

Warfare and the Book of Mormon

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Karl von Clausewitz's great work *Vom Kriege*, or *On War*, has been the Bible of the military for 150 years. The Book of Mormon reads as if it were written by a diligent student of this work. This is another case of Joseph Smith's timing to the split second, because the work wasn't published until 1833. Otherwise, you could accuse him of stealing the whole thing, because it's right out of Clausewitz, who was very active in the Napoleonic Wars. I'm going to read his principal maxims from his two-volume work—the great maxims of war; and you will think of some instances from the Book of Mormon just like those. I could mention a couple and draw out my speech. But one sentence would be enough to show modern applications, because if you've been reading the newspapers or the magazines, you'll know how relevant this all is.

The most famous saying of Clausewitz, the one that everybody knows by heart, is that "War is therefore a continuation of [state] policy by other means." As he puts it elsewhere, "[War] is ... a continuation of political intercourse ... by other means."¹ He is strictly a soldier, dealing only with the technical side, only with how war is conducted. He says he's not going to talk about the causes in the background. And there he spills the beans. This points directly to the causes — the continuation of politics. The Book of Mormon begins with the war in Jerusalem and ends with the war at Cumorah; and in between there are a lot of wars. They all deal with political ambition. We don't have to go into Egypt, Babylonia, and Jerusalem to illustrate this, because we see the territorial ambitions and the political ambitions of Zerahemnah, Amulon, Amalickiah, Ammoron, Laman, Nehor, Zeezrom, Korihor, etc. They were men of political ambitions who wanted to get ahead. They started out with political parties and ended up uniting bodies in war, such as the great coalitions of Amalickiah. Of course we don't need to comment as far as the present world is concerned — what is cold war but politics being carried on? It's a political movement on both sides; it's political systems in conflict.

Another saying of Clausewitz is "War ... belongs not to the province of arts and sciences, but to that of social existence.... It would be better ... to liken it to business competition ... and it is still more like politics, which ... may be regarded as a kind of business competition on a great scale."² As I said, Clausewitz is writing back in the eighteenth century, during the Napoleonic Wars. His main study was wars of the eighteenth century, wars of the princes and kings following the grandeur of Louis the Great, "Le Grandeur." It was all-important to be grand. You had to annex as much land as you could, for example, as in the tripartition of Poland between the three great powers. You grabbed not only resources but also a lot of peasants or people, and these strengthened your army. They became your aggrandizement. They strengthened you and enabled you to make further sweeps, which occurred all throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Everybody grabbed as much land as they could, the princes doing it in the interest of the state. It was *ratio status*—that would justify anything. (In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the great industrial barons were after the same thing—land, because along with that came raw materials, cheap labor, and market.) And so it went on, the territorial wars. Clausewitz continues: "Moreover, politics is the womb in which war is developed." It is "business ... on a great scale."³ Nothing describes these days better than that. We don't need to explain, do we?

"The disarming of the enemy — this object of war in the abstract, [is the] final means of attaining the political object."⁴ In the Book of Mormon, Moroni often requires the enemy to lay down their arms and lets them go home. There are no reprisals or anything similar (see Alma 44:6, 15, 20; 52:37). The test comes when they lay down their arms — then they know your will has dominated over theirs. So Clausewitz says, the "disarming of the enemy— this

[is the] object of war.”⁵ Moroni was satisfied when the enemy laid down their arms. Likewise in the French and Indian Wars, and in the Mexican Wars, and in the last war when the German and Japanese laid down their arms, the war was over.

Clausewitz’s next maxim (and this is an interesting one, too) is “The aggressor always pretends to be peace-loving because he would like to achieve his conquests without bloodshed.... Therefore, aggression must be presented as a defensive reaction by the aggressor nation.”⁶ Nobody ever attacks. You’re always just on the defensive. After World War I, the German War Office, *Kriegsamt*, changed its name to *Wehrmacht*, “defense power.” We changed our War Office to the Department of Defense. We’re just defensive now, that’s all. Both sides must take the defensive position, whether they are aggressors or not. We see good examples in the Book of Mormon in the case of Giddianhi and Lachoneus. Giddianhi writes to Lachoneus, “We wouldn’t bother you except you’re infringing on our rights of government, our ancient society, which is old and venerable and you’ve been the aggressor against us” (cf. 3 Nephi 3:9-10). This is true, though; since the loser must always submit to the winner, each side is always fighting for its freedom. I don’t want to submit to you and you don’t want to submit to me, so I’m defending my freedom and you’re defending your freedom. We have a Defense Department, if you please, all throughout the world.

“Those who belong to the profession,” says Clausewitz, “will always look upon themselves as a kind of guild.... This corporate spirit ... must exist more or less in every army.... Military virtue is a quality of standing armies only.”⁷ It is professionalism that guarantees the ongoing tradition. But it’s also a very dangerous thing: “It is impermissible and even harmful to leave a great military event ... to *purely military judgment*.”⁸ “The influence in the cabinet of any military man except the commander-in-chief is extremely dangerous.”⁹ That’s an interesting remark. It’s not the business of military men to meddle in the higher policies of state. The chief military commander is the only one who should be in the cabinet; it’s harmful and impermissible for the military to participate.

A good example is Moroni getting on his high horse when he writes to Pahoran. Speaking as a general in the midst of war, he blows his top and writes very indiscreet letters. He doesn’t understand what is going on back home; he is writing to Pahoran about conditions he isn’t aware of at all. He is going to take over: We’ll come and seize the state. We’ll expel you. I’ll march with my men, and we’ll unseat you (cf. Alma 60).

The first maxim is “It’s politics by other means.” The second maxim is “War is thus an act of force to compel our adversary to do our will.... War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale.”¹⁰ Alma fights Amlici face to face; that’s the duel, but they represent the forces (see Alma 2:29). Amalickiah swears to drink Moroni’s blood (see Alma 49:27; 51:9). Of course the classic is Shiz versus Coriantumr (see Ether 15:29-30). We still do the same today—we try to destabilize governments which do not favor us or which we do not favor, and we personify them in their leaders. The leader or whoever is in charge becomes the villain, and it becomes a personal duel between this president and that president, whoever they might be. Clausewitz goes on to say, “If the enemy should choose the method of the great decision by arms, our own method *must on that account be changed against our will to a similar one*.”¹¹ What the enemy does, we must do. “If the enemy should choose the method” he’s going to use, “of the great decision by arms,” we can’t do anything but reply in the same way. We must on that account, against our own will, adopt a similar method. Moroni repeatedly found that the enemy had copied his equipment and tactics. In war, armies come to look alike.

In another place Clausewitz says, “In modern times the armies of European states have arrived very much at a par in discipline and training.”¹² You can see why: we can’t allow the enemy to get any new gun —whether it’s a

shepatovka, which we immediately adopted as a bazooka, or whether it's a Mark VI Panzer, which we immediately countered as a Pershing. We can't allow them to hold an edge, whether it's in the type of helmet or camouflage or anything else. We have to copy it if it works better than ours. So armies very quickly come to look exactly alike. Thus the duel, in which the parties are necessarily equal. There will be very little difference between them when they meet. That makes it all very destructive. When the Lamanites tried to encircle the Nephites with the same wine tricks the Nephites had tried, the Nephites then tried other tricks. But their tricks didn't work anymore, because the enemy knew them all by heart; both had adopted each other's methods.

Continuing on with the idea of the duel of the equal parts, Clausewitz writes, "The ruthless user of force who shrinks from no amount of bloodshed must gain an advantage if his opponent does not do the same."¹³ Teancum and Amalickiah typify this principle. It's always the wicked against the wicked in the Book of Mormon, never the righteous against the wicked. In the duel between Amlici and Alma (see Alma 2:29-31), wasn't that a good guy against a bad guy? No, when the war was over they mourned terribly because they were convinced that the war had been because of their wickedness. They had brought it on themselves. They weren't fighting bad guys as good guys after all. In the same way, Mormon counsels, Don't worry about the wicked; surely the "judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished" (Mormon 4:5).

Clausewitz describes the old-fashioned wars as punishment wars. We can't afford that luxury now. We must copy the enemy if he is bloody-minded. The Lord gives a rule right at the beginning of the Book of Mormon. The second chapter of the Book of Mormon states the wicked Lamanites "shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also" (1 Nephi 2:23). When they fight, it is because they are both rebellious against God. Otherwise, there is going to be no fight. "They will have no power over thy seed unless they rebel against me also. I'll keep things going." That was the agreement, and it is repeated throughout the Book of Mormon.

Clausewitz continues: Because we're so equal, "the wastage of our own forces is always the greater the more our aim is directed toward destruction of the enemy's forces."¹⁴ In other words, "the harder we try" – which is represented, of course, by the Book of Mormon's total extermination story, Shiz versus Coriantumr (see Ether 14:17-15:30). They exterminate each other, although such a thing can never happen, according to Clausewitz. But we know that such a thing can. It's kill or be killed. Teancum is an example (see Alma 51, 61, and 62), and the Nephites and the Lamanites, too. The Lamanites decidedly became completely disrupted at Cumorah, we are told, as well as the Nephites; but with that wastage, you must risk your own forces at whatever cost. If you're going to destroy, you must be destroyed. You must accept that, says Clausewitz. That's the rule.

"In the lower ranks the spirit of self-sacrifice is more required [than in others]."¹⁵ You regulate the policy. The general is at a distance; we expect others to sacrifice. "Amalickiah [did not] come down out of the land of Nephi, at the head of his army.... He did care not for the blood of his people" (Alma 49:10). Such an attitude so shocks Moroni that he writes to Pahoran, "Can you think to sit on your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor, while your enemies are spreading the work of death around you" (cf. Alma 60:7). They don't care for the lives of those on the front, and that's a policy which Clausewitz says you can't worry about. Self-sacrifice is what the soldiers are there for.

Then he goes on to the third rule: "We can never introduce a modifying principle into the philosophy of war without committing an absurdity.... War is an act of force, and there is no limit to the application of that force."¹⁶ To talk about civilized warfare and the rules of warfare is ridiculous. If you're civilized, you won't start scratching and biting; you'll continue the discussion. And war is even worse. You try to kill the other person, and there's no limit to

that. Their death is what you're after. "To introduce a modifying principle is an absurdity." You can't modify it. There's no limit to the application of that force. Alma puts it very well when he says they had exhausted all their resource: "Whatever evil we cannot resist with our words, [then] let us resist them with our swords" (Alma 61:14). That means you must go all the way. There are no more rules in warfare — in "civilized" warfare. And the Lord says (a frequent expression), "Cursed shall be the land . . . unto destruction" (Alma 45:16). Brush-fire wars are out of the question.

At the end of World War II, the generals became very discouraged, because there was going to be no fighting for them. The war had been a lark for most of them. But then they discovered the concept of brush-fire wars and tried it out in Southeast Asia. I remember very well the day General Taylor, just glowing, discovered brush-fire wars; he explained how we could have little wars going on, so the military could get their promotions and always have opportunity for practice — send the officers out to get practice. It doesn't work that way. And this is why Clausewitz explains, "War and peace are ideas which fundamentally can have no gradations."¹⁷ He goes on, "We need not lose sight of the absolute form of war. [War is all the way or nothing. There is no partial war]; rather [the] image [of absolute war] must constantly hover in the background."¹⁸ After a great victory, Alma announces to the people, "I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, ... shall become extinct" (Alma 45:10-11).

Clausewitz continues: In pursuing the aim of war, "there is only one means: *combat*.... All the effects manifested in [war] have their origin in combat."¹⁹ Moroni, in combat, returns the sword to Zerahemnah. Zerahemnah didn't want to discuss terms anymore. Moroni invited him to take his sword back and continue fighting. That's all we can do — it's the only solution. Unless you choose to make a covenant of peace, you'll just have to go on fighting. Military combat is the only effective way — the pursuance of only one means. "All the effects manifested in [war] have their origin in combat." As Moroni hands Zerahemnah his sword back, he says, "We will end the conflict" — if you don't want to discuss it, there's nothing else to do (cf. Alma 44:10-11). Then the only reason, says Clausewitz, for "suspension of military action [is]0 ... *to await a more favorable moment for action*."²⁰ When Zerahemnah puts up his sword, he is merely waiting for a more favorable time to strike back. He tells Moroni quite frankly to hand him back his sword and then adds, "We will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break" (Alma 44:8-10). When he got his sword back, he immediately made a mad lunge for Moroni, only to have the top of his head cut off (see Alma 44:12). You suspend your action to wait for more action.

Again from Clausewitz: "The destruction of the enemy's armed forces is the foundation stone of all actions in war, the ultimate support of all combinations."²¹ The theme is destruction, and the armed forces now of course extend to everybody. That was unthinkable at the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. Those were gentlemen's wars, but now everybody gets wiped out. The words "destruction" and "destroy" appear 534 times in the Book of Mormon, and nearly always in conjunction with the word *war*. Why with war? We're told that war and plague and pestilence and famine all go together, but the wars are the part you bring on yourselves. You cannot plead innocent victim as you can of famine and plague, for example. You invite war. In the army we were always told that our mission was to search and destroy. So Clausewitz says, "The soldier is levied, clothed, armed, trained — he sleeps, eats, drinks, marches — *merely to fight at the right place and the right time*."²² That is the only reason for his existence — just to fight at the particular time and place. In World War II, only eight percent of the armed forces ever saw action. It was the cutting edge units that did the dirty work, and it was pretty nasty. All the others were just for the purpose of supporting them. That was their whole purpose and it still is — to destroy.

And so, quoting Clausewitz again, "If we speak of the destruction of the enemy's forces, we must expressly point out that nothing obliges us to confine this idea to the physical forces."²³ We try to break the enemy down

psychologically as well. But of course it was Clausewitz who introduced a doctrine of *Schrecklichkeit* – make yourself as terrible as possible – which the Germans applied so effectively in the first world war. Making yourself an object of utter terror is beautifully described in the Book of Mormon, as do the Lamanites on various occasions (see Enos 1:20; Mosiah 10:8; Alma 3:4-5), and also the Gadiantons in their various trappings (see 3 Nephi 4:7). They make themselves and their uniforms up as hideously as possible, like the trappings of the Middle Ages, which paralyzed resistance by fear. On July 4, 1944, the Allies sent at least five thousand planes over Germany in one bunch to give a display of force. We thought that would show them. Well, people looked up once or twice but didn't pay any attention after that. The planes just went on and on, but who cared? It was a bore. As Tolstoy tells us, war is a crashing bore. All night long you pray for it to be day. All day long you pray for it to be night. That's the whole thing – search and destroy. But you can use more than the physical forces – you can employ *Schrecklichkeit* to make the soldiers objects of terror. Feudal trappings paralyze resistance and create fear. The Lamanites were especially good at that, specializing in it, and it sometimes worked rather well. But it didn't work when the Nephites were praying for the Lord to help them. The armies of Giddianhi – with the red on their foreheads, lambskins on their loins, and all that nonsense – thought they were praying because their fierce appearance had paralyzed the Nephites, but they were only supplicating the Lord for his protection (see 3 Nephi 4:8-10).

There is a fourth point, one on which Clausewitz lays very heavy emphasis. He very decisively states, “There is no other human activity that stands in such constant and universal contact with chance as does war.”²⁴ “He who undertakes war ... must renounce every absolute certainty of a result.”²⁵ Typical examples are found in Alma 49:10 and Alma 59:5-13, where Moroni, the great military genius, is caught flat-footed time and again. Coriantumr marches right into the center of Zarahemla, the capital city of Bountiful, catching the Nephites off guard; but in the end, he caught himself in a trap. When he tried to get out of the land, he found that the Nephites had put all their defenses on the periphery, and he couldn't get out (see Helaman 1:25-30). Everybody surprises everybody else in war; nobody is sure of anything. “War is therefore a chameleon,” Clausewitz explains, “a strange trinity [three things make it up].... It is composed of [1] the original violence of its essence; [2] the hate and enmity which are to be regarded as blind, natural impulse; ... [3] the play of probabilities and chance, which make it a free activity of the emotions.”²⁶ In other words, war is a madhouse. Those climactic pages of Mormon describe the final windup. Mormon prays for God to destroy them if they don't change their ways. They're so hopeless: “I saw that the day of grace was passed” (Mormon 2:15). The Nephites had reached the point of no return, and Mormon simply wished they'd get wiped out. There is nothing more terrifying than that, nor more vivid or to the point. It's like today's wars in Lebanon and Central America – madhouses, crazy scenes. “War, of all branches of human activity,” says Clausewitz, is “most like a game of cards.”²⁷ Again, only in Hollywood are we sure that the good guys are going to win.

One of the most famous phrases coined by Clausewitz, next to the one on war and politics, is “Three-fourths of the things upon which action in war is calculated lie hidden in a fog of uncertainty”²⁸—the fog of battle. Fortunately I was in a position in the front in which I could see everything the Germans did while the battle was going on; all the general could do in his little tiny tent was pace back and forth and chew his nails. He tried to make contact with the walkie-talkie, but he never got through. Everything collapsed. As soon as the battle begins, nobody has any control. Nobody knows what anybody else is doing. I don't know if it would be so now. But you can imagine just a little technical flaw occurring, such as happens to our marvelous computers – how they can be jammed. How that will compound the fog of wars! So Clausewitz observes, “War ... is the province of chance.... It increases the uncertainty of every circumstance and deranges the course of events.” He continues, “Differences of opinion are nowhere so great as in war [the generals never agree].... *Strength of character* leads to a degenerate form of [disagreement—which is sheer] *obstinacy*.”²⁹ Arguments among the staff are terrible – Moroni versus Pahoran,

Patton versus Monty and Eisenhower (whose main job, his greatest achievement, was to reconcile clashing plans and personalities, prejudices and pride of the commanders). They never agreed on any plan, on any project, on anything else. Were you out in one of those CP's [command posts], you would hear them argue.

And finally, "We shall soon feel what a dangerous edifice war is, how easily it may fall to pieces and bury us in its ruins."³⁰ The Nazi SS learned in a hurry. Clausewitz explains, "Decision[s are based upon] reports [all of which have] been lies, exaggerations, and errors.... Most reports are false, and the timidity of men gives fresh force to lies and untruths." Note his frankness and honesty in these things. This is military "intelligence," part of a joke: "this difficulty of seeing things correctly ... is one of the greatest sources of friction in war"³¹ among commanders. Thus Moroni has no idea what is happening to Pahoran, who is home with a rebellion on his hands, which could break everything up. When Pahoran writes back to Moroni and explains the situation, Moroni realizes he's had it all wrong from the beginning, yet he was as well informed as anyone (see Alma 61:1-62:1). What does a general do in a case like this? "War ... in its plan — is so often thwarted by [the] unexpected ... [that its conduct must] be left to talent [a person who has a genius for it. Frederick the Great and Napoleon had the genius. Of course, Clausewitz thought Napoleon was a great man, though he was really a great rascal], and less use can be made of a theoretical guide [in war] than in any other business."³² So Clausewitz says to throw away the rule book. You must depend on the genius of the commander.

Of course that's what you learn from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Clausewitz says the thing that's surprising about war is that war is supremely simple. That is what fools everybody. That's why a talented genius, the most intelligent person, is not going to be the greatest general. You want a man like Suvarov who has the instinct to do the right thing and knows just what to do.

Here's another of Clausewitz's main doctrines, the central doctrine of strategy and tactics: "The defensive is the stronger form of [making] ... war.... It is ... contrary to the prevalent opinion— ... the defensive form of war is in the abstract stronger than the offensive. The absolute defense[, of course,] completely contradicts the conception of war."³³ "All the time which elapses [you spar for time you see] falls into the scale in favor of the defender."³⁴ Put confirmation off as long as you can. But of course "every defensive, according to its strength, will seek to change to the offensive."³⁵

The defensive screen of the two thousand sons of Helaman is interesting. Helaman leads the Lamanite army on and on. Then finally the Nephites turn on their heels and attack and surprise the daylights out of the Lamanites (see Alma 56:30-54). That's why Clausewitz says, "It is extremely important always to bear in mind that almost the only advantage which the offensive possesses is the effect of surprise."³⁶ You have to be the innocent aggressor, yet you must make a surprise attack on someone; and there are many surprise attacks in the Book of Mormon.

"Every defensive, according to its strength, will seek to change to the offensive"³⁷—as in the case of the two thousand sons, who turned suddenly in the opposite direction (see Alma 58:25-27). We claim defensive strategy today in Europe, Latin America, Africa, the Near East, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, showing the flag; but armies don't exist to sit still. Their threatening presence and the power to destroy invite combat; it is a challenge to action in the medieval sense.

So Clausewitz says, "The negative effort ... must prefer a bloodless decision."³⁸ And "the only ... advantage of the negative object is [to] delay ... [a] decision."³⁹ It's game to switch to war after all. You can stall all you want, "but

everything is subject to a supreme law: *The decision by arms*.⁴⁰ Clausewitz underlines that. “When this is actually demanded by the enemy, such an appeal can never be refused [so it will make the war inevitable]... Accordingly, among all the objects which may be sought in war, the destruction of the enemy’s forces appears always to be the one that overrules all others.”⁴¹ No matter how you spar, no matter how you wait, no matter how long you delay, no matter how strong your defensive position, this will be your objective — sooner or later you must destroy the enemy. But let him destroy himself. This is not what the Ammonites practiced, but it leads to the policy adopted by the Generalstab in World War II in the blitzkrieg. The blitzkrieg is strictly Clausewitz; that’s where it came from. “No conquest can be finished too soon.” Don’t drag it out. But wars always do drag out, and that’s the problem. Six-week wars always turn out to be five-year wars. “No conquest can be finished too soon; ... spreading it over a *greater period of time* makes it more *difficult*... A speedy and uninterrupted effort toward a decision is essential to [an] offensive war.”⁴² “Until it [the final result] takes place nothing is decided, nothing won [you may be winning up to the final last minute, and then something will happen and you’ll be defeated — that’s happened], nothing lost... The end crowns the work. War is an indivisible whole.”⁴³

At Cumorah, both lost (see Mormon 6:2-22; 8:2). This would be inconceivable to Clausewitz, who says, “Once the great victory is gained, there should be no talk of rest, of pausing for breath, ... or of consolidating, ... but only of pursuit.”⁴⁴ That’s the fatal flaw, because every campaign has to slow down somewhere, as ours did in World War II. We could have attacked the Germans very easily, had it not been for our gasoline supplies. Patton couldn’t get the gasoline because Monty wanted it, and there was a big fight between them. “Beware ... of confusing the spirit of an army with its morale.”⁴⁵ “The highest spirit in the world changes only too easily at the first check into depression.”⁴⁶ There is always such a check, and that comes in the Book of Mormon, too, when the tide suddenly turns.

Clausewitz’s last principle is important: “War is never an isolated act. In the real world, war never breaks out suddenly, and it does not spread immediately.”⁴⁷ He observes that the modern world, and modern wars, are different. On this point Clausewitz is wrong. He saw that principle in the princes’ wars, the gentlemen’s wars, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the nineteenth and twentieth century wars are something different. And for a good reason, which still applies: “Human organizations” have, because of their inefficiency, “always fall[en] short.” There are always the bungling, misunderstanding, and deficiencies. You never get things mobilized instantly, “and these deficiencies, operative on both sides, become a modifying influence.”⁴⁸ That’s why we have cold wars, and the Book of Mormon proceedings of men aspiring for position. The Nephite-Lamanite wars were sometimes raids, a very common thing. All wars are raids anyway. When Zoram went out, he said it was to obtain those who had been carried away captive into the wilderness. His whole purpose was to get them back, and he did get them back (see Alma 16:6-8). Incidentally, in talking about the defense, the best position, remember that all Book of Mormon wars take place on Nephite property, not on Lamanite. They rarely invade the other. The Nephites are rarely the aggressors, in that sense.

On that point, Clausewitz says something that will amuse us: “If the wars of civilized nations are far less cruel and destructive than those of the uncivilized, the cause lies in the social conditions of these states, internally and in their relations with each other.”⁴⁹ The various documentaries on TV show that animals and savages do fight, but they know when to stop—before everybody is killed! We don’t, as we find in the Asiatic exterminations, among the Jaredites (see Ether 15:25, 29-32), and so forth. They were what Clausewitz had in mind. Thinking of certain wars in Russia, he says they are unthinkable in our society because you can’t exterminate a whole nation; a thing like that is out of the question. Yet what is the expression used in the Book of Mormon? “[When] the time ... come[s]

that the voice of this people should choose iniquity, ... [or] fall into transgression, they would be ripe for destruction” (Alma 10:19). And when the cup is full, they shall be “swept off from the face of the land” (Jarom 1:3), and “ye shall become extinct” (3 Nephi 3:8).

Then Clausewitz says, “Since Bonaparte, war ... has approached much nearer to its real nature, to its absolute perfection.”⁵⁰ The Napoleonic Wars were the real wars: “The most violent element of war, freed from all conventional restrictions, broke loose with all its natural force.”⁵¹ This is the way it should be. Mormon says, “from this time forth ... the Nephites ... began to be swept off by them even as a dew before the sun” (Mormon 4:18). It was a total thing. “The most violent element of war,” like a violent “natural force,” like a plague sweeping the nation, simply appeared. When “freed from all conventional restrictions, [it] broke loose with all its natural force.” That’s what happens: war is absolute; war is basic. There are no rules or other restraints; war is much nearer to real nature in absolutes. Bonaparte put the whole nation in arms, and since then it’s been the nation with arms. Operation Barbarosa, in June 1941, when Hitler entered Russia, took almost a third of Russia in two weeks, a terrific sweep of a vast land, total destruction. So Clausewitz was wrong— because he didn’t have a nuclear bomb.

Finally from Clausewitz: “In the great combats which we call wars ... there is usually no hostile feeling of individual against individual.... National hatred ... becomes a more or less powerful substitute for personal hostility of individuals. Where this is also absent, ... a hostile feeling is kindled by the combat itself; an act of violence ... will excite in us the desire to retaliate and be avenged.”⁵² This is the circle. Amalickiah has to get the Lamanites to hate so they can go to war, so he has his people preach from towers – gets the propaganda machine going (see Alma 48:1-3). Such hatred is artificial. It has to be stirred up, but once the killing starts, there follows the idea of vengeance – the Green Beret syndrome. The good guy sees his friends bullied; so he seeks vengeance – the theme of almost all TV shows, so many on World War I and II. Every time you turn the TV on, you can see documentaries on World War I and II, which we hang on, because we know how it turns out and we want to see the bad guys get what’s coming to them.

Revenge is the whole thing. Mormon, at the end, says, “And now, because of this great thing which my people, the Nephites, had done, they began to boast in their own strength, and began to swear before the heavens that they would avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren who had been slain by their enemies” (Mormon 3:9). What nobler motive can they have than to “avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren.” With that, Mormon lays down his arms. He resigns as their commander and says he will have nothing more to do with them. He utterly refuses to avenge his enemy, for the one thing the Lord had absolutely forbidden them to do was to seek vengeance and build up hatred. For Mormon heard the “voice of the Lord ... saying: Vengeance is mine, and I will repay” (Mormon 3:14-15).

So where does that leave us today? Well, short of Zion. It seems that war is inevitable, according to Clausewitz. President Benson is right – he says it all applies to us. That’s why I don’t like the wars in the Book of Mormon. They make me ill.

Notes

1. Karl von Clausewitz, *War, Politics, and Power: Selections from ON WAR, and I BELIEVE AND PROFESS*, tr. and ed. Edward M. Collins (Chicago: Gateway, n.d.), 83.

2. Ibid., 167-68.

3. Ibid., 168.
4. Ibid., 91.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 33.
7. Ibid., 183, 185.
8. Ibid., 261.
9. Ibid., 264.
10. Ibid., 63.
11. Ibid., 108; italics added.
12. Ibid., 180.
13. Ibid., 64.
14. Ibid., 108.
15. Ibid., 156.
16. Ibid., 65.
17. Ibid., 252.
18. Ibid., 257.
19. Ibid., 100.
20. Ibid., 73; italics added.
21. Ibid., 106.
22. Ibid., 102.
23. Ibid., 107.
24. Ibid., 79.

25. Ibid., 210.

26. Ibid., 86.

27. Ibid., 80.

28. Ibid., 117.

29. Ibid., 122-23.

30. Ibid., 128.

31. Ibid., 129.

32. Ibid., 155.

33. Ibid., 189.

34. Ibid., 190.

35. Ibid., 245.

36. Ibid., 290.

37. Ibid., 245.

38. Ibid., 110.

39. Ibid., 111.

40. Ibid.; italics added.

41. Ibid., 112.

42. Ibid., 240.

43. Ibid., 206-7.

44. Ibid., 292.

45. Ibid., 188.

46. Ibid., 187.

47. Ibid., 68.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., 64.

50. Ibid., 229.

51. Ibid., 230.

52. Ibid., 151.