

# Strategists



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Strategists Machiavelli's most important theories on war, military strategy and leadership could be found in his two works, *The Prince* and his *Discourses on Livy*. The first has to do with the rule in one-man states while the latter is just assuredly about rule in republics. A close student of both will find common elements particularly in regard to leadership. Sun Tzu's views, on the other hand, of the same subjects are codified in his opus, *The Art of War*.

In the area of war, Sun Tzu (2003) laid out the most fundamental rationalization of the act. His argument is that war is the greatest concern of the state because failure in war can lead to the extinction of the state. (7-8) Machiavelli, meanwhile, introduced the concept of the "just war" in his exhortation on Italians to recapture their own land: "You have justice on your side; for war is just which is necessary and it is piety to fight where no hope is left in anything else." (cited in McAlpine 2000, 6) For these two philosophers war or preparedness to engage in it is fundamental for the survival of a state.

In regard to military strategy, Sun Tzu captures something of the sense of Machiavelli's last words in *The Prince* when he stressed the importance of a positive attitude and the goodness of opportunity – seizing the occasion to put something right, to make a person, place or thing better. According to Sun Tzu, one who foresees victory before a battle will most probably win and that, one who predicts not much of a chance of winning before the fight, will most probably not win. This principle of unashamed act of winning is supported by this text of *The Art of War*: "If fighting is sure to result in victory, then you must fight, even though the ruler forbids it; if fighting will not result in victory, then you must not fight even at the ruler's bidding."

(158)

Machiavelli's assertion that men have evil in them as well as good is an important factor when considering his perspectives on leadership. This is highlighted in his discourse of what characterize the ideal prince. Machiavelli believed that a prince as a leader needed above all to pursue virtue, but not the one in the traditional sense. Machiavelli often told the reader that qualities traditionally called virtuous in the Christian or feudal senses were not virtuous at all in a prince. For Machiavelli, a prince who truly understand virtue – in the sense of the qualities needed to perpetuate his state and his own power – would prefer 'vice' of meanness, say to the virtue of liberality, (xxiii) On the other hand, Sun Tzu views virtue in a more traditional sense. For him, virtue is necessary in order to stay in power because it is a requirement for the mandate of Heaven. (xv) It is, hence, equivalent to the abandonment of negligence and evil. A virtuous leader must be good otherwise Heaven will bestow its sanction to another group of leaders. The relationship of state, leadership, war and strategy to each other is perhaps sum up best by Sun Tzu with his general. The general fights in the interest of the state, and his army, a part of the state, fights with him. Once the ruler has given instructions, that is the end of the ruler's authority. " Thus the general, who advances without coveting fame withdraws without fearing disgrace, but whose sole intention is to protect the people and do good service for his ruler is the precious jewel of the state." (45)

#### Works Cited

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