

Carl Von Clausewitz's On War, A Biography by Hew Strachan.  
Atlantic Books 2007.

This is a further volume in Atlantic Books' excellent series of Books That Shook the World, which already includes, inter alia, The Bible, Darwin's Origin of Species, Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations and The Qur'an. Each book, though small in size, is a detailed, informative and highly readable analysis not just of the book in question but the way in which it has achieved its particular status in world literature.

Hew Strachan, Chichele Professor of the History of War at Oxford University analyses Carl von Clausewitz seminal book on warfare, written in Prussia in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars; a book the knowledge of which is restricted, in most people, to one, frequently misquoted statement.

Professor Strachan sets out to rectify this by giving a detailed analysis of the book, no mean feat in view of its complexity, as well as a mini-biography of Clausewitz himself, and then considers the reasons why Clausewitz' philosophy of war has been as influential as it has in the centuries since it was written.

For me, one of the most intriguing and valuable aspects of this book is the way in which it demonstrates the limitations of Clausewitz' thinking, the fragmented nature of his work – it was not written as a seamless whole – and the fact that, apart from some brilliant insights, it is something of a mystery as to why it has attained its almost mythic status. In addition, Hew Strachan, considers especially the Clausewitzian doctrine of 'absolute' or 'total' war, which proved so influential in Germany in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as elsewhere in the world.

This is a valuable addition to Atlantic's Books that Shook the World series, and an easy introduction to a text which, however surprisingly, has had a considerable influence on military thinking since its initial publication.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh