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Carl von Clausewitz's Last Campaign: Clausewitz's Role as Chief of Staff for the Prussian Army of Observation in the Polish-Russian War of 1831¹

Abstract

Relatively little is known about Carl von Clausewitz's involvement in the November Uprising as the Chief of Staff for the Prussian Army of Observation. This article argues that in Prussia's strategy of no direct involvement in the Polish-Russian conflict, Clausewitz's formidable skills as a military planner played an integral role. The tightened control over the borders deprived the Polish army of critical manpower and resources, while not giving Great Powers sympathetic to the Polish independence like France a clear cause for intervention. Additionally, Clausewitz's visceral opposition to the November Uprising stemmed from his fears about Prussia's strategic vulnerabilities.

Despite Carl von Clausewitz's fame as one of the most influential military theorists in modern history, relatively little is known about his involvement in the November Uprising in the last year of his life. Especially in the Western scholarship, this short but consequential period is largely overlooked. For instance, Peter Paret's famed biography *Clausewitz and the State* devotes merely twenty pages to these events.² Donald Stoker's more recent work *Clausewitz: His Life and Work* combines the time after 1815 to Clausewitz's death in one

¹ Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

² Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State: The Man, His Theories, and His Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 410–430.

single chapter.³ Bruno Colson's biography in French is equally concise on the topic.⁴ The period has not been a subject of a recent detailed monograph either, despite the fact the 1831 Campaign occurred after Clausewitz that ceased his work on *On War* in 1830, thus raising the question whether his conduct mirrored his mature concepts and whether his writings from 1831 may provide additional insight into his theoretical work.

The reasons for this neglect range from the loss of primary sources due to the damage done to the German archives in World War II; through biases against a military campaign that did not include exchange of fire on Prussian side and thus was considered as less worthy of discussion; to the highly controversial nature of the action, for it ultimately aimed at the suppression of the Polish rebellion against the Russian Crown. Clausewitz's hostility against the Polish cause expressed in a variety of texts from the period contributed further to the reluctance shared by biographers and readers of *On War* to discuss the events of 1831. Almost two hundred years later, however, we should be able to take a prudent look into Clausewitz's writings, discuss his role as the Chief of Staff of the Prussian Army of Observation, and his influence over the course of the Polish-Russian War of 1831, and finally, the insight gained into Clausewitz's legacy.

Polish scholars of the November Uprising and the War of 1831 have displayed significantly more interest in Clausewitz's role in these events. The only monograph on the subject is indeed in Polish, but it was written in the 1930s.⁵ More recently scholars like Henryk Kocój and Norbert Kasperek reference Clausewitz's writings from the period.⁶ Contrary to the Western scholarship, Polish historians have little doubt in the indirect but crucial role the Prussian army at the border played in the suppression of the Polish efforts.⁷ Nonetheless, Clausewitz's particular actions does not constitute the focus of these works.

³ Donald Stoker, *Clausewitz: His Life and Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 254–281.

⁴ Bruno Colson, *Clausewitz* (Paris: Perin, 2016), 362–369.

⁵ Otton Dąbrowski, „Clausewitz a kampanja 1831 roku,” *Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy* 4, No. 2 (1931): 273–294.

⁶ Henryk Kocój, *Preußen und Deutschland gegenüber dem Novemberaufstand* (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1990), 10, 22–24, 35–37, 71; Norbert Kasperek, *Polnische Aufständische in Ost- und Westpreußen, 1830–1833*, trans. Krzysztof Gębura (Dąbrówno: Oficyna Retman, 2012), 26.

⁷ For my research on the matters of the 1830–1831 November Uprising, in addition to the already mentioned works by Kocój and Kasperek, I have relied on the following monographs: R. F. Leslie, *Polish Politics and the Revolution of November 1830* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1969); Marian Kukiel, *Czartoryski and the European Unity, 1770–1861* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955) and Henryk Kocój, *Powstanie listopadowe w relacjach dyplomatów pruskich, saskich i rosyjskich* (Kraków: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2008).

This article argues that Clausewitz's visceral opposition to the November Uprising stemmed from his fears due to Europe's growing political polarization coupled with concerns about Prussia's strategic vulnerabilities. In 1831, Prussia opposed the Polish independence, but also wished to retain a veneer of no direct participation in the war. In this strategy, Clausewitz played an integral role. He oversaw the tightened control over Prussia's eastern borders and thus, prevented supplies and volunteers from reaching the Kingdom of Poland. Additionally, Clausewitz planned the interception and detainment of Polish troops crossing the border. Clausewitz's formidable skills as a military planner deprived the Polish army of critical manpower and resources and effectively shortened the war's course, but without giving Great Powers sympathetic to the Polish independence, like France, a clear cause for intervention.

This indirect approach diverged from Clausewitz's perception as a strategic thinker always advocating for massive and decisive actions. Yet it remained in accord with his mature writings where he gradually abandoned the idea that Napoleonic warfare constituted as the yardstick for all modern conflicts, while embracing limited forms of warfare. In addition to shedding light onto Clausewitz's life, this article also explores the events of 1830–1831 from a Prussian point of view. It discusses the place of the November Uprising and the Polish-Russian War within the European Great Power Competition, the reasons for the hostility against the Polish cause, and ultimately the causes for its defeat.

I

On 7 March 1831, *Generalfeldmarschall* August Neidhardt von Gneisenau, appointed as Commander of the Prussian Army of Observation, left Berlin in the company of his Chief of Staff *Generalmajor* Carl von Clausewitz. Two days later, the party reached Posen, the capital of the name-sake Grand Duchy, where they established their headquarters. The immediate reason for Gneisenau's and Clausewitz's travel was the outcome of the Battle of Grochow on 25 February. Originally a Russian victory, by deciding not to pursue the remains of the Polish army over Vistula into Warsaw, the Russian Commander General Hans Karl von Diebitsch failed to bring the Polish-Russian War of 1831 to a swift end. The Russian plans to subdue the Kingdom of Poland in just one blow had collapsed and Warsaw was saved. Around Europe, newspapers published articles describing the Battle of Grochow as a heroic Polish success – the mighty Russian army, it appeared, was unable to defeat the Polish troops. In Prussia, the Russian blunder raised once more the fears of unrest in its own eastern provinces inhabited by a native Polish population. The Prussian commanders

stationed in these provinces dispatched urgent messages to Berlin demanding reinforcements. Although anxious not to escalate the situation further but equally disquieted by the reports, Frederick William III hastily issued the order for Gneisenau to travel to Posen and assume his duty as the commanding officer for Prussia's Army of Observation.

The headquarters was a small team totaling just ten men. Beside Gneisenau and Clausewitz, it consisted of *Major* Franz August O'Etzel, *Major* Heinrich von Brandt, *Hauptmann* von Pirch, Gneisenau's two adjutants (one of them his son August), and three *Feldjäger* serving primarily as couriers. *Hauptmann* Wilhelm von Rahden, an officer previously serving in the Russian Army but looking for reappointment in Prussia, was an additional member of the team, but only on a temporary basis.⁸ The three staff officers – Brandt, O'Etzel, and Pirch – served directly under Clausewitz's supervision.⁹ Despite its cumbersome name, the Army of Observation, in fact, consisted of the four army corps already stationed in the provinces of East and West Prussia (I Army Corps), Brandenburg (II Army Corps), Grand Duchy of Posen (V Army Corps), and Silesia (VI Army Corps), about 80,000 regular troops (or 145,000 men with the *Landwehr*). Already in late 1830, after the news about the November Uprising in Warsaw reached Berlin, the four corps had moved their line units closer to the border and partially mobilized their *Landwehr* regiments. The Grand Duchy of Posen was their main theater of operations.

The corps however required a unified command, as their commanders, especially *General der Kavallerie* Hans Ernst Karl von Zieten of the VI Army Corps and *General der Kavallerie* Friedrich Erhard von Röder of the V Army Corps in Posen, often disagreed,¹⁰ or their military orders were at odds with the local civilian authorities and the latter complained directly to the Prussian King Frederick William III.¹¹ Grochow had revealed the Russian army's weakness and forced Berlin to adopt more proactive measures. Another major Polish victory, the Prussian military leadership feared, would certainly result in unrest in the Grand Duchy of Posen.¹² The headquarters, thus, had to bring

⁸ Wilhelm von Rahden, *Wanderungen eines alten Soldaten*, Part 2 (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1848), 327–328.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 328.

¹⁰ Gneisenau to Fritz von Brühl, 6 March 1831, see Heinrich von Sybel, "Gneisenau und sein Schwiegersonn, Graf Friedrich Wilhelm v. Brühl," *Historische Zeitschrift* 69, No. 2 (1892): 270.

¹¹ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin-Dahlem (hereafter: GStA PK), VI. HA, NL Witzleben No. 95, Friedrich Wilhelm to Witzleben, Berlin, 5 March 1831, 23.

¹² Gneisenau to Friedrich Wilhelm, 13 April 1831, see Theodor Schiemann, "Aus Gneisenau letzten Tagen," *Forschungen zu der Brandenburgische und Preussischen Geschichte* 24, Issue 2 (1911): 248.

unity in the Prussian efforts by planning and coordinating the corps' movements, and gathering and sharing information between Berlin and the corps themselves.¹³ The four corps had to operate as one army.

When the headquarters' staff took a temporary residence at the best venue in Posen, Hotel de Vienne, they assumed that their mission would be brief. Although Diebitsch's withdrawal further east from Warsaw gave a cause for worry, Clausewitz wrote to his wife Marie in Berlin, he judged the move as only a tactical retreat.¹⁴ It was just a matter of time before the Russian army attacked again with an overwhelming force. The ongoing instability in the West also led Gneisenau and Clausewitz to believe that they would be soon redeploying on the Rhine.

The concept of Army of Observation (*Observationsarmee* or *Beobachtungsarmee*) had a long tradition in European warfare. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a state or a coalition of states created these corps for the purpose of intercepting hostile acts. This type of military body had primarily defensive tasks. It could serve diplomatic purposes; to deter foreign aggression; signal readiness to back up negotiations with force; or even perform limited operations and exert pressure. In siege warfare, an army or a corps of observation aimed at preventing a relief force from lifting the siege. In the Napoleonic era, with war's growing intensity, the armies of observation fell out of fashion. In the post-1815 period when limited interventions resumed, the practice was revived, too. For instance, in 1822–1823, before France intervened in Spain, it stationed an army of observation on the border.¹⁵ Although Berlin officially declared a policy of non-intervention, the designation of the four corps as the Army of Observation and the deployment of a headquarters staff revealed that, if needed, the entity could also act offensively. Additionally, Austria also deployed an Army of Observation to its border with the Kingdom of Poland, to its predominantly Polish province of Galicia. At its helm was the veteran *Feldmarschalleutnant* Joseph von Stutterheim, previously the military commander for the Province of Galicia.¹⁶

The deployment of Gneisenau and his Chief-of-Staff Clausewitz revealed the complexities of the European crisis of 1830–1832. In fact, without discussing the larger international context, Prussian actions at the border and

¹³ Heinrich von Brandt, *Aus dem Leben des General Dr. Heinrich von Brandt*, Vol. 2 (Berlin: Mittler und Sohn, 1870), 50 and 59.

¹⁴ "Clausewitz to Marie, Posen, 12 March 1831," in *Karl und Marie von Clausewitz: Ein Lebensbild in Briefen und Tagebuchblätter*, ed. Karl Linnebach (Berlin: Wegweiser-Verlag, 1935), 412.

¹⁵ Irby Coghill Nichols, *The European Pentarchy and the Congress of Verona, 1822* (The Hague: Springer, 1971), 29–30.

¹⁶ Jürgen Angelow, *Von Wien nach Königgrätz: Die Sicherheitspolitik des Deutschen Bundes im europäischen Gleichgewicht 1815–1866* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996), 88.

Clausewitz's writings lack much of their nuances and reasoning. Although Gneisenau and Clausewitz were sent to the eastern border, the crisis started in the West. In the summer of 1830, the conservative corset the Congress of Vienna had imposed on Europe in 1814–1815 appeared to collapse. As one of the measures constructed to restrain post-Napoleonic France and guarantee lasting European peace, the Allies reinstated the Bourbon Dynasty on the French throne. Louis XVIII and his brother Charles X were never popular with the French population, however. The growing dissatisfaction with Charles X finally erupted on the streets of Paris in the so-called “Three Glorious Days” (or *Trois Glorieuses* in French, 27–29 July). Charles X fled the capital and lost his crown. To calm the spirits at home, but mostly to reassure the rest of Europe, as a moderate compromise the Duke of Orléans, from the junior branch of the Bourbon Dynasty, was crowned as Louis Philippe I. The shock about the swift abdication in Paris had barely settled in when the news about the Belgian Revolution on 25 August stupefied Europe. Sensing the urgent need to strengthen the moderate faction in France while not giving the radicals additional munitions, the remaining members of the Concert of Europe gradually came to terms with Louis Phillip's regime. Belgium's separation or even possible annexation by France, as the latter country's radicals already contemplated, constituted a much greater problem. After all, during the Congress of Vienna, the significant growth in territory granted to the United Netherlands – with the Belgian provinces and the Princedom of Liege – aimed at the establishment of a strong buffer state on France's border. King William's attempts to restore his rule in Belgium by force resulted in bloody fighting on the streets of Brussels on 23–26 September.

Despite the widening crisis, the desire for peace prevailed for the time being. The members of the Concert of Europe were consumed by internal weakness and unable to immediately mount forces for an intervention. The Russian Tsar Nicholas I's belligerent insistence on an intervention in France was tempered by the reluctance of Prussia's Frederick William III to allow the Russian troops' march through his country on their way west. Members of Prussia's military leadership, led by Gneisenau as the most likely commander of the nation's force in a case of an intervention, argued for caution but also insisted that Prussia should build a strong defensive position in the west. During these developments, urged by Gneisenau, Clausewitz wrote his two memoranda on a possible war with France emphasizing the need for remaining on the defense and building a broad coalition, should the need for a war remain.¹⁷

¹⁷ The memoranda are published as “Mitteilungen aus dem Archive des Königlichen Kriegsministeriums. II. Zwei Denkschriften von Clausewitz 1830/1831,” *Militär-Wochenblatt* 76, No. 29–31 (1891): 757–766, 786–796, 818–822.

After the hot revolutionary summer in Paris and Brussels, many looked nervously towards the Polish lands and suspected that it would be the next calamitous point.¹⁸ Particularly the Prussian-ruled Grand Duchy of Posen appeared to be a hot spot of radicalism. Already on 14 September the Prussian government issued an order allowing General Friedrich von Röder, the commander of the V Army Corps stationed in the Grand Duchy of Posen, to apply military measures, if needed.¹⁹ The local Prussian authorities sent back to Berlin reports full of anxiety, suggesting that an uprising was just a matter of time.²⁰ To Gneisenau, Clausewitz also described the situation in the Grand Duchy of Posen as dangerously unstable and recommended, in case of a campaign west, Prussia should leave I Army Corps there, fully mobilized and ready to suppress a rebellion.²¹ Instead of Posen, however, the revolution erupted in Warsaw.

The news about the November Uprising suddenly shifted priorities in Europe. Prussia faced a particularly complex situation, as it potentially had to deal with another conflict on its borders, and perhaps even an insurgency in its eastern provinces. Once he learned about the uprising in Warsaw, on 5 December, Clausewitz, serving as head of the Artillery Inspectorate in Breslau postponed his scheduled work-related trip. He harbored hopes that his old commander and close friend Gneisenau recalled him to Berlin.²² Clausewitz indeed received urgent orders on the night of 10 December. Gneisenau arranged for Clausewitz to serve as his chief of staff.²³

After his urgent recall, Clausewitz was dismayed to find the political and military leadership in Berlin mired in endless debates about how to

¹⁸ Emil von Conrady, *Leben und Wirken des Generals der Infanterie und kommandierenden Generals des V. Armeekorps Carl von Grolman*, Part 2 (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1894), 116.

¹⁹ Barbara Dettke, *Die asiatische Hydra: die Cholera von 1830/31 in Berlin und den preußischen Provinzen Posen, Preußen und Schlesien* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 91; Karl Heink Streiter, *Die Nationalen Beziehungen im Grossherzogtum Posen 1815–1848* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986), 53.

²⁰ Dettke, *Die asiatische Hydra*, 91; Theodor Schiemann, *Geschichte Russlands unter Kaiser Nikolaus I*, Vol. 3 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1913), 44–46.

²¹ Curiously Clausewitz expressed these concerns on 3 December, just before the reports about the November Uprising reached him. “Clausewitz an Gneisenau, Breslau 3 Dezember 1830,” in Carl von Clausewitz, *Schriften-Aufsätze-Studien-Briefe, Dokumente aus dem Clausewitz-, Scharnhorst- und Gneisenau-Nachlaß sowie aus öffentlichen und privaten Sammlungen*, ed. Werner Hahlweg, Vol. 2, part 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1990), 598–599.

²² “Clausewitz an Gneisenau, Breslau, 8 December 1830,” in *ibid.*, 600–601.

²³ Clausewitz, “Tagebuch vom 7 September 1830 bis 9 März 1831,” in Karl Schwartz, *Das Leben des Generals Carl von Clausewitz und der Frau Marie von Clausewitz geb. Gräfin von Brühl, in Briefen, Tagebüchern, Aufsätzen und anderen Schriftstücken*, Vol. 2 (Berlin: F. Dümmler, 1878), 300.

proceed. The early measures included ordering the mobilization of the four corps and the dislocation of the predominantly Polish *Landwehr* deeper into Prussian territory, and inspections of the fortresses in Thorn, Posen, Glogau and Cosel and their preparation for defense. Still Berlin clarified that this was not a mobilization for war but a precaution and communicated the latter point to foreign diplomats.²⁴ During Clausewitz's first official meeting in Berlin, *Generalleutnant* Job von Witzleben, the king's adjutant-general, informed him too that Frederick William III intended to delay the public announcement about Gneisenau's command of the Army of Observation, for fears of escalating the situation further. Additionally, Nicholas I regarded the Polish uprising as an internal matter and declined Prussian help.²⁵ Therefore, for the next six weeks, Clausewitz had little to do.

In Berlin's salons, Clausewitz found significant support for the Polish cause. The genuine sympathy for the Poles was often paired with discontent about the conservative turn European politics took after 1815 and desire for change in Prussia and wider Germany. Others hoped that the November Uprising would humble Russia's ambitions in Europe. Clausewitz was dismayed at these reactions as he considered the unrest in Warsaw dangerous for Prussia's internal stability and international role. As a reaction to the heated debates in Berlin's salons, he wrote two texts on the matter and their strong language continues to trouble their readers ever since. The first text, "Europe since the Polish Partitions," as Peter Paret and Daniel Moran write, was most likely an attempt to clarify his thoughts on the political situation at the moment and was first published in Karl Schwartz's biography in 1879.²⁶ Clausewitz composed the second one, "On the Basic Question of Germany's Existence", with the clear intent of publishing it in the popular press but could not find an interested venue. Clausewitz's somber tone and insistence that only considerations about Prussia's security should dominate the discussion, together with intense suspicion of France and distasteful descriptions of Poland, make both essays perhaps the most controversial part of his legacy.

A sober reading of these texts reveal that they were written from a position of German weakness and anxiety. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars, German patriots like Clausewitz dreamed of the German lands' greater political integration. The Vienna Congress squashed their hopes by creating a loose German Confederation. Hence, fifteen years later, as

²⁴ Clausewitz, "Tagebuch," 301; "Haake an Bernstorff, Berlin, 7 XII 1830," in Kocój, *Powstanie listopadowe*, 91.

²⁵ Kocój, *Preußen und Deutschland*, 23–24.

²⁶ *Carl von Clausewitz: Historical and Political Writings*, ed. and transl. Paret and Daniel Moran (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 370.

Clausewitz wrote, the German states were divided and politically weak (“*das in seiner politischen Einrichtung so äußerst schwache, in seinen Richtungen so sehr geteilte deutsche Reich*”).²⁷ The German states’ lack of unity and direction, in his mind, was in stark contrast with France’s restored strength. In 1814–1815, France’s ambitions were curtailed, but the petty German princess’ lack of vision and desire to implement internal reforms and counterbalance the powerful neighbor had led to its quick resurgence. Since the last seventeenth century, Clausewitz argued, France’s rise was the force destabilizing Europe. France’s dominance over the continent coincided with the Polish Partitions, he wrote, hence most observers mistook Poland’s disappearance from the European political map as the cause for the disbalance. France’s unbridled ambitions were the source of instability, however.²⁸ Similarly, Clausewitz envisioned a restored and independent Poland as the natural ally of France. Prussia and the rest of the German states would be squeezed between those two states and unable to assert themselves on the European stage.

Clausewitz had visited the Polish lands on multiple occasions. On his way to Russia in 1812, he was shocked by the poverty he encountered in the villages and penned the notorious lines that “*Das ganze Leben der Polen ist, als wäre es mit zerrissenen Stricken und Lumpen zusammengebunden und zusammengehalten*”.²⁹ Simultaneously, throughout his participation in the 1812 Campaign, Clausewitz, who failed to learn Russian and needed help with the Russian language and customs, heavily relied on a servant he had hired in Poland.³⁰ In the Polish attitude, Clausewitz also discerned arrogance against the Prussians, as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had been an older and much grander state than Prussia, and many German princes once were its vassals.³¹ Furthermore, the circle of the military reformers to which Clausewitz belonged, in the Reform period (1807–1812) had aimed at dismantling aristocratic privilege; hence it shared little sympathy for the Polish magnates’ economic and political

²⁷ Clausewitz, “Die Verhältnisse Europas seit der Teilung Polens,” in Schwartz, *Das Leben*, 2:408.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 401.

²⁹ “Clausewitz to Marie, 15 May 1812,” in *Karl und Marie*, 287.

³⁰ Clausewitz mentioned in his study of the 1812 Campaign that his servant was Polish, but Marie, who encountered the servant after Clausewitz’s return to Prussia, suggested in her correspondence that he was Jewish. Clausewitz, “The Campaign of 1812 in Russia,” in *Carl von Clausewitz: Historical*, 172; and Vanya Eftimova Bellinger, *Marie von Clausewitz: The Woman behind the Making of On War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³¹ Clausewitz, “Zurückführung der vielen politischen Fragen, welche Deutschland beschäftigen, auf die unserer Gesamt-Existenz,” in Schwartz, *Das Leben*, 2:412–413.

dominance.³² Gneisenau, for instance, considered the November Uprising a reckless aristocratic revolt and therefore, envisioned it as an opportunity for redistributing the lands of those Polish aristocrats in the Grand Duchy of Posen who had left to fight in the Kingdom of Poland.³³

Clausewitz believed that if the November Uprising was successful, the restored independent Polish state would inevitably attempt to recover the lands lost in its partitions. In 1814–1815, Clausewitz was a strong advocate of Prussia absorbing Saxony, thus partially consolidating the German principalities. He was deeply disappointed when Austria, Great Britain, and France opposed the Prussian-Russian plans.³⁴ For its support for Prussia's territorial growth, Russia envisioned the unification of the Polish lands under its crown. Clausewitz believed that by letting Russia rule Poland, Russia could be controlled more effectively (*“dann ist es grade Polen wodurch Russland besiegt werden kann”*).³⁵ Comparatively, he displayed little interest in the Grand Duchy of Posen which Prussia ultimately received as a compensation in Vienna.

Even if he had not been enthusiastic about the annexation of former Polish lands in 1814–1815, in 1831 Clausewitz feared that if forced to give up these lands, Prussia would significantly shrink in population and territory, and inevitably lose, too, its position as a Great Power.³⁶ Therefore, he chastised his fellow Prussians who enthusiastically supported the Polish cause, for they lacked an understanding about the situation's gravity. Nevertheless, just like in his war plans for France, Clausewitz reiterated the need for Prussia to remain on the strategic defense and not to interfere in the Polish–Russian conflict unless provoked. Strengthening Prussia's borders and a preparation for a worst-case scenario, i.e., an all-out war – but not directly meddling in the conflict – ensured that Prussia would keep the moral high ground. If Prussia was indeed forced to march into the Kingdom of Poland, it would do it, then, with significant international and public support.³⁷

³² When travelling through the Polish lands in 1812, Clausewitz, for instance, blamed the poverty he encountered to the magnates' tight grip over Polish economy. “Clausewitz to Marie, 15 May 1812,” 287–288.

³³ Gneisenau to Fritz von Brühl, 30. December 1831, see Sybel, “Gneisenau und sein Schwiegersohn,” 269.

³⁴ “Clausewitz an Gneisenau, Solingen, 9 Februar 1815,” and “Clausewitz an Gneisenau, Aachen, 27 Februar 1815,” in Clausewitz, *Schriften*, 2/1:166 and 168–169.

³⁵ “Clausewitz an Gneisenau, Sancheville 29 Juli 1815,” in *ibid.*, 186.

³⁶ Clausewitz, “Die Verhältnisse Europas,” 404; Clausewitz, “Zurückführung der vielen politischen Fragen,” in Schwartz, *Das Leben*, 2:413–414.

³⁷ Clausewitz, “Die Verhältnisse Europas,” 416.

What Clausewitz's analysis in 1830–1831 lacked was a vision of different political realities in Europe. The Napoleonic era marked the zenith of France's domination over Europe and from then on, the country gradually lost its preeminent position. Less than forty years later, Prussia united the German lands and for its turn, dominated Europe. The German Empire's rise, just like the French before, unsettled its neighbors. The jarred memories from the Napoleonic Wars prevented Clausewitz from observing the incremental changes the European security design was undergoing and that his fears in 1830–1831 about France's domination were exaggerated. Nonetheless, throughout the crisis, his main concern remained Prussia's inability to navigate the treacherous field of international diplomacy and meet the other Great Powers on an equal footing. In this regard, throughout the crisis of 1830–1832, Paris indeed exploited the developments far better than Berlin, especially in the case of the Belgium independence, thus constantly feeding Clausewitz's suspicions.³⁸

Clausewitz must have been well-aware about the Vienna Congress's debates concerning the possible restoration of the Polish state as the independent center of Europe and by extent a bulwark against Russia's ambitions. His text did not outright dismiss the resurgence of this vision in 1830–1831 – he just considered it unrealistic in that particular historical moment: *“Aber dazu gehoeren Bedingungen, die durchaus nicht vorhanden sind. Erstlich müsssten die Polen Mittel haben, sich schnell in einen europäischen Staat zu veredeln. Dies ist eine völlige Unmöglichkeit. Gesetzt, es gelänge ihnen in ihrer Unabhängigkeit diese Aufgabe wirklich dereinst, so wird es doch nur dereinst sein, nämlich vielleicht nach hundert Jahren. Zweitens aber würde zu einer heilsamen Mittelmacht ein in den Polen selbst liegendes befreundetes Verhältnis zu den Deutschen gehören”*.³⁹ In other words, in Clausewitz's mind, an independent Poland playing a major role in European politics was a future possibility, but to achieve this state, Poland – and of course Germany – had to become strong political entities first, and second be in friendly relations with each other. In 1830–1831 however, neither Prussia, nor Poland were close to that ideal state. Therefore, Clausewitz vehemently opposed the Polish aspirations for an independent Kingdom of Poland.

Clausewitz's analysis mirrored the Prussian government's approach in 1830–1831. Prussia harbored a sense of weakness and existential fear should the Kingdom of Poland achieve its independence, or France decide to annex Belgium and thus triggering war in the West. The nightmare

³⁸ “Clausewitz to Marie, 23 June 1831,” “Clausewitz to Marie, 2 July 1831,” and “Clausewitz to Marie, 13 August 1831,” in *Karl und Marie*, 455–456, 460–461, and 477.

³⁹ Clausewitz, “Zurückführung,” 412.

scenarios included both developments occurring simultaneously. This dictated Berlin's cautious approach. Prussia reinforced the defenses of its Eastern provinces and took great pains in upholding the public perception that it did not directly interfere in Polish-Russian conflict.

II

The arrival of the Army of Observation's headquarters in Posen brought unity in the Prussian efforts. Early on, Clausewitz budded heads with General von Röder, the Commander of the V Army Corps. Clausewitz made clear that Gneisenau was the supreme commander and that he, Clausewitz, Gneisenau's preeminent advisor.⁴⁰ For the rest of the operation, the Army of Observation's headquarters served as the primary planning center. As the analysis of official documents reveals, the headquarters in Posen drafted most measures, while the government in Berlin mainly approved or, respectively, rejected certain courses of action. The headquarters' preeminent role meant that, in fact, the Prussian efforts were largely shaped by Clausewitz, as he wrote most of the strategic analysis and planned the measures sent back to Berlin for a final approval. Gneisenau frequently left the operational work to Clausewitz and mainly signed the latter's drafts.⁴¹

As experienced military leaders, Clausewitz and Gneisenau realized the novelty of their mission. Gneisenau referred to it as a police operation (*"doch ist mein jetziges Kommando nur ein polizeiliches"*).⁴² Clausewitz joked that avoiding actions was the nature of their action (*"unsere Tätigkeit oder Nicht- Tätigkeit"*).⁴³ The November Uprising was a spontaneous act and while galvanizing Polish passions, the lack of thorough preparations was its crucial weakness. The Prussian leadership easily recognized this weakness and built its strategy upon targeting it.⁴⁴ In December 1830, Prussia placed restrictions on the export of weapons and ammunitions to Poland and controlled individuals wishing to cross the border. As a landlocked state, the Kingdom of Poland's supply lines were thus irreparably damaged. The unified headquarters continued the course of indirectly crip-

⁴⁰ "Clausewitz to Marie, 12 March 1831," in *Karl und Marie*, 413.

⁴¹ "Clausewitz to Marie, 17 March 1831," and "Clausewitz to Marie, 5 September 1831," in *ibid.*, 417 and 490. See also Gneisenau's admission about their working relations in Gneisenau to Brühl, 10 April 1831 in Sybel, "Gneisenau und sein Schwiegersohn," 275.

⁴² Gneisenau to Brühl, 10 April 1831 see Sybel, "Gneisenau und sein Schwiegersohn," 275.

⁴³ "Clausewitz to Marie, 17 March 1831," 415.

⁴⁴ As Gneisenau wrote: *"Die Leute dort mögen wohl begreifen, dass man ohne hinlängliche Lebensmittel und ohne Pulver einen Krieg nicht in die Länge führen kann"*. Gneisenau to Brühl, 16 June 1831 see Sybel, "Gneisenau und sein Schwiegersohn," 284.

pling the Polish war efforts. The troop buildup on the border also signaled Berlin's ability to swiftly project power if needed. Nonetheless, as Gneisenau wrote, this approach required strategic patience and persistence: "In dieser Hinsicht möchte das Zaudersystem des F.-W. P. [Friedrich Wilhelm von Preussen] am sichersten zum Ziel führen, wenn nur nicht das intervenierende Nichtinterventions-System Zeit gewönne, sich auszubilden".⁴⁵

The conduct of the Army of Observation mirrored one of Clausewitz's mature but underdeveloped concepts, namely the abandonment of the notion that Napoleonic warfare constituted the yardstick for all modern conflicts. In the Book VIII of *On War*, Clausewitz declared that Napoleon's aggressive and rapid assault constituted the superb form of warfare, or *absolute war*.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, after 1827, while revising his lifework, Clausewitz gradually abandoned this idea.⁴⁷ In practical terms, the abandonment of the term *absolute war* meant that various degrees of conflict intensity could be considered as equally valuable. If Napoleon's aggressive and rapid assault style was no longer the yardstick for how to wage every campaign, military conduct could encompass "all degrees of importance and intensity", Clausewitz wrote, from a war of extermination to a simple armed observation.⁴⁸ He no longer considered the limited forms of military conduct an abomination or a grotesque distortion of war's true nature of mass, intense, and determined violence. They constituted a genuine course of action when following political goals. In fact, the type of operation he conducted on the Polish border in 1831 resembled the low-intensity conduct identified on the pages of *On War* – an armed observation.

Strikingly for an early nineteenth century army, the headquarters in Posen created a separate and highly effective intelligence team. Clausewitz's initial letters to his wife Marie complained about the lack of good intelligence, and historians have repeated these complains uncritically.⁴⁹ The memoirs of Heinrich von Brandt and the quality of Clausewitz's memoranda disavow the notion that the Prussian actions throughout 1831 were hampered by insufficient intelligence. As the only Polish speaker, Brandt

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and transl. by Michael Howard and Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 580.

⁴⁷ As Christopher Bassford observes, in the last three chapters of Book VIII the term absolute war is entirely missing; Bassford, "Clausewitz's Categories of War and the Supersession of 'Absolute War'," 16 March 2020, ClausewitzStudies.org, accessed on November 21, 2021, <http://www.clausewitz.com/mobile/Bassford-Supersession5.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 81.

⁴⁹ "Clausewitz to Marie, 17 March 1831," and "Clausewitz to Marie, 18 March 1831," in *Karl und Marie*, 418 and 419.

was tasked to compare and analyze all available sources and then reassess the information with the help of “healthy skepticism”. Brandt once served in the Polish Legion of Vistula and fought for Napoleon in the Peninsular War and the Russian Campaign, but after 1815 entered the Prussian army. Trained as a cartographer, Captain von Rahden created maps displaying the movements of the Polish and Russian forces. The insight gained from this careful evaluation of the information surprised the rest of the Prussian army.⁵⁰

This modern approach to intelligence strongly diverged from the Napoleonic era where the commander was frequently his own intelligence officer and based on the received information, decided on the course of action. Therefore, presented with partial or contradicting reports amid a battle, commanders lacked time to carefully evaluate these reports' veracity, and as a result lost their nerve when negative news arrived, or made mistakes inexplicable for later observers. Clausewitz's harsh assessment of intelligence on the pages of *On War*, could be also read as a criticism of the Napoleonic era's haphazard approach.⁵¹ In the early months of 1831, with cascading news about unrest around Europe, Clausewitz reconsidered his opinion on intelligence and became a passionate proponent of careful evaluation of raw reports.⁵² In Posen, he finally tested his ideas for creating a specialized team tasked with a careful and comprehensive evaluation of information. The gained insight surely convinced Clausewitz in the effectiveness of this modern approach to intelligence – but he never captured these changes on the pages of *On War*.

The headquarters in Posen was also responsible for one of the most damaging measures to the Polish war efforts. Namely, the decision not to allow Polish troops who crossed into Prussia to return into the Kingdom of Poland. In fact, while scholars have extensively debated the measure's outcomes, the headquarters' role in planning it has remained largely overlooked. Originally, Frederick William's orders for the conduct of the Prussian troops on the border from 11 February, stated that Polish troops crossing over to the Prussian territory had to be disarmed but allowed to return back to the Kingdom of Poland (“*Die Rückkehr in ihre Heimat kann ihnen jedoch einzeln und ohne Waffen gestattet werden*”).⁵³ In May, with the Lithuanian Uprising in full swing and urgent reports about the spread of cholera in the Kingdom of Poland, the headquarters in Posen sent a mem-

⁵⁰ Brandt, *Aus dem Leben*, 2:102–103.

⁵¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 117–118.

⁵² Clausewitz, “Tagebuch,” 315–316.

⁵³ “Reskript Friedrich Wilhelms III (11 February 1831),” in Kocój, *Powstanie listopadowe*, 121.

orandum to Berlin suggesting changes in the border proceedings. General Józef Dwernicki's crossing over to Austrian-rule Galicia in late April and Austria's decision to intern his men led to an intense debate between Gneisenau, Clausewitz, and the rest of the team about the required measures should a significant number of Polish-Lithuanian troops attempt to traverse the Prussian border. Officially signed by Gneisenau, the headquarters' memorandum from 10 May stated that permitting Polish troops to return to the Kingdom of Poland was counterproductive to the Prussian strategy. The change in policy, too, required the establishment of camps where the surrendering troops were quarantined as, by that point, the fear of cholera was gripping the Prussian state. The expected large numbers made it impossible to hold these troops in the already established quarantine stations along the border.⁵⁴

The Memorandum from 10 May reshaped the Prussian conduct against the Polish troops. The latter, aware of Frederick William's orders from February regarded the change as a break in Prussia's declarations of noninvolvement in the conflict. After the demise of General Antoni Giełgud's expedition in Lithuania, in mid-July Polish-Lithuanian troops crossed into Prussian territory. Following their disarmament, according to Prussian sources, 249 officers and 2,361 soldiers led by General Chłapowski were sent to Schernen, and 359 officers and 3,904 soldiers bivouacked in Packmohnen northwest from Tilsit.⁵⁵ The two camps were established as stations where the troops could undergo a twenty-one-day quarantine. When surrendering, many believed that they would be allowed to return home eventually. After the required twenty-one days had passed, the Polish-Lithuanian troops were informed however that they would be moved shortly to villages and towns in East Prussia. Coupled with the deteriorating living conditions, in August the detained troops attempted breaking out of the camps. General Chłapowski wrote to Frederick William III and stating the latter's order from February, petitioned for his men's release.⁵⁶ On 5 September the Prussian king sent an answer to Chłapowski's petition stating that when the order was written, none could foresee the great number of troops crossing the border.⁵⁷ There would not be change in the Prussian decision to keep the Polish-Lithuanian troops in East Prussia for the dura-

⁵⁴ "Gneisenau to Friedrich Wilhelm III, 10 May 1831," in *ibid.*, 164–165.

⁵⁵ Wilhelm von Dankbahr, *Der Übertritt der polnischen Corps von Giełgud, Chłapowski und Rybinski auf das königlich Preußische Gebiet, ihr Aufenthalt daselbst und die angeordnete Entfernung derselben* (Königsberg: Gebrüdern Borntträger, 1832), 4–6.

⁵⁶ Richard S. Ross III, *Contagion in Prussia, 1831: The Cholera Epidemic and the Threat of the Polish Uprising* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2015), 237.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

tion of the conflict. The measure drafted by the headquarters in May thus steadily eroded the Polish war efforts by depriving it from badly needed experienced troops.

III

Scholars generally judge the Prussian actions in 1831 as favoring the Russian war efforts, but a careful analysis of these actions suggests that the Army of Observation projected Prussia's own interests. On several occasions that meant, too, balking at Russian demands for greater support. Therefore, we can conclude that Prussia was never truly neutral, as a swift end of the unrests in the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania was clearly in her interest; however, Prussia made everything possible to avoid a direct involvement in the conflict. This meant, for instance, allowing the Russian army to supply its depots on Prussian territory, for starving Russian troops would delay the end of the conflict, while simultaneously rejecting any Russian demands for crossing the Vistula via Prussian territory.

The Russian Tsar Nicholas I expected an easy and fast victory in Poland and when these plans failed, he pressured the Russian commander General Hans von Diebitsch for a change in strategy in April. The Lithuanian Uprising cut off the Russian army's main supply roads, hence Diebitsch sent emissaries to Prussian-ruled Thorn to buy and store provisions, to be shipped to the Russian troops once they crossed the Vistula.⁵⁸ Envisioning a sweeping encirclement of Warsaw and the main Polish force, the Russian commander turned again to the Prussian government with a demand to cross the Vistula by Thorn. However, the plan risked inflaming the anger and the passion of the Poles living in Prussia. As Marie von Clausewitz informed her husband, in Berlin's salons, the possibility of granting Diebitsch's request was casually and openly discussed. Clausewitz was exasperated: "*Graf B. [Bernstorff, the Prussian foreign minister] wundert sich, dass die Russen nicht über Thorn gehen? Und Ihr alle denkt dabei nur an den Umweg?*" Considering the political and social conditions in 1831, Clausewitz believed even the discussion of such a possibility irresponsible. A crossing in Thorn had the potential to propel an uprising in the Grand Duchy of Posen and create a secondary theater of war.⁵⁹ When Frederick William III received the official request from Diebitsch, he indignantly replied that if he were to give permission for it, Prussia would also have to maintain a force of 400,000 men in the Grand Duchy, to absorb the consequences of this act. Furthermore, a wave of international criticism would

⁵⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁹ "Clausewitz to Marie, 17 March 1831," in *Karl und Marie*, 415–416.

follow this very public end to Prussia's policy of non-intervention, not to mention tensions within the country itself.⁶⁰

The headquarters in Posen did draft plans for a Prussian intervention in the Kingdom of Poland. These plans, however, ought to be considered in the context of preparations for a worst-case scenario. In early April, the headquarters in Posen sent a memorandum to Frederick William III, signed again by Gneisenau as commanding general, outlining a possible intervention. The immediate cause for these war plans was not only the Russian weakness but also France's ongoing instability. A new liberal government under Casimir Perier had been appointed and the rest of Europe feared that, to remain in power, Perier's cabinet may overreach and involve the country in another international crisis. "*Wird Warschau nicht bald bezwungen, so ist dieser Umstand für die siegenden Republikaner ein Beweggrund mehr, ihn [den Krieg] schnell zu beginnen, und Ew. Majestät westliche Provinzen würden mit Übermacht von Belgien und der Ober-Mosel aus angefallen sein,*" the memorandum stated. Realizing that Prussia had little chance to immediately stop the French force, the analysis suggested that the Rhine provinces would be temporarily abandoned (the proposal also echoed Clausewitz's earlier concept of defensive war). As a countermeasure, however, the Army of Observation should march into Poland and help the Russian army to suppress the Polish forces. In the aftermath, marching together with the numerous Russian troops, the Prussian army could overwhelm and destroy the French forces on the Rhine. The memorandum was supported with an operational plan signed by Clausewitz. The latter envisioned 51,000 Prussian soldiers with 144 cannons marching east, separated in three corps, and advancing towards Warsaw from Western Prussia, Posen, and Silesia. Shortly before the capital, the corps would reunite for an assault, presumably coordinated with the Russian army.⁶¹ In a letter to his wife Marie from 6 April Clausewitz briefly mentioned these war plans but predicted that Frederick William III would never agree to such a bold move.⁶² These drafts constituted, therefore, more of a planning exercise for the headquarters in Posen.

A moderate liberal and a reformer in his youth, Clausewitz was deeply unsettled by the thought that the events of 1830–1831 pushed him into the reactionary camp. The rumors among Carl and Marie's friends that he had become belligerently anti-Polish bothered him. Writing to his wife he

⁶⁰ Ross, *Contagion*, 79.

⁶¹ The memorandum and the plan are published in Georg H. Pertz and Hans Delbrück, *Das Leben des Feldmarschalls Grafen Neithardt von Gneisenau*, Vol. 5 (Berlin: Georg Reimer Verlag, 1880), 648–651.

⁶² "Clausewitz to Marie, 6 April 1831," in *Karl und Marie*, 427.

wished to set the record straight – he did not harbor personal animosity against the Poles but considered the November Uprising and the Polish-Russian conflict that followed, when Europe was on the brink of a war, a dangerous act. Keeping the peace and civility in the Grand Duchy of Posen, Clausewitz wrote to Marie, was the best outcome for both Prussians and Poles living in it.⁶³ The war in the Kingdom of Poland, paradoxically, lowered the tensions in the duchy itself, as, with the outbreak of the hostilities, the most radical Polish patriots had left Posen to fight against the Russian army. As an attempt to keep the peace in the duchy, the Prussian headquarters also interacted with the local Polish elites. As Clausewitz wrote in jest to Marie, prominent Polish ladies even attempted to win him over for their cause.⁶⁴ Gneisenau's and Clausewitz's fame as moderate reformers also led some Poles to believe that the two men could be swayed to support the Polish side.⁶⁵ The Prussian army's highly visible presence in the border regions made any unrests highly unlikely, too.

The low-intensity nature of the conflict coupled with more troublesome news about unrest throughout Europe clearly unnerved the Prussian headquarters. In the second half of April, false news spread about yet another major engagement ending with an alleged Polish victory. The battle forced, so several messages claimed, the Russian army to capitulate. Convinced that the time for a consequential act had come, according to Brandt's memoirs, Clausewitz insisted that the Army of Observation should start concentrating immediately. According to Brandt, Frederick William III had granted Gneisenau the authority, in the most dire case, to march into the Kingdom of Poland without a further delay.⁶⁶ The famed German military historian Hans Delbrück, however, could never locate that particular order in the General Staff Archive and questioned whether, considering the circumstances, the king could ever grant Gneisenau such an authority.⁶⁷ Perhaps the unnerved military men wished to take the matter into their own hands, and ask the king for forgiveness later. Either way, Gneisenau had his qualms and decided to wait for more information. It turned out that the reports were indeed false. The lesson the headquarters espoused from this episode was to double down on intelligence, to avoid future missteps.

With cholera's appearance closer to the Prussian territory, the Prussian army prioritized its own government concerns even more clearly. Cholera

⁶³ "Clausewitz to Marie, 16 April 1831," in *ibid.*, 430–432.

⁶⁴ "Clausewitz to Marie, 16 April 1831," and "Clausewitz to Marie, 1 June 1831," in *ibid.*, 430 and 442.

⁶⁵ "Clausewitz to Marie, 27 June 1831," in *ibid.*, 459.

⁶⁶ Brandt, *Aus dem Leben*, 2:97.

⁶⁷ Pertz and Delbrück, *Gneisenau*, 5:652.

first appeared in Russia's gate to Asia, the city of Orenburg, in August 1829. From there, it moved deeper into the country. The march of thousands of Russian troops west sped up the terrifying new disease's arrival in Central Europe.⁶⁸ The cholera outbreak ravaged the Russian army's camps,⁶⁹ and in the aftermath of the Battle of Iganie (10 April), it crossed over to the Polish side and reached Warsaw on 20 April.⁷⁰ Berlin watched the spread of this new disease with growing anxiety. Learning about the outbreak of cholera in Warsaw, on 3 May, Frederick William III mobilized the Immediate Commission for Prevention of Cholera (*Immediat-Kommission zur Abwehrung der Cholera*).

On 9 May Clausewitz dispatched detailed military orders about the structure and functions of the sanitary cordon to the Army of Observation's divisional commanders.⁷¹ The border to the Kingdom of Poland was practically sealed off. The Russian army considered the harsh Prussian measures an impediment to their war plans. Diebitsch peppered the Prussian government and its Army of Observation with requests for policy modifications. The cordons threatened to interrupt not only the increasingly important deliveries from Thorn but also from the Port of Danzig, where direct supplies from Russia were expected.⁷² The Prussian government attempted to accommodate the Russian demands by expanding the exchange on the outskirts of Thorn where Russian emissaries bought and stored provisions.⁷³ Nonetheless, Berlin and local authorities engaged in long disputes over the Russian requests to use the ports in Danzig and Pillau near Königsberg. Allowing the docking of ships from Russia where the disease was raging on, constituted a true internal challenge for Berlin, particularly since Danzig was the subject of a complete lockdown due to cholera. (Despite Clausewitz's personal qualms about the measure's efficiency, he planned the tight cordon surrounding Danzig, too.⁷⁴) Local authorities and business com-

⁶⁸ Roderick E. McGrew, *Russia and the Cholera, 1823–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 101.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 102–103; Aleksandr Puzyrevsky, *Der Polnisch-Russische Krieg 1831*, Vol. 1 (Vienna: Kreisel & Gröger, 1893), 337.

⁷⁰ Józef Hordyński, *History of the Late Polish Revolution: And the Events of the Campaign* (Boston: Carter and Handee, 1832), 249–250.

⁷¹ Although lost today, the text of this document was related in the papers of General von Grolman, Clausewitz was explicitly named as its author. All these details are taken from Conrady, *Grolman*, 2:129.

⁷² Ross, *Contagion*, 79–81.

⁷³ Brandt, *Aus dem Leben*, 2:116.

⁷⁴ Clausewitz's plan is published in Gustav Schreiber, *Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments von Borcke: (4. Pommerschen) Nr. 21* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1889),

munities in Danzig and Königsberg also vehemently opposed such accommodations. After long debates and pressure from all sides, on 24 June the Immediate Commission allowed Russian ships to enter Prussian ports after a prolonged quarantine; first docking outside Danzig, and then moving on to Pillau for offloading. However, before the Russian ships could reach Pillau, cholera appeared in the nearby Königsberg, thus rendering the whole plan futile.⁷⁵ After Diebitsch's death from cholera on 29 May Field Marshal Ivan Paskievich assumed the Russian command. Paskievich also bombarded the headquarters in Posen with demands for supplies. Though he had his qualms, Gneisenau decided to meet the Russians half-way. In the areas where cholera was less of a concern, the sanitary cordons could be relaxed, and the trade with the Russian envoys allowed. This decision created a peculiar trade corridor along the frontier and outside of economic centers like Thorn and Königsberg.⁷⁶ Shipments for the Polish side, of course, enjoyed no such considerations.

To shame Prussia and shore up international support for the Polish cause, the new Polish Commander-in-Chief Jan Skrzynecki published an open letter to Frederick William III. The letter argued that if not for the Prussian support, by that point, plagued by their enormous supply problems, the Russian army would have retreated from the Kingdom of Poland. Skrzynecki mixed true facts, like the existence of exchanges, with widely exaggerated or even false rumors about Prussian shipments of uniforms, and deployments of Prussian artillerymen and engineers to help the Russian war efforts.⁷⁷ In conclusion, Skrzynecki begged Frederick William III to cease this support, implement a truly neutral policy and give the Polish side a chance to secure its people's freedom and independence. The answer to Skrzynecki's letter was written by none other than Clausewitz, although the article in *Zeitung des Großherzogtums Posen* was published anonymously.⁷⁸ Like Skrzynecki's letter, the response should be considered a continuation of the war with other means, namely words. Clausewitz purposely minimized the Prussian support for the Russian army. According to his article, none of the allegations were true, apart from Russian agents buying food and supplies from private dealers in Prussia and shipping them on rented

135–136; “Clausewitz to Marie, 13 June 1831,” and “Clausewitz to Marie, 16 June 1831,” in *Karl und Marie*, 453 and 466.

⁷⁵ Ross, *Contagion*, 72–75.

⁷⁶ Brandt, *Aus dem Leben*, 2:127.

⁷⁷ Skrzynecki's letter is published in English in Cyrus Redding, *Yesterday and Today*, Vol. 3 (London: T. C. Newby, 1863), 214–216. See Kasperek's discussion of Skrzynecki's letter in Kasperek, *Polnische Aufständische*, 25–26.

⁷⁸ Paret, “An Anonymous Letter by Clausewitz on the Polish. Insurrection of 1830–1831,” *The Journal of Modern History* 42, No. 2 (1970): 184.

barges and wagons. This happened, according to Clausewitz, without the local authorities' active support. None of these acts constituted a bridge of neutrality, however. There was, according to Clausewitz, a long list of historical precedents of businesses and inhabitants of neutral nations providing, for cash, support not sanctioned by their governments. For instance, when the French army marched against Prussia in the Seven Years' War, it crossed Rhine on vessels rented from the neutral Dutch Republic. In the same war, Russia established its own depots in the neutral and still independent Poland.

The exchange of open letters between Skrzynecki and Clausewitz clearly targeted the European public opinion. At this stage – with the Russian army preparing to cross the Vistula and besiege Warsaw – support from abroad and even a possible foreign intervention became crucial. Understanding this dimension of the war as well, Clausewitz counterattacked the soundness of Skrzynecki's arguments claiming that only Prussia's support kept the Russian efforts going.

How important was the Prussian support then? Clausewitz's involvement in the public debate provided, too, his indirect answer to this question. Certainly, the deliveries from Prussia were not the only thing keeping the Russian army still in the Kingdom of Poland. Nicholas's I desire to punish those who subverted his will, first and foremost, fueled the Russian war effort. In a moment of weakness in late May, the tsar sought military support from Prussia and Austria in exchange for a new Polish partition. Neither Prussia nor Austria had a desire to march into Poland and turned down Nicholas's I offer; yet none of the three powers would consider the possibility of a truly independent Poland either.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, if the Army of Observation played indeed such an unimportant role, its actions hardly would have deserved Clausewitz's outright deception and energetic defense. In other words, the Prussian support was crucial for the Russian war efforts but withholding it would not have put an end to the Russian advances, just slowed them down. Yet the impression that only the Prussian support kept the Russian army going increased the possibility of French pressure over Berlin, especially since the events in the Kingdom of Poland were gaining more attention in Paris. The latter constituted Clausewitz's real concern.⁸⁰ Blinded by his suspicion of France, Clausewitz failed to realize that at that point, Perier's cabinet had very little appetite for an intervention on the Kingdom of Poland's behalf.

The Russian army's crossing of the Vistula at Osiek created more headache for the headquarters in Posen. Gneisenau became so worried about

⁷⁹ Schiemann, *Geschichte*, 3:119–120 and 122–123; “Gneisenau to Bernstorff, 21 VI 1831,” in Kocój, *Powstanie listopadowe*, 182–183.

⁸⁰ “Clausewitz to Marie, 12 August 1831,” in *Karl und Marie*, 477.

a Polish attack on the Russian forces that he considered sending additional Prussian troops to secure the border. The village of Osiek was so close to the Prussian territory that, in case of attack, Russian or Polish troops would surely cross into Prussia. Clausewitz, however, argued against the measure because “*es sei für die Verhältnisse viel besser, wenn wir dort ganz schwach wären*”.⁸¹ The circumstances the chief of staff hinted were again of strategic nature. Prussian troop buildup could be perceived as a preparation for intervention, and this would surely compel a French reaction. In case that either Polish or Russian troops indeed crossed into Prussian territory, the Prussian army's attempt to capture the trespassers could easily lead to a battle escalating the situation further. Temporary surrendering Prussian territory was the strategically savvy move. Frederick William III also agreed with Clausewitz's proposal.⁸² No such dangerous situation developed, however. Well-informed about the growing political divisions within the Polish camp, another memorandum for the Prussian government drafted by Clausewitz concluded that the infighting and the loss of confidence in Skrzynecki's leadership most likely led to the missed opportunity to attack the Russian army's crossing the Vistula.⁸³

With the impending Russian attack on Warsaw, in Paris the *Comité Franco-Polonais* urged the French government to relieve the Kingdom of Poland. In his speech at the Chamber, Marquis Marie Joseph de Lafayette insisted not on an armed intervention against Russia – a perilous and largely impossible move – but on French pressure on Prussia. Lafayette believed that for the Poles to have a chance, the Prussian Army of Observation's chokehold had to be loosened immediately. Diplomatic pressure and even veiled threats against Berlin, Lafayette suggested, would help Warsaw, next to the other necessary steps like official recognition of the Polish independence, delivery of French arms and supplies, and a generous loan for the Kingdom of Poland.⁸⁴ Périer's government did not adopt any of these measures, however. After the fall of Warsaw, it faced angry accusations for its lack of support for the Polish cause and the failure to exert pressure on Prussia. Arguing on its government's behalf, the Foreign Minister Horace Sebastiani stated that “Prussia having confined herself to furnishing the

⁸¹ “Clausewitz to Marie, 26 July 1831,” in *ibid.*, 469.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ GStA PK, VI. HA, N1 Karl v.d.Groeben, No. I F6, Gneisenau to the Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm [copy], Posen, 3 August 1831, 20.

⁸⁴ Mark Brown, “The Comité Franco-Polonais and the French Reaction to the Polish Uprising of November 1830,” *The English Historical Review* 93, No. 369 (1978): 792; Bertrand Sarrans, *Lafayette, Louis-Philippe, and the Revolution of 1830*, Vol. 2 (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832), 193–194.

Russians with aid in money, provisions, and ammunition, such an intervention did not constitute a *casus belli*”⁸⁵

Already in July, Clausewitz had prepared another plan about how to deal with the impending end of the war. In the last phase, Clausewitz wrote, the Polish units would not be as isolated as Giełgud’s corps had been. Operating relatively close to the main army, the Polish troops might seek only a temporary protection on Prussian territory and would attempt to return to the Kingdom of Poland once the Russians had left. To avoid such a scenario – and the prolonging of the war – Clausewitz developed further plans for border protection. According to the new strategy, a significant number of Prussian troops would be positioned just a day’s march away from the frontier. This way, in a case of trespassing, a brigade of 4,000 to 5,000 Prussian troops could intercept the Polish soldiers within the same day, or the next one.⁸⁶ In the second half of September, the plan was applied and Prussian troops took their positions on the stretch from Lautenburg (now Lidzbark) in West Prussia to Wilczyn in the Grand Duchy of Posen.⁸⁷ On 6 October, on the outskirts of Strasburg (now Brodnica), the remains of the Polish army under General Rybiński crossed into Prussia and surrendered. The Polish-Russian War of 1831 was over.

In early November, the Army of Observation was officially disbanded. With that, Clausewitz’s formal participation in the European crisis following the July Revolution was over, too. He returned to Breslau and reunited with his wife Marie. Shortly after his return home, Clausewitz died of cholera on 16 November 1831.

Conclusions: Assessing Clausewitz’s Role in the Polish-Russian War of 1831

To assess Clausewitz’s role in the events of 1830–1831, we ought to recognize, first, that at that time, he was far from an influential voice in the Prussian politics. His diary from 1830–1831 bears witness to Clausewitz’s feeling of isolation and lack of political clout.⁸⁸ Despite Clausewitz’s strong opinions expressed in the two texts on the European crisis, Frederick William III and his government made the ultimate decisions about Prussian foreign policy. Clausewitz had no influence over the course of actions against Belgium and France; but in the Polish matter, his opinions and that

⁸⁵ Louis Blanc, *The History of Ten Years, 1830–1840*, Vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1844), 492–494.

⁸⁶ GStA PK, VI. HA, Nl Karl v.d.Groeben, No. I F6, Gneisenau to the Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm [copy], Posen, 24 July 1831, 6–9.

⁸⁷ Dankbahr, *Der Übertritt*, 15–16; Brandt, *Aus dem Leben*, 2:157.

⁸⁸ Clausewitz, “Tagebuch,” 2:302.

of the Prussian government happened to coincide. Nonetheless, it should be added that as a professional soldier, Clausewitz was obliged to follow his government's orders, even if he disagreed with them. It should be added, too, that no indications exist that Clausewitz envisioned the Kingdom of Poland's disappearance that followed the end of the Polish-Russian War. He might have, too, naively believed that Nicholas I would punish those who subverted his power but preserve the Polish autonomy as part of the original 1814–1815 European design.

The question, then, becomes whether the Polish independence might have had a better chance if the Prussian army relied on a less skilled military strategist than Clausewitz. Frederick William III wished to follow a policy of non-intervention, but it was the Army of Observation that effectively weaponized this approach and adopted it to the challenges at hand. Gneisenau and Clausewitz had recognized that for a landlocked state such as the Kingdom of Poland, its lack of preparation for a prolonged campaign and dependence on resources and support from abroad constituted its Achilles' heel. The blockade of the border, the disarmament and detainment of Polish-Lithuanian troops, and the *de facto* military occupation of the Grand Duchy of Posen slowly but inevitably crippled the Polish war efforts. Furthermore, with its troops buildup on the border Prussia avoided international condemnation and outright pressure. Only very late in the war did Poland's mighty ally France become aware of the Prussian army's deadly efficiency. Even then the government in Paris could hardly mount an official protest since the way the Army of Observation conducted its operations was not recognized as an act of hostility. Without Clausewitz's skillful planning, the Polish army might have enjoyed resources and continued the fight for a few months longer. And with that, perhaps, the chances for an international intervention would have increased, too.

The Polish-Russian War of 1831 was Clausewitz's final campaign. He died just weeks after its end without time to process the political and military developments. The campaign's indirect approach was far from typical for the period that still lived in the shadow of the Napoleonic era's mass warfare. The campaign was deeply controversial because the suppression of Polish aspirations became the price for the restoration of the European peace. The balance of powers remedied some of the Vienna Congress's fault lines by allowing a more liberal regime in France and an independent Belgium. Yet the end of the Kingdom of Poland opened new ones. In 1830–1831, Clausewitz feared that Prussia may face a war on two fronts, from France and the Kingdom of Poland. The political disappearance of the latter brought Russia's might immediately at Prussia and wider Germany's borders – and with it, a more terrifying vision of a two-front war became a reality.

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STRESZCZENIE

Vanya Eftimova Bellinger, Ostatnia kampania Carla von Clausewitza: Rola Clausewitza jako szefa Sztabu Pruskiej Armii Obserwacyjnej w trakcie wojny polsko-rosyjskiej 1831 r.

Pomimo sławy Carla von Clausewitza jako jednego z najbardziej wpływowych teoretyków wojskowości we współczesnej historii stosunkowo niewiele wiadomo o jego działalności w trakcie powstania listopadowego jako szefa Sztabu Pruskiej Armii Obserwacyjnej. W 1831 r. Prusy sprzeciwiały się niepodległości Polski, ale chciały też zachować pozory neutralności w stosunku do tego konfliktu. W strategii tej Clausewitz odegrał istotną rolę, nadzorując zaostrzenie kontroli na wschodniej granicy Prus, uniemożliwiając dotarcie do Królestwa Polskiego zaopatrzenia i ochotników. Dodatkowo Clausewitz planował przechwycenie i internowanie polskich wojsk przekraczających granicę. W związku z tym niezwykle umiejętności Clausewitza jako planisty wojskowego pozbawiły polską armię nieocenionych zasobów materiałowych i ludzkich, a tym samym skutecznie skróciły przebieg wojny, nie dając jednak mocarstwom sympatyzującym z polską niepodległością, takim jak Francja, wyraźnego powodu do interwencji. Artykuł ten pokazuje, że zaciekle wrogość Clausewitza wobec powstania listopadowego wynikała z jego obaw związanych z rosnącą polaryzacją polityczną w Europie i była połączona z jego niepokojem o strategiczną słabość Prus. To pośrednie podejście odbiegało od nowoczesnego postrzegania Clausewitza jako myśliciela strategicznego, który zawsze opowiadał się za masowymi działaniami, niemniej jednak pozostawało w zgodzie z jego dojrzałą myślą, obejmującą również ograniczone formy wojny. Oprócz rzucenia światła na spuściznę Clausewitza artykuł ten bada wydarzenia z lat 1830–1831 z pruskiego punktu widzenia.

Keywords: Carl von Clausewitz, powstanie listopadowe, wojna polsko-rosyjska 1830–31, kryzys europejski 1830–1831, August Neidhardt von Gneisenau, Wielkie Księstwo Poznańskie, O wojnie, Prusy, napoleoński styl wojny, Jan Skrzynecki, Iwan Dybicz, Iwan Paskiewicz

SUMMARY

Vanya Eftimova Bellinger, Carl von Clausewitz's Last Campaign: Clausewitz's Role as Chief of Staff for the Prussian Army of Observation in the Polish-Russian War of 1831

Despite Carl von Clausewitz's fame as one of the most influential military theorists in modern history, relatively little is known about his involvement in the

November Uprising as the Chief of Staff for the Prussian Army of Observation. In 1831, Prussia opposed the Polish independence, but also wished to retain a veneer of no direct participation in the war. In this strategy, Clausewitz played an integral role as he oversaw the tightened control over Prussia's eastern borders that prevented supplies and volunteers from reaching the Kingdom of Poland. Additionally, Clausewitz planned the interception and detainment of Polish troops crossing the border. Therefore, Clausewitz's formidable skills as a military planner deprived the Polish army of critical manpower and resources and effectively shortened the war's course, but without giving Great Powers sympathetic to the Polish independence like France a clear cause for intervention. This article argues that Clausewitz's visceral opposition to the November Uprising stemmed from his fears due to Europe's growing political polarization coupled with concerns about Prussia's strategic vulnerabilities. This indirect approach diverged from Clausewitz's modern perception as a strategic thinker always advocating massive actions. Nonetheless it remained in accord with his mature thought embracing limited forms of warfare as well. In addition to shedding light on Clausewitz's legacy, this article explores the events of 1830–1831 from a Prussian point of view.

Keywords: Carl von Clausewitz, November Uprising, Polish-Russian War of 1830–1831, European Crisis of 1830–1831, August Neidhardt von Gneisenau, Grand Duchy of Posen, On War, Prussia, Napoleonic Warfare, Jan Skrzynecki, Hans von Diebitsch, Ivan Paskievich

АННОТАЦИЯ

Ваня Эфтимова Беллингер, Последняя кампания Карла фон Клаузевица: роль Клаузевица в качестве начальника штаба прусской наблюдательной армии во время польско-прусской войны 1831 года

Несмотря на известность Карла фон Клаузевица в качестве одного из самых влиятельных военных теоретиков в современной истории, относительно мало известно о его деятельности во время Ноябрьского восстания, где он был начальником штаба Прусской наблюдательной армии. В 1831 г. Пруссия выступила против независимости Польши, а вместе с тем хотела сохранить видимость нейтралитета в отношении этой войны. Клаузевиц играл важную роль в этой стратегии, поскольку он выполнял надзор за ужесточением контроля над восточными границами Пруссии, не позволяя поставщикам и добровольцам добираться до Польского Королевства. Кроме того, Клаузевиц планировал перехват и интернирование польских войск, пересекающих границу. В связи с этим экстраординарные умения Клаузевица как военного планировщика лишили польскую армию бесценных материальных и человеческих ресурсов и, таким образом, фактически сократили ход войны, но не дали державам, симпатизирующим польской независимости (таким как Франция), явной причины для интервенции. В данной статье приводятся

аргументы того, что яростная враждебность Клаузевица к Ноябрьскому восстанию проистекала из его опасений по поводу усиления политической поляризации в Европе и, кроме того, была связана с его опасениями по поводу стратегической слабости Пруссии. Этот подход расходился с современным взглядом на Клаузевица как на стратегического мыслителя, который всегда выступал за массовые действия, но, тем не менее, совпадал с его зрелой мыслью, охватывающей также ограниченные формы войны. Эта статья не только проливает свет на наследие Клаузевица, но и исследует события 1830–1831 гг. с прусской точки зрения.

Ключевые слова: Карл фон Клаузевиц, Ноябрьское восстание, Польско-русская война 1830–1831 годов, Европейский кризис 1830–1831 годов, Август Нейдхардт фон Гнейзенау, Великое княжество Позенское, Война, Пруссия, Наполеоновские войны, Ян Скшинецкий, Ганс фон Дибич, Иван Паскевич