms of war.

In an asymmetric war, one side (usually the state) has significant advantages in terms of military power, resources, and organization, while the other (the insurgents) is more fragile in conventional terms. However, the asymmetry lies in strategy: insurgents avoid direct confrontation and employ tactics such as ambushes, terrorism, propaganda, and support from the local population to compensate for their asymmetry in technological resources, war material, and number of combatants. Galula emphasizes that insurgency wars are not merely military conflicts but are fundamentally political in nature. Insurgents seek "a prolonged struggle conducted methodically, step by step, with the aim of achieving specific intermediate objectives that will ultimately enable them to overthrow the established power" (Galula, 2006).

In conclusion, Galula's approaches provide an analytical framework for understanding conflicts that go beyond traditional confrontations between states. His approach highlights the importance of underlying political causes and the centrality of the population in asymmetric wars. Galula emphasizes that, in both insurgency and counterinsurgency, success depends on the ability to win the support of the population and address the social, economic, and political roots of the conflict. This perspective allows for a deeper

understanding of the clashes between state and non-state forces, as well as the political and social dynamics that drive them.

Elements of the Russian Ukrainian War

On February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin announced the start of a “special military operation”—a term used by the Russian government—marking the beginning of a large-scale invasion of Ukrainian territory. The first attacks consisted of missile strikes on multiple regions, followed by a ground advance by Russian troops (Anna Pavlova, 2023). However, what Moscow hoped would be a quick campaign turned into a protracted conflict.

By the end of October 2023, Russian forces controlled approximately 17.95% of Ukrainian territory (Anna Pavlova, 2023), but their advance was slowed by a combination of Ukrainian resistance, logistical problems, and tactical errors (Ellmanns, 2023). The initial attempt to take Kyiv in a lightning offensive failed due to an underestimation of Ukrainian defensive capabilities and overconfidence in Russian military superiority (Ellmanns, 2025).

The Russian strategy was limited by its reliance on centralized logistics, based on rail lines and static supply corridors, which were vulnerable to Ukrainian attacks. This rigid structure made it difficult to resupply troops in hostile territory, creating operational bottlenecks (Ronald & Kinsey, 2023). Furthermore, the massive mobilization of volunteers (24.2% of casualties), prisoners (16.4%), and conscripted soldiers (11.5%)—according to data verified by Mediazona (2024)—reflects Russia’s difficulties in sustaining a prolonged war without resorting to further mobilization of non-professional troops.

In contrast, Ukraine has adopted a flexible and decentralized strategy, combining conventional warfare with asymmetric tactics. Its ability to make agile decisions on the battlefield, coupled with Western support in intelligence and weaponry, has allowed it to exploit Russian logistical weaknesses and launch effective counteroffensives (Ronald & Kinsey, 2023). However, the conflict has taken a devastating toll on its civilian population: more than 12,100 dead and 26,919 wounded (UN, cited in Anna Pavlova, 2023), due to indiscriminate bombing of critical infrastructure, hospitals, and residential areas.

In addition, at least 14,000 Ukrainian civilians have been detained by Russian forces since 2014, many used as “bargaining chips” in prisoner exchanges (Mediazona, 2024). At the geopolitical level, the war has redefined European security, framing the role of NATO and consolidating Ukraine as a symbol of resistance to Russian aggression. The narrative of a united Europe against Moscow’s expansionism has been strengthened, reconfiguring regional power dynamics (Deyermond, 2022). The conflict has shown that neither numerical superiority nor conventional power guarantee success without efficient logistics and a realistic assessment of the adversary.

While Russia struggles to overcome these shortcomings, Ukraine has taken advantage of its adaptability by actively defending its territory, especially from the fall of 2023 to the spring of 2025, albeit at the cost of currently having 20% of its territory occupied by Russian forces (Galán, et al., 2025). This active defense means high costs in terms of equipment, weapons, and manpower for a Russian army that is advancing slowly in the Donbas region and increasingly threatening the Kharkiv region, causing the Ukrainian army to progressively surrender territory as active defense positions become difficult to defend in human and material terms. The outcome will depend on the ability of both sides to sustain their war efforts in an increasingly grueling scenario, with political actors seeking to take advantage of their own national interests.

Discussion

Clausewitz's Perspective

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began with the Russian invasion in February 2022, can be analyzed through the prism of our four classic war theorists: Carl von Clausewitz, Henri Jomini, Basil Liddell Hart, and David Galula. Each offers a unique perspective that helps to understand both Russian and Ukrainian strategic errors and virtues.

Returning to Clausewitz, he conceptualizes war through what he calls the “trinity,” composed of three interdependent elements: Violence and hatred (the people): Represents the emotions and feelings of the population, such as hatred, nationalist fervor, or fear, which can drive and sustain a conflict; Chance and uncertainty (the military): This refers to the unpredictability of war, where factors such as friction and the “fog of war” complicate the execution of military plans, requiring commanders to constantly adapt to chaotic and confusing circumstances; Political rationality (the government): This corresponds to the strategic direction provided by political leaders, who define objectives and make decisions about the use of force.

The fog of war is particularly important to Clausewitz. It refers to the unpredictable obstacles that arise during a conflict, such as logistical problems, communication errors, technical or human failures. These factors make the execution of any military plan more difficult in practice than in theory. For its part, the “fog of war” describes the uncertainty inherent in military operations, where commanders lack clear and complete information about the battlefield, making decision-making difficult, even in the contemporary era, despite technological advances and where cyber defense and the use of satellites for both reconnaissance and communications missions play a fundamental role in deception strategy, making them the fog of contemporary warfare.

Although Clausewitz does not explicitly use the term, he is considered a precursor to the concept of “total war.” He argues that, under certain circumstances, war can tend toward an “absolute,” that is, an unrestricted conflict that involves the whole of society and mobilizes all a state’s resources. This type of war seeks the annihilation of the enemy, especially when political conditions demand it (Idalgo, 2023). However, in practice, most wars are limited, as states weigh the costs and benefits of escalating a conflict based on their political interests.

Clausewitz also analyzes the balance between offense and defense. He considers that defense is the strongest form of warfare, as it allows the defender to choose the terrain, prepare their positions, and wear down the attacker. This element is clearly represented in this conflict, with Ukraine increasingly implementing active defense, where from a distance, through kamikaze drones, anti-tank missiles, remotely installed mines, anti-aircraft missiles, and guided bombs, it confronts the advances of Russian troops, who, with a clear offensive intent, in order to conquer more territory and achieve a media and political victory, especially one that affects public opinion in Western states, assumes a high military cost in material and human resources, while the Ukrainian active defense progressively loses ground.

However, to achieve a decisive victory, the offensive is indispensable, as only through aggressive actions can political objectives be achieved. This analysis leads Clausewitz to introduce the concept of center of gravity, which refers to the enemy’s nerve center on which its overall balance and combat capability depend. This center can be its main army, its political leadership, the morale of its population, or its industrial resources. According to Clausewitz, strategy must focus on identifying and attacking this center of gravity to weaken and nullify the adversary’s will to fight.

Some of the centers of gravity are the political elite, economic resources, and the morale of the population. Throughout the war and at different junctures, Russia has defined different centers of gravity, which has also led it to define a center of gravity for the Ukrainian forces and, by not striking it quickly and decisively, to prolong the conflict and make it more exhausting than originally contemplated. This has been clear from the outset of the war, when Russia attacked the Donbas and the south from its western borders, attempting to overwhelm Ukrainian troops and cripple their communications and response capabilities, but with the center of gravity identified in taking the capital Kiev, in order to try to nullify the exercise of government and effective communication between the political command and the strategic military level, either through the capture, death, or flight of senior civilian and military commanders, as the international community suggested at one point by offering asylum to Zelensky and his cabinet.

A second moment that exemplifies the ineffective execution of Clausewitz’s principle of the enemy’s center of gravity was when the Russians, having missed the opportunity

to strike the first Ukrainian center of gravity, related to the centrality of command in Kiev, shifted the center of gravity to destroying Ukraine's energy infrastructure, attempting to undermine the Ukrainian people's will to fight, so that they would pressure their government to seek a negotiation with Russia that would obviously favor the latter. By the spring of 2025, the center of gravity identified by Russia to end this conflict definitively and decisively has shifted again, as it now seeks to impact public opinion in Western nations that send vital supplies of both weapons and financial and humanitarian aid that allow Ukraine to maintain its war effort. This center of gravity, which is more communicational than military, is more focused on the populations of the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

However, Clausewitz warns of the risks of over-extending an offensive, as the initial momentum of a successful attack can lead to overconfidence and an underestimation of logistical and operational challenges. To address this danger, he introduces the concept of the "point of culmination" (Kulminationspunkt), which represents the critical moment when an attacking force reaches the maximum limit of its offensive capacity, whether due to the exhaustion of its troops, the overextension of its supply lines, the growing resistance of the enemy, or the exhaustion of its strategic resources. Exceeding this threshold without consolidating gains or securing a solid rear can reverse the situation: instead of imposing its will, the attacker loses the initiative and exposes itself to devastating counterattacks that can nullify its previous advances.

The conflict in Eastern Europe presents three clear and vivid examples of this point, such as the attempt to consolidate the initial victory in the battle of Hostomel (2022), where the Russian army initially won a victory, but overestimated its own ability not only to maintain the position it had won, but also to logistically connect these advance troops with the support troops arriving later from Belarusian territory with the intention of encircling Kiev. Another example that will remain in the memory of many generations about this war will be the gigantic columns of armored vehicles waiting outside the roads leading to Kiev, which ended up being bombarded not only by Ukrainian 152mm artillery but also by the then-novel Bayraktar attack drones. The third moment that exemplifies the ignorance of this Clausewitzian principle occurred during the Ukrainian counteroffensive of 2023.

The Ukrainian army failed to reach its initial culmination point: it did not manage to break the Russian army's connectivity in the southern theater to divide it in two, nor did it penetrate Crimea after breaking the Zurovikin line. Although the objective was redefined towards Tokmak, this new goal was not achieved either, pushing Ukraine to the limit of its offensive capacity. The consequences were severe: enormous losses in equipment, armored vehicles, and highly trained soldiers (including forces trained in NATO countries), but even more critically, the erosion of credibility with its Western allies. They became

convinced that the war could not be won quickly and easily, but only through a long and costly process.

From Clausewitz's perspective, war is a political instrument, and in this case, Russia sought to impose its geopolitical objectives—such as preventing Ukraine from turning to the West by joining the European Union and NATO—through military force. However, it underestimated two key elements of Clausewitzian thinking: the “trinity of war” and the “point of culmination.” The trinity, which encompasses the government, the people, and the armed forces, was thrown off balance when the Kremlin failed to align its political objectives with its military reality and a massive national mobilization to support the stated objectives of this “special operation.” Meanwhile, Ukraine capitalized on the invasion by encouraging the nationalist fervor of its population, boosting the tactical flexibility of its army, and coordinating the state apparatus as a whole, setting aside internal differences to align themselves against the invader. Although the “culmination point” was supposed to be the capture of Kyiv, logistical overextension and the determined resistance of the Ukrainian population and army turned the initial advance into a costly retreat. Russia ignored Clausewitz's warning about the limits of offensive warfare, while Ukraine applied active defense, wearing down the invader before launching decisive counterattacks.

Jomini's Perspective

Before addressing Henri Jomini's perspective, it is worth recalling the core principles of his theory of war:

Concentration of forces: Jomini argued that the key to victory lies in concentrating one's forces at the decisive point on the battlefield. This principle involves avoiding the dispersion of resources and ensuring that most of the force is available to confront the enemy at the right time and place. An example of the application of this principle is that, although in the Russian case its material resources were enormous in principle, its human resources were not—about 200,000 men (AFP, 2022)—'s special operation was supposed to last a week (Rosenberg, 2024), and by attacking on different fronts, both eastern and northeastern, northern and southern, in order to collapse the Ukrainian army and its chain of command, they made the mistake of not concentrating their forces on the decisive field, which was the encirclement of Kyiv. The Ukrainians, by doing the opposite and sacrificing territory in other positions to mobilize their troops and concentrate them on the defense of Kiev, clearly applied this principle from different perspectives at the same moment of confrontation. *Lines of operation:* Jomini emphasized the importance of choosing and maintaining clear and secure lines of operation. These lines are the routes that connect supply bases with forces on the battlefield. According to Jomini, a commander must secure these lines to ensure the flow of resources and prevent the isolation of his troops.

Importance of strategic points: Jomini identified that certain geographical points, such as key cities, mountain passes, or river crossings, have superior strategic value. Controlling these points allows one to dominate the theater of operations and limit the enemy's options.

Offense and defense: Jomini believed that offense was the most effective form of warfare, as it allows one to take the initiative and dictate the terms of the conflict. However, he also recognized that defense can be advantageous in certain circumstances, especially when seeking to wear down the enemy and gain time.

Economy of force: This principle involves using resources efficiently, avoiding the waste of men and material. Jomini argued that a commander should assign only the forces necessary to accomplish a specific objective, reserving the rest for other operations.

Based on his focus on scientific principles of warfare, Jomini would be critical of Russian planning for its lack of rigor, as it dispersed its troops across multiple fronts without ensuring efficient supply lines. Its reliance on static logistics corridors, such as railways, made them vulnerable to Ukrainian drone and artillery attacks. In contrast, Ukraine applied Jomini's principles with precision: during the Ukrainian counteroffensive in September 2022, Ukraine executed a clever diversionary maneuver to deceive Russian forces. While publicly announcing a major attack in the southern Kherson region and conducting limited military movements in that area, Russia moved reinforcements south, weakening its defenses in the northeast.

However, the real blow came in Kharkiv, where Ukraine launched a surprise attack. Within days, Ukrainian troops advanced rapidly, liberating key cities such as Balakliia, Kupiansk, and Izium, and recapturing more than 6,000 km² of territory (Villanueva, 2022). The maneuver left the Russian army in disarray, forcing it to retreat amid heavy equipment losses. This operation demonstrated the effectiveness of Ukraine's strategy of disinformation and rapid movements.

The Ukrainian economy of forces was also evident, avoiding unnecessary battles and prioritizing achievable objectives, in contrast to the Russian reality in which they have lost enormous amounts of men and material in frontal assaults such as Bakhmut and Avdiivka. Although these captures were costly (Bakhmut and Avdiivka), they are in line with Jomini's approach to the importance of strategic points, as they allowed Russia to push forward and gain momentum in late 2024 and early 2025 in this area of the Donbas and to push the Ukrainian army back to more defensible positions such as the urban centers of Toretsk and Pokrovsk. For its part, the principle of economy of force contrasts with the enormous human and material costs of these captures, represented by the increasingly scarce IFVs,¹ APCs² and tanks, denoting the incomplete application of these approaches.

1 Armored Infantry Vehicle, the BMPs of the Soviet era.

2 Armored Personnel Carrier, numerous BTRs lost by Russia.

Basil Liddell Hart's Perspective

Liddell Hart's central concept is indirect strategy, which proposes avoiding direct, head-on confrontation with the enemy. Instead of seeking the total destruction of the opponent, Liddell Hart advocated unbalancing the enemy through maneuvers that exploited their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. This approach seeks to achieve victory not through brute force, but through cunning and the exploitation of tactical and strategic opportunities.

Liddell Hart argued that direct confrontations, such as battles of attrition, were costly and inefficient. Instead, he proposed: Maneuver and movement: Mobility and flexibility are key to disorienting the enemy and forcing them to react under unfavorable conditions. Liddell Hart emphasized the importance of rapid, surprise attacks that destabilize enemy lines.

Surprise, both tactical and strategic, is an essential element in unbalancing the enemy. Liddell Hart argued that an unexpected attack could cause confusion and demoralization, reducing the adversary's ability to respond. These first two postulates can be clearly seen in the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv, which was contrary to expectations and resulted in a significant territorial liberation for Ukraine.

Exploiting weaknesses: Instead of attacking where the enemy is strongest, Liddell Hart recommended identifying and exploiting their weaknesses, whether in their military disposition, logistics, or morale. Minimizing attrition: Indirect strategy seeks to reduce friendly casualties and resource attrition, prioritizing efficiency over mass destruction.

With regard to the above aspects, it is clear that Russia took advantage of Ukraine's weakness in the area south of the Dnieper River and the Azov Sea coastline, which facilitated a rapid encirclement of the strategic coastal city of Mariupol and the coastline, ultimately leading to the fall of the city, not because of the annihilation of the defending forces, but because of their surrender, caused by the attrition they had been subjected to and the lack of real support for the delivery of supplies and care for the wounded by the Ukrainian army, which ultimately handed the Russians an important victory both territorially and propagandistically by documenting and broadcasting the surrender of nearly 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers in battle at the Azovstal steelworks (Euronews, 2022), which ended up cutting off Ukraine's access to the Sea of Azov.

Basil Liddell Hart's ideas on "indirect strategy" find application in this war. Liddell Hart advocated avoiding head-on clashes and unbalancing the enemy through maneuver, surprise, and exploitation of weaknesses. While Russia opted for an attack using a large mechanized and human force, Ukraine adopted this approach with surprise attacks on the Russian rear, using innovative drones and sabotage of critical infrastructure. Operations such as the sinking of the cruiser Moskva and attacks on bridges over the Dnieper River that supplied Russian troops between Kherson and the shore closest to Crimea demonstrated how a force that is weaker on paper in conventional terms can undermine the morale and logistics of its adversary. Russia, on the other hand, relied

entirely on brute force, something that Liddell Hart criticized: predictable attacks, lack of adaptation, and dependence on numerical superiority without tactical innovation, largely based on operations carried out according to doctrines created for the Cold War period and which, thirty years later, due to technological advances, presented vulnerabilities in their implementation.

Galula's perspective

Although the war between Russia and Ukraine is classified as a regular war between states, Galula's approaches are particularly important insofar as elements of insurgency and counterinsurgency warfare can be observed in this conflict, events that have taken place in this regular war, but which contain elements of what Galula describes as hybrid warfare. Galula (2006) argues that the population is the center of gravity of the conflict, therefore, the key to success in an asymmetric war lies in gaining the trust and support of the population. Both the government and the insurgents compete for the loyalty (or at least the submission) of the population, as their support determines the ability of both sides to recruit, finance, and operate. Galula describes insurgencies as a process that unfolds in four main stages:

Stage 1 - Creation of the insurgent movement: Insurgents organize and mobilize the population, exploiting government weaknesses or existing discontent. This phase includes the formation of clandestine networks and the spread of propaganda to gain supporters.

Stage 2 - Minor attacks and destabilization: Insurgents use guerrilla tactics, such as ambushes, sabotage, and targeted attacks, to weaken the government. The goal is to erode state authority in each territory and provoke a disproportionate response that alienates the population and turns it toward the insurgency.

Stage 3 - Balance of power: If the insurgents manage to consolidate their position, they can establish "liberated zones" where the government loses control, and the insurgency takes over government functions. In this phase, the insurgents seek to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the population and expand their political, social, and economic influence.

Stage 4 - Final offensive: Insurgents move from guerrilla tactics to a more traditional war of position in the conventional sense when they consider themselves to be on a par with government forces in human, technological, financial, and communications terms. The goal is to overthrow the existing regime and seize power. Ukraine has been forced to engage in hybrid warfare to the extent that it has not only carried out attacks, sabotage, and selective assassinations of senior political and military leaders both in occupied territory and within Russian territory itself (Deutsche Welle, 2022), but has also carried out acts of sabotage, tactical intelligence, and identification of strategic targets such as logistics centers and artillery and ammunition depots in the occupied regions by partisans

who send the information to Kyiv so that the Ukrainian air force and artillery can carry out attacks with HIMARS and Stormshadow missiles, thereby slowing the advance of Russian frontline troops.

However, Galula does not limit himself to analyzing insurgency; he also proposes an effective counterinsurgency strategy. According to him, success in the fight against insurgency depends on a combination of military and political action. It is not enough to physically eliminate the insurgents; it is necessary to address the underlying causes of the conflict. Galula structures his counterinsurgency strategy in four main phases:

Phase 1. Clear: Locate and eliminate insurgents from a specific area through military operations. In the Russian-Ukrainian context, Russia attempted to apply this phase throughout the conflict, particularly in cities such as Mariupol, Kherson, and Melitopol, where large populations were trapped and unable to evacuate before the Russian invasion and who provided information to Ukrainian intelligence for many months. Although the Russians have attempted, even through torture, to eliminate these pockets of partisans, there continue to be actions in occupied territories that reveal that there are still partisan pockets that provide real-time strategic information to Kiev for long-range attacks. However, the Russian approach was predominantly conventional (massive bombing, urban sieges) rather than surgical operations against insurgent forces.

Phase 2. Stabilize: Secure the area through military and police presence to prevent the return of insurgents. Russia has made progress in actively controlling this area, generating stability and military presence, even mobilizing residents to control the territory and identify collaborators with the Ukrainian cause.

Phase 3. Build: Implement economic, social, and political development projects to gain the support of the population. This includes creating stable local institutions and improving living conditions. Here, Russian counterinsurgency has not been entirely effective due to its repressive approach, while Ukraine prioritized building legitimacy. The Russian “military-civilian administrations” imposed propaganda, forced recruitment, and censorship, but without real investment in infrastructure. Although the Russian state has realized this situation and has sought to implement Galula’s approach, as seen in Vladimir Putin’s visit to Mariupol in 2024, which was intended to showcase the reconstruction of a city that was largely destroyed by the invasion, by Russian standards, the city is still far from being a shadow of what it was before the invasion.

Phase 4. Transfer: Gradually return control of the area to civilian authorities once security has been ensured and the trust of the population has been gained. Russia never reached this phase: its “puppet governments” in Donetsk/Luhansk are completely dependent on Moscow (Hodge, 2022). Ukraine, on the other hand, has made progress in reintegrating liberated areas. After stabilizing these regions militarily, Kyiv transferred power to civilian mayors and governors, maintaining only a logistical support role for the army. Elections, although postponed due to the war, are part of this transition.

David Galula offers a lens through which to understand the asymmetric dimension of the conflict. For Galula, in irregular wars, the population is the center of gravity, and here Ukraine has been a master at winning its support and that of the international community. While Russia alienated civilians in the occupied territories through repressive tactics (executions, kidnappings, torture, and deportations of Ukrainian children to Russia), Ukraine built a unifying narrative of resistance, with Volodymyr Zelensky as a symbol of combativeness, thus achieving victory in the battle for political legitimacy that the Kremlin needed to win in order to align a new Ukrainian government with its own interests.

Although Galula described the phases of an insurgency, in the case study at hand, and making it clear that Ukraine is a state in terms of a traditional regular conflict, it applied insurgent tactics (sabotage, information warfare, assassinations behind enemy lines) combined with conventional operations. For its part, Russia's response in implementing a counterinsurgency process has been slow and inefficient, failing to achieve either security or significant legitimacy among the inhabitants of the occupied territories.

Conclusions

In short, the Russian Ukrainian conflict is a testing ground for strategic theory in the 21st century. Russia made predictable mistakes: it ignored Clausewitz's "point of culmination," violated Jomini's principles of concentration and logistics, underestimated Liddell Hart's indirect strategy, and failed to win over the population according to Galula. Ukraine, on the other hand, effectively combined Clausewitzian defense, Jominian efficiency, Liddell Hartian maneuvering, and Galulian asymmetric warfare. The result is a conflict where adaptation, political support, and tactical innovation have compensated for the initial disparity in forces.

However, the strategic lesson goes further: although classical principles remain valid, their application requires flexibility and creativity. Furthermore, it is crucial to analyze not only Russia's mistakes, but also those of Ukraine. The Ukrainian state was negligent for decades in ignoring the Russian threat; it allowed the occupation of territories such as Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea without reacting forcefully. For years, it neglected to strengthen its military industry, acquire international weaponry, and train its troops, in addition to underestimating the need for institutional and national cohesion in the face of a common enemy.

This strategic laboratory also raises a new paradigm: the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of international law, especially international humanitarian law (IHL), in scenarios involving nuclear powers or permanent members of the UN Security Council. Despite undeniable war crimes, such as the Bucha massacre (Euronews, 2024) or the documented executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war (captured on video by drones), the application of justice faces unprecedented obstacles.

This raises a new critical question for scholars of strategy and conflict: how can we link strategic analysis of war with the real and effective application of IHL in 21st-century conflicts? This new paradigm opens up new opportunities for multidisciplinary studies of war and conflict, not only from the perspective of international law, but also from the perspectives of strategic theory, global security, and transitional justice, in order to understand the reconfiguration of a turbulent and constantly changing international order after decades of relative stability and peace due to the absence of major international conflicts or , which will particularly involve the Eurasian region and the world.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Ibero-American School of Political and Social Innovation for their support in the creation of this article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to the article.

Authors

Jaime Ernesto Gutiérrez Murillo. PhD of Education, Political Scientist, and Lawyer. Strategy consultant with over 18 years of experience, recognized among the 100 most influential people by the Napolitan Victory Awards. Expert in team building for victory, crisis management, and public innovation for defense and security. Director of Ibero-American School of Political and Social Innovation.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3469-0815> - Contacto: consultoria@jaimegutierrez.co

Juan Camilo Cárdenas Luna. Lawyer, Gran Colombia University. Master's degree in administration, Pontifical Bolivarian University, Colombia. Specialist in Public Management, Pontifical Bolivarian University, Colombia. Academic Researcher, Ibero-American School of Political and Social Innovation. Representative for Quindío with an interest in academic research.

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2204-3215> - Contacto: juancamilocl21@outlook.com

Referencias

- Agence France-Presse. (2022, 23 de febrero). Casi 200.000 soldados rusos aguardan órdenes de Putin en la frontera con Ucrania. *Perfil*. <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/internacional/casi-200000-soldados-rusos-aguardan-ordenes-de-putin-en-la-frontera-con-ucrania.phtml>
- Calhoun, M. T. (2011). Clausewitz and Jomini: Contrasting Intellectual Frameworks in Military Theory. *Army History*, (80), 22-37. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26296157>
- Clausewitz, K. von. (1832). *De la guerra*. (M. von Clausewitz, Ed.). F. Dümmler.
- CNN en español. (2023, 17 de enero). Los ataques más graves contra civiles en la guerra de Rusia en Ucrania. *CNN en Español*. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2023/01/17/ataques-graves-civiles-guerra-rusia-ucrania-orix/>

- Deutsche Welle. (2022, 12 de diciembre). Jersón: atentado hiere a vicegobernador instalado por Rusia. DW. Recuperado de <https://www.dw.com/es/atentado-hiere-a-vicegobernador-instalado-por-rusia-en-jers%C3%B3n/a-64073715>
- Deyermond, R. (2022). Security, history and the boundaries of European identity after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *Department of War Studies, King's College*, 30(3), 230-235.
- Ellmanns, L. (2025). Transformation under fire - an analysis of Ukraine's security sector since 1991. *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 6(3), 5-33.
- Euronews en español. (2022, 20 de mayo). El batallón Azov de la aceria de Mariúpol confirma haber recibido la orden de rendirse. *Euronews*. <https://es.euronews.com>
- Euronews. (2024, abril 2). Dos años después de la masacre de Bucha: "Les dispararon por estar en la calle". *Euronews*. <https://es.euronews.com/2024/04/02/dos-anos-despues-de-la-masacre-de-bucha-les-dispararon-por-estar-en-la-calle>
- Galán, J., Sevillano, L., & Álvarez, J. A. (2025, 16 de febrero). Mapas: ¿Qué perdería Ucrania si cede el territorio ocupado por Rusia? *El País*. <https://elpais.com/internacional/2025-02-16/mapas-que-perderia-ucrania-si-cede-el-territorio-ocupado-por-rusia.html>
- Gallardo, M., & Faundes, C. (2014). ¿Qué es el pensamiento estratégico? *Escenarios Actuales*, 19(3), 7-22. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312935778>
- Galula, D., & Nagl, J. A. (2006). *Counterinsurgency warfare: Theory and practice*. Praeger Security International.
- Hobson, R. (2010). Blitzkrieg, the Revolution in Military Affairs and Defense Intellectuals. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33(4), 625-643. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2010.489717>
- Hodge, N., & John, T. (2022, 25 de febrero). Anexiones, un Estado remanente o gobernantes títeres. Esto es lo que Putin puede estar planeando para Ucrania. *CNN en español*. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com>
- Idalgo, J. (2023). La vigencia de Clausewitz en el orden mundial actual. 1991. *Revista de Estudios Internacionales*, 5(2), 13.
- Jomini, A. H. (1840). *Précis de l'art de la guerre: Ou nouveau tableau analytique des principales combinaisons de la stratégie, de la tactique et de la politique militaire*. Librairie de A. Perez.
- Liddell Hart, B. H. (1941). *Strategy: The indirect approach*. Faber & Faber.
- Mediazona. (2024, November 19). 1000 days of war: Russia's attack on Ukraine in numbers. *Mediazona*. <https://zona.media/article/2024/11/19/war>
- Poczynok, I. (2012). Batallas doctrinarias. Guerra, política y estrategia en los orígenes de la ciencia militar. *Cuadernos de Marte*, 2(3), 57-90.
- Rodríguez, M. T. (2015). Los usos de la teoría de la guerra de Carl von Clausewitz en el concepto de lo político de Carl Schmitt. A propósito de la guerra como continuación de la política por otros medios. *I Congreso Latinoamericano de Teoría Social. Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani*. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires.
- Rosenberg, S. (2024, 15 de agosto). Cómo la sorpresiva incursión ucraniana en territorio ruso está erosionando la imagen de Putin como el protector de la "Madre Rusia". *BBC News Mundo*. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articulos/cevix3rv7800>
- Salinas Vio, C. (2024). Jomini: Geografía, Geometría y Arte Operacional. *Revista Ensayos Militares*, 9(2), 31-42. <https://revistaensayosmilitares.cl/index.php/acague/article/view/457>
- Ti, R. & Kinsey, C. (2023). Lessons from the Russo-Ukrainian conflict: the primacy of logistics over strategy. *Defence Studies*, 23(3), 381-398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2023.2238613>
- Van Creveld, M. (1991). *The Transformation of War*. The Free Press.
- Villanueva López, C. D. (2022, septiembre 14). La ofensiva de Járkov (I). *Revista Ejército*. <https://www.revistaejercitos.com/articulos/la-ofensiva-de-jarkov-i/>