

Do the teachings of
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 produce the better
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10086882

The teachings of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu provide the military leader with different approaches on how war should be conducted, both theorists and their theories being the product of very different times. Sun Tzu's *Art of War* was written during the late 6th century BC, whilst Clausewitz *On War* was written during the 19th century. The two teachings therefore have very different conceptions of the nature of warfare as they are based on their own observations of warfare during their lifetime. Sun Tzu's *Art of War* doctrine is very much based on the assumptions of ancient warfare, whilst Clausewitz's teachings are based on his observations of the Napoleonic Wars, and therefore offer a very Western centric view of warfare. Whilst it is evident that both the teachings of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu offer the military leader advice which is beneficial, both approaches are not without fault. The best military leader is aware of the limitations of both Sun Tzu and Clausewitz and draws strengths from each doctrine and applies them to war. However, if one was to only be allowed to follow one doctrine it can be seen that the adaptability and totality of warfare taught by Sun Tzu is of more applicable to modern war than the Western centric view on the warfare offered by Clausewitz.

The teachings presented by Clausewitz in *On War* do provide the modern military leader with some transferrable methods. Perhaps the greatest advantage of the teachings of Clausewitz over that of Sun Tzu, is the

importance he places on the strategic triad between government, the armed services and the people. The importance Clausewitz places of this “remarkable trinity” in waging an effective war stems from his belief that “war is nothing but a continuation of policy with other means” (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 69). The effective use of this triad of government, armed forces, and the population can be seen as key factor in achieving success in a modern war. Clausewitz’s teachings were shaped by the Napoleonic Wars, meaning that his views were influenced by the total nature of warfare he witnessed. Whilst in ancient times there was a clear distinction between the military sphere and the political sphere, the extensive nature of warfare and the purpose for which it was being fought, i. e. the survival of the status quo against the revolutionary ideas of the Republic, meant that the waging of war had to be considered from a more holistic standpoint. For Clausewitz each component of this “remarkable trinity” has an important role to play in strategy; the government gives the fighting a political purpose, the armed services provides the means for achieving this goal, and the people provide the will. (Cronin, 1984, p. 41-2). It is evident that each component is equally essential to one another in waging an effective war. Perhaps the best example of when this triad came into full affect can be seen in the way society was mobilised in Europe during the Second World War.

The relationship between the government and the military is a relationship in the triad which Clausewitz gives particular attention to. For Clausewitz by giving the political goal paramount importance its avoids the military leaders from viewing the “capture of certain geographical points or the seizure of undefended provinces [as] of value in themselves” (Clausewitz, 1976, P.

182). This is beneficial to military leaders at any time as it avoids the view of war in terms of military achievements, but rather encourages the military leader to view military actions in relation to the political goal which is sought to be achieved. This use of a political motive in fighting a war, and its relationship with morale and will, can be seen as one of the driving factors behind Clausewitz teaching incorporating the defensive advantage in warfare. For it could be argued that the intensity of will and morale associated with protecting one's own sovereignty, compared to that of the attacker who is not concerned with loss but purely gain, attributes the defender a greater strength in his morale due to the intense nature of his motivation (Sumida, 2009, p. 19).

Another useful teaching of Clausewitz is the emphasis which he places on approaching theory as simply a guide. Clausewitz's teaching that a theory of war cannot be subject to rigid scientific principles is beneficial in that it teaches the military leader to be flexible and to adhere the conduct of war to only what is being observed. It can be seen that this flexibility of strategy was one of Napoleon Bonaparte's greatest attributes, and given the context of Clausewitz's writings, would have been a major driving force behind this inclusion in *On War*. For Clausewitz argues that the 'friction of war', the difficulty of applying theory to real life due to the intrinsically dangerous nature of war, the physical effort, and the ambiguous information received in war, will mean that any rigid war plans will ultimately fail (Cronin, 1984, p. 44-5). This is perhaps one of the most useful teachings that Clausewitz has to offer the modern military leader, as it gives focus to the very human

nature of warfare and the difficulty of applying rigid pseudoscientific formulas to the battlefield.

However, despite these useful teachings which Clausewitz has to offer, *On War* cannot be used as a set military doctrine to base all future military action on. The teachings of Clausewitz are very much the product of its time, based heavily in the conventional western view of warfare as a conflict between two large armies fighting each other on large battlefields each searching for a decisive battle. Although perhaps useful in fighting conventional conflicts, the doctrine of *On War* has somewhat been outdated by the development of new technologies and the new type of warfare which is being fought. 'Modern warfare' is perhaps characterised by its lack of large open conflicts between two large ground forces, and this development in the way in which war is fought can be seen to outdate a lot of Clausewitz's lessons on war. The teaching of Clausewitz which is perhaps most outdated is the idea of concentration of one's forces on the oppositions "centre of gravity" (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 595-6). For it can be seen that although there are benefits to knowing the opponent's "centre of gravity", the hub of all power and movement in order to effectively direct force towards it. However, with the rise of new more precise artillery and the nuclear threat, the concentration of forces provides the opponent with the perfect opportunity to wipe out a large percentage of one's force. Sun Tzu in comparison teaches the military leader to be able to hide one's forces and to never concentrate them until it is necessary. Therefore, when one views the teachings offered by Clausewitz in *On War* it should be remembered the limitations of much of

his teachings in relation to the modern world and his teachings should instead be used with care.

The teachings offered by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* due to its focus on the abstract nature of warfare can be seen as of great use to the modern military leader. The fact that Sun Tzu was writing during the 6th century BC can be seen as advantageous in shaping his teachings, due to the lack of any major technological advances at the time, Sun Tzu's teachings are not bogged down by the preconceived ideas about how warfare is to be fought and instead focus on the very essence of conflict. This can be seen in Sun Tzu's focus on the concept of deception as a tool in ensuring conflict, for Sun Tzu "all warfare is based on deception" (Sun Tzu, 1993, p. 101). The use of deception in waging war is advantageous to the modern military leader and can be seen to be used by great effect in modern warfare. As mentioned previously, warfare no longer consists of long open battles between two large forces but is characterised by small skirmishes. The use of deception during warfare can be seen to have been used by great effect by small terrorist groups in the middle east fighting large foreign forces. For Sun Tzu a major part of ensuring success in conflict is to shape the adversary's perception of you. For Sun Tzu the best commander will confuse his opponent and not allow them to gain an understanding of what they are facing. For it can be seen that to deceive the enemy makes it very hard to plan against an attack. This idea of deception can be seen as of great use regardless of the time period one is fighting and is one of Sun Tzu's teachings which transcends the period of conflict.

Also central to the idea of deception is the belief of Sun Tzu that a good military leader will 'attack the enemy's mind'. For it can be seen that this is very much constant with perhaps one of Sun Tzu's most famous teachings from *The Art of War*, that "to subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence" (Sun Tzu, 1993, p. 105). For it can be seen that for Sun Tzu to attack the will of one's force to fight is just as, if not more important, than the destruction of an opponent's army (Yuen, 2008, p. 192). For if the opponent no longer wishes to fight one has already defeated the opponent, without the mass loss of life. This is yet another of Sun Tzu's teachings which has proven to be more applicable today than ever, with the development of weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, it can be seen that Sun Tzu's belief that one should only fight a war when one has studied all aspects of the potential "friction of war" and all conditions seem in place to ensure victory can be seen as of benefit to any military leader. A follower of Sun Tzu will not be afraid to retreat when the odds are against him[1], and will only engage in battle when he is certain that the odds are in his favour. This leads to less unnecessary loss of life and produces the better military leader in today's world.

Another teaching offered by Sun Tzu which is of benefit to the military leader of today is that of creating an army which is fluid and able to change tactics and formation in accordance to the situation of the opponent. Sun Tzu remarks that the army should be able to adapt in accordance to the situation of the enemy, the same way water flows in accordance to the ground (Sun Tzu, 1993, p. 113). Both Clausewitz's and Sun Tzu's teachings rightfully place importance on the army's ability to be flexible as a major attribute in

achieving victory. The ability of strategy to be flexible is essential in today's warfare. The ever-expansive nature of where war is being waged and the use of new tactics such as guerrilla warfare mean that the army needs to be able to respond to new challenges.

In conclusion, it can be seen that both the teachings of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu provide lessons and teachings which are beneficial to any military leader in learning how to fight an effective war. However, it can be seen that it is ultimately the student of Sun Tzu that will produce the better military leader, as the teachings of Sun Tzu leads one to view warfare outside of just the battlefield, and will produce a military leader who takes into consideration not just the acts of battle but one who is able to effectively wage war through all mediums. The student of Sun Tzu views warfare in relation not just to numbers and battles but the metaphysics of warfare and conflict, producing a military leader who is more competent and skilled in the art of warfare.

Bibliography

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5. Yuen, D. (2008) 'Deciphering Sun Tzu' in *Comparative Strategy: An International Journal*, vol. 27 no. 2.
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[1] Apologise for constant use of "him" can also be applied with "her" etc.
Just used for narrative style.