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Continuity and Contrast in the Strategic Theories of Four Classic Strategic Thinkers: Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Clausewitz

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CLASSIC STRATEGIC THINKERS: SUN TZU, THUCYDIDES,

MACHIAVELLI, AND CLAUSEWITZ

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Defense and Strategic Studies

By

Morteza Safari

December 2023

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to examine the thinking of four classic strategic theorists, namely Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Carl von Clausewitz, and explore continuity and contrast in their strategic theories. In doing so, this author has structured the paper based on the fundamental architecture of strategy, that is, ends, ways and means. Since the paper specifically addresses military strategy, it first investigates what the ideas of the four theorists are on war as the military means. Then, the paper will explore the theorists' thoughts on different strategic approaches as ways. Then, the essay will delve into the ideas of the thinkers on politics as the end. The paper argues that the thinking of the classic theorists of strategy is still relevant to the modern strategic challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

The late Professor Colin S. Gray, as one of the most renowned theorists of strategy of our time, asserted: "Any attempt to design a new general theory of strategy could only be eccentric and misleading. Everything necessary for a general theory already exists in the literature."[1] In this line, Gray put forward four divisions of theorists of strategy whose works comprise the classical canon of general theory of strategy.[2] Among them, Gray categorized Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, and Thucydides as theorists of "First Division"[3] whose works should be considered superior to those of others,[4] and most essential to understanding and establishing general theory of strategy. However, Antulio Echevarria, in the Special Edition of *Infinity Journal* dedicated to Gray's theoretical work, *The Strategy Bridge*: *Theory for Practice,* underscored the significance of another theorist whose contribution to general theory of strategy, in Echevarria's opinion, was not duly appreciated by Gray. Echevarria observed: "there is one donor to strategy's canon who surely deserves more coverage in a theory purporting to address strategic practice; the much maligned but indispensible [*sic*] Niccolò Machiavelli."[5] Indeed, Niccolò Machiavelli is the thinker with whom modern strategy begins.[6]

The writings of these four theorists constitute the core of general theory of strategy, and yet a comparative studies of their ideas on common strategic themes has been lacking. This is

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[1] Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24.
[2] Ibid., 240, 263.
[3] Ibid., 240.
[4] Theorists of other divisions are: Niccolò Machiavelli, Antoine Henri de Jomini, Basil Liddell Hart, J. C. Wylie, and Edward N. Luttwak belonging to the Second Division; Bernard Brodie categorized in the Third Division; and Thomas C. Schelling being in the Forth Division. For more information, see Gray, *Strategy Bridge*, 240.
[5] Antulio J. Echevarria II, "A Theory for Practice: But Where is Machiavelli?," *Infinity Journal*, The Strategy Bridge Special Edition (March 2014): 10.
[6] Matthew Kroenig, "Machiavelli and the Naissance of Modern Strategy," in *The New Makers of Modern Strategy: From the Ancient World to the Digital Age*, ed. Hal Brands (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 91.

what this author aspires to do. In this paper, the author will attempt to compare the theories of the four strategists and discover continuity and contrast among their theories which comprise the core of general theory of strategy.

This paper in principle concentrates on military strategy as its story arc. For the purpose of this paper, I have borrowed the definition of military strategy proposed by Colin Gray who defined military strategy as "The direction and use made of force and the threat of force for purposes of policy as decided by politics."[7] According to this definition, we would be well advised to plan our investigation based upon ends, ways, means. Hence, I start the paper by investigating the four thinkers' personal "backgrounds." Then, I discuss the ideas of the theorists about the "nature of war." The chapter includes the meaning of war; friction, chance, and uncertainty; moral forces; the enemy; and intelligence. Next, I assess the thinkers' ideas about "strategy" as ways. This entails examination of strategies of annihilation and attrition, direct and indirect, deterrence and coercion, and offensive and defensive. After that, I examine the themes related to "politics" as the end which concerns the relationship between political leadership and population, and civil-military relations. Finally, I draw my "conclusion" which will concern the relevance of the thinkers' ideas today. This author argues, as his thesis statement, that *the comparison of the four theorists reveals their thinking is highly relevant to modern strategic challenges.*

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[7] Gray, *Strategy Bridge,* 18.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Professor E. H. Carr, the renowned British historian and the classical realist, more than eighty years ago, advised his students: "Before you study the history study the historian. … Before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment. The historian, being an individual, is also a product of history and of society; and it is in this twofold light that the student of history must learn to regard him."[8] These observations would hold true in examining any theory advanced in social sciences. Thus, our investigation of the theories of our thinkers starts with understanding of the theorists, their time and environment.

Sun Tzu

Sun Tzu, or Master Sun, is known to be the earliest strategy theorist of all time[9] for writing *The Art of Warfare*.[10] However, the identity of Sun Tzu as a historical figure has been subject of much debate.

According to tradition, Sun Tzu is identified with a well-respected Chinese military strategist called Sun Wu who is thought to have "lived during the later Spring and Autumn

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[8] E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Classics, 2018), 44.

[9] Another strategy thinker of the ancient world from the East who centuries later -assuming Sun Tzu was a historical figure living during the Spring and Autumn period - developed some strategic ideas, though as yet underappreciated, is the Indian Kautilya or Chanakya who apparently lived between 375 and 283 BC.

[10] For this paper, I would use the title The Art of warfare as proposed by Roger T. Ames in his excellent translation. Ames' translation unlike other translations of the work provides context to Sun Tzu's maxims. Besides, what distinguishes his translation from those of others is that, as Ames himself notes, "Most accounts of the Sun-tzu have tended to be historical; mine is cultural." See Roger T. Ames, introduction to *The Art of Warfare*, by Sun Tzu, trans. Roger T. Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993) 12.

period in the late sixth century or early fifth century BCE [*sic*], making him a contemporary of Confucius."[11] In the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 BC) we would witness "the rise of state power, development of internecine strife, and destruction of numerous political entities."[12] Sun Wu, in this account and as a military strategist, gave council to the State of Wu, and King Ho-lii enabling the state to win against its enemies. In another account, however, as General Samuel Griffith, whose translation of *The Art of Warfare* is respected by the mainstream scholars of strategy, proposed Sun Tzu was an expert with a much deeper knowledge of military affairs than Sun Wu, and someone who lived during the Worrying States period (453-221 BC). In this period, Griffith noted, wars among different states were more complex, and "armies were effectively organized, well trained, and commanded by professional generals" fighting wars on a large scaled.[13] The third account is that *The Art of Warfare* "a process rather than a single event", and "probably the product of some later disciple or disciples [of Sun Wu], probably several generations removed from the historical Sun Wu" who compiled the work. In this way, *The Art of Warfare* could be viewed, at the very least, as "a secondhand report on what Master Sun had to say about military strategy."[14]

Regardless of the identity of the writer or writers, we may make two general observations about the Chinese Magnum Opus. First, we can presume that the book has been written or compiled during a period of intense chaos and disorder and as such war had been the order of the

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[11] Toshi Yoshihara, "Sun Zi and the Search for a Timeless Logic of Strategy," in *The New Makers of Modern Strategy: From the Ancient World to the Digital Age*, ed. Hal Brands (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 68.

[12] Ralph D. Sawyer, introduction to *The Art of War*, by Sun Tzu, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1994), 50.

[13] Samuel B. Griffith, introduction to *The Art of War*, by Sun Tzu, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 1-12.

[14] Ames, introduction to *The Art of Warfare*, 20-21.

day rather than peace. Second, it appears that *The Art of Warfare* is written from the standpoint of the weak, possibly an equal in power, and not the strong.

The Art of Warfare's thirteen chapters discusses different aspects of warfare such as preparation and mobilization for war, when and how to attack or defend, various maneuvers and the effect of terrain on the outcome of battles, and the importance of intelligence in warfare. In sum, as General Griffith observed, *The Art of Warfare* "is a thoughtful and comprehensive work, distinguished by qualities of perception and imagination which have for centuries assured it a pre-eminent position in the canon of Chinese military literature."[15]

Thucydides

It is no exaggeration to state that practice of strategy in history starts with the Peloponnesian War which was waged between Sparta and Athens from 431 to 404 BC. The man who had the foresight to see continuity in strategic and political history, due to human nature, and recorded the remarkable event for posterity to learn from it was none other than the Athenian commander: Thucydides.

Our knowledge of Thucydides himself is very sparse. We assume that Thucydides was born to an aristocratic Athenian family in the Athenian suburb of Halimos in about 460 BC. This date would fit in with his attempt as a general to save Amphipolis from Brasidas' (a prominent

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[15] Samuel B. Griffith, preface to *The Art of War*, by Sun Tzu, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), ix.

Spartan general) advance in 424/3 BC,[16] which he failed.[17] Then, he "travelled widely during his exile (especially to the Peloponnese) and died back at Athens after returning there at the end of the war."[18]

Thucydides began to write about the Peloponnesian War "in the expectation that this would be a great war."[19] Yet the origin of the rivalry between Athens and Sparta can be traced back to "the decades after the Persian Wars[20] as the Delian League grew in success, wealth, and power and was transformed gradually into the Athenian Empire."[21] Athens' growth in power and the fear that Athens could tilt the balance of power in the Hellenic world to its own advantage prompted Sparta, as the old hegemon, to consider war as the solution to the problem.[22] Yet "fear" as the main motive had to be complemented with "honor and interest."

Sparta was strategic culturally slow in responding to threats,[23] mainly because of the nature of its army being comprised of rebellious slaves, Helots, and because of the nature of its agrarian society which precluded it from waging war away from the mainland.[24] But Sparta's self-interest and sense of honor in leading and preserving the Peloponnesian alliance system played a pivotal role in driving the Spartans to war. Corinth, as Sparta's main ally, had already developed a sense of anger and hatred towards Athens and its Corcyraean ally which in principle

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[16] Jeremy Mynott, introduction to *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, by Thucydides, ed. and trans. Jeremy Mynott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), xxii.

[17] Curiously, three of our four greatest strategy thinkers of all time, namely Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Clausewitz were not particularly successful as practitioners.

[18] Mynott, introduction to *The War*, xxii.

[19] Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, ed. and trans. Jeremy Mynott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

[20] The Persian Wars mainly took place from 490 to 479 BC, though formally ended in 449 BC.

[21] Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War and Preservation of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 27.

[22] Thucydides, *The War*, 15, esp. 53.

[23] Ibid., 41

[24] For the discussion on the distinction between Athens' and Sparta's strategic cultures, see Athanasios G. Platias, and Constantinos Koliopoulos, *Thucydides on Strategy: Grand Strategies in the Peloponnesian War and their Relevance Today* (London : C. Hurst and Co. Publishers Ltd., 2010), 24-27.

was the colony of Corinth. For example, this Corinthian speech before the Spartan assembly prior to the start of the war is revealing: "we are the ones with the most serious grievances – victims both of Athenian arrogance and of your [Spartans'] neglect. ...they [the Athenians] are born neither to enjoy any peace themselves nor to allow it to others." [25] As such, Corinth became an active agent in encouraging or even coercing Sparta into war as it threatened to leave the Peloponnesian League if Sparta did not lend its support against Athens.[26] Eventually, Corinth's involvement with the affairs of two city-states, Boeotia and Megara, in their disputes with Athens prompted Sparta into the long war. As the late Donald Kagan aptly noted, the Spartans "had formed the Peloponnesian League to serve their own interests but found that to preserve it they had to serve the interests of their allies, even if those threatened their own safety."[27]

Niccolò Machiavelli

Niccolò Machiavelli is widely associated with modern political thought rather than strategic thinking. This is essentially due to the influence of his popular work, *The Prince*, in which Machiavelli attempted to divorce moral principles from political thinking or rather, as Isaiah Berlin would put it, distinguish between Christian morality and pagan (ancient) morality which suited politics.[28] The distinction was the result of Machiavelli's experience and his deliberations on the state of affairs in his time and place.

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[25] Thucydides, *The War*, 41, and 43. On Corinth's grievances about its former colony, Corcyra, see Thucydides, *The War*, 26.
[26] Thucydides, *The War*, 43.
[27] Kagan, *Origins*, 57-58
[28] See Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Roger Hausheer, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 33-100.

Niccolò Machiavelli was born in Florence during the rule of the Medici family in 1469. However, "60 years of Medici rule ended in 1494, and broad-based republican institutions" were established.[29] As a consequence of the change in political settings in Florence, Machiavelli was appointed to his first public posts as Second Chancellor of the republic and Secretary to the Ten of War in 1498. In these interrelated capacities, Machiavelli's responsibilities were concerned with military and foreign affairs.

In the Italian politics, "Since the beginning of the fourteenth century, increasing prosperity and the refusal of the wealthy to bear arms had resulted in a general reliance upon mercenaries by the Italian commercial states."[30] Florence was not an exception. As a "merchant city run by tradesmen and bankers" Florence had to rely on foreign troops such as those of France or Spain, or hire mercenaries to defend itself.[31] Yet during his career, Machiavelli "witnessed the crippling effect of Florence's dependence on the condottieri" (mercenaries), and subsequently, encouraged establishing the Florentine militia.[32] On a larger scale, Machiavelli, through his writings, later showed he had "a strong interest in seeking to improve military collaboration among Italians to prevent the worst: the gradual 'acquisition' of all of Italy by large foreign monarchies with their formidable military forces."[33]

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[29] Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince: A New Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xxiii.

[30] Neal Wood, introduction to *The Art of War*, by Niccolò Machiavelli, trans. Neal Wood (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), Xiii.

[31] Quentin Skinner, introduction to *The Prince*, by Niccolò Machiavelli, ed. and trans. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), Xxiii. In this paper, I use this edition as my main reference when I refer to *The Prince* unless otherwise is mentioned.

[32] Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought: from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 3.

[33] Skinner, introduction to *The Prince*, xxiv.

Also, as an intellectual Renaissance man, "Machiavelli attempted a synthesis of the whole of military experience from antiquity to the developments of the late Middle Ages."[34] This was because, similarly to Thucydides, he thought that "despite historical change, man and society remained 'in essence' the same at all times and cultures because human nature was immutable."[35] Accordingly, he placed premium on "lessons of history", and went on "to deduce the laws and principles that stood behind the facts of Roman military history, and show their applicability to the present."[36]

Despite the fact Machiavelli failed to bring about military reforms he wanted to during his lifetime and was more popular as a satirist and playwright than a political and strategy thinker, he succeeded in developing ideas which later influenced both practitioners of strategy like Fredrick the Great and theorists of strategy like Clausewitz.[37] Today his strategic legacy lives on as a result of his three seminal works, namely *The Prince*, *Discourses on Livy* and *The Art of War*.

Carl von Clausewitz

The triumph of Prussia over France in January 1871 marked the beginning of a new era in Europe: the newly established German Empire became the dominant power in continental

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[34] Gat, *Origins*, 2 (emphasis added).
[35] Ibid.
[36] Felix Gilbert, "Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 22.
[37] Wood, introduction to *The Art of War*, xiii, and x1vi; for Machiavelli's influence on others see pages xxix- xlvii; also, Beatrice Heuser, *The Strategy Makers: Thoughts on War and Society from Machiavelli to Clausewitz* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 5.

Europe. Also, the victories of the Prussian army over Denmark (1864), Austria (1866) as well as France stimulated interest among other armies of Europe to search for inspiration behind the conduct of wars by the Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke. The German publications pointed towards one name: Carl von Clausewitz.[38] Clausewitz, since then, has become the central figure of war and strategic studies in academia and military colleges.

Carl von Clausewitz was born in 1780, the son of a half-pay lieutenant in the Prussian Army. Clausewitz joined the army at the age of 12 and saw active service the following year. At the age of 13, he saw his first combat in campaigns against France on the Rhine, and then, in the Vosges.[39] Clausewitz's first scholarly study of war started when he enrolled in the Berlin War Academy in 1801 where he met his mentor General von Scharnhorst, a military reformist. Later, in 1812, when Prussia concluded an alliance with France and Clausewitz was asked to join Napoleon's invasion of Russia, he resigned his commission and joined the Russians. He eventually was back in Prussian uniform by 1815 when the war against France was resumed and was present at Waterloo.

Clausewitz's work on his magnum opus, *On War* began as early as 1816. Yet his position as the Director of the War College from 1818 until 1830 provided Clausewitz with suitable opportunity to reflect on his drafts for 12 years. The critical point about writing *On War* is that in 1827, "In the middle of composing *On War*, Clausewitz's line of thought underwent a drastic change of direction" and he began to revise his drafts "on the basis of two guiding ideas: firstly, that there are two types of war: all-out war and limited war; and secondly that war is the

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[38] Hew Strachan, "Clausewitz and the Dialectics of War," in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 38.
[39] Michael Howard, *Clausewitz: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

continuation of policy by other means."[40] Clausewitz's work remained unfinished as a result of his sudden death in 1831 when he caught disease while being back in inactive duty.

The closing of the eighteenth century saw the beginning of the greatest leap forward in the way of waging war: the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815). Nationalism arisen out of the French Revolution resulted in creation of *levée en masse* or the nation in arms which linked citizenship with the obligation to defend the nation,[41] which Machiavelli would have approved. Nationalism and the resulting citizen army had two important implications for the way in which wars had been fought in the past. First, wars were not any longer waged for limited purposes and were not elaborate forms of bargaining between kings. Particularly "With Napoleon, wars became means by which one state could challenge the very existence of another."[42] Second, and as a result of the first point, siege warfare was not any longer the main way of warfare and "Military maneuvers were no longer ritualistic—their impact reinforced by the occasional battle—but preludes to great confrontations that could see whole armies effectively eliminated and states subjugated.[43]

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[40] Gat, *Origins*, 199.
[41] Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23.
[42] Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 70.
[43] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE OF WAR

In this chapter, I will discuss what the four thinkers mean by "war". This will enable us to understand, at the outset, their points of view about the core component of this paper. I will also discuss their thinking on different aspects of war which are integral to it regardless of time, place or kind. These constituents include: friction, chance, and uncertainty, moral forces, and enmity.

The Meaning of War

War is as old as humankind, and so many books have been written on that subject that "had they been put aboard the *Titanic*, the ship would have sunk without any help from the iceberg," as military historian Martin van Creveld observes.[44] The earliest contemplation on the meaning of war is traced back to Sun Tzu.

In his treatment of war, Sun Tzu did not conceive war in terms of slaughter and destruction, but rather as "the art (*tao*) of deceit."[45] In this regard, he advised the strategist that, for example, "when able, seem to be unable; when ready, seem unready; when nearby, seem far away; and when far away, seem near."[46] Yet Master Sun subtly pointed out that deception on the battlefield depends on circumstances: "they [his instructions] cannot be settled in advance."[47] In other words, he perceived that war owes much of its success to adaptation, be it at the tactical

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[44] Martin van Creveld, *More on War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1 (emphasis in the original), 1.
[45] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, trans. Roger T. Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 4.
[46] Ibid., 74.
[47] Ibid., 40.

level or strategic level. As he noted, "Revise your strategy according to the changing posture of the enemy to determine the course and outcome of the battle."[48] However, this does not mean that Sun Tzu left every decision to the circumstances on the battlefield. Sun Tzu was aware that strategic thinking before war is also of paramount importance. As Sir Lawrence Freeman notes: "At the heart of Sunzi [Sun Tzu]'s approach is intellectual preparation. *The Art of War* stresses the possibility of outsmarting in preference to just out- fighting the opponent. It puts a premium on a dispassionate assessment of the risks and possibilities of alternative courses of action, and then acting with confidence once that assessment has been made."[49]

In contrast to Sun Tzu, Clausewitz did not perceive war as an act of deception. At the very beginning of book I, chapter I, in *On War*, despite the popularity of his other definition of war as "a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means,"[50] Clausewitz gave importance, first and foremost, to the intrinsic qualities of war by defining it as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."[51] In this definition, what Clausewitz stressed was that war is violent and that war is adversarial. The definition, Sir Hew Strachan asserts, makes plain that "What war is not, or at least not by nature, is a political instrument."[52] The American strategic thinker, Michael Handel, concurred. Handel stated that "What can be misleading is the fact that Clausewitz, who is best known for his ideas on the primacy of politics, actually devotes relatively little space (two out of eight books in *On War*) to the analysis of war on its highest level. The diplomatic or economic environment in which war takes place is just not within the

[48] Ibid., 118.
[49] Lawrence Freedman, forward to *The Art of War*, by Sunzi, trans. Brian Bruya, adapt. and illust. C. C. Tsai, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), viii.
[50] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Prince-ton University Press, 1989), 87.
[51] Ibid., 75.
[52] Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 51.

scope of *On War*."[53] By comparison, Handel observed, "Sun Tzu's framework is much broader than that of Clausewitz" as Sun Tzu devoted "considerable attention to concerns that precede war, discussing in detail the advantages of various diplomatic strategies."[54] The late Williamson Murray, the eminent American military historian, likewise agreed that Clausewitz "focuses almost exclusively on the conduct of human conflict and military operations, as he makes clear from the beginning of *On War*."[55]

By way of comparison, among all strategy thinkers treated in this paper, Thucydides is the one who placed war in its broadest context by painting it as the outcome of rivalry among powers in the international system. As noted earlier, Thucydides believed that the growth of power of revisionist states and the fear it induces in dominant powers, in addition to alliance entanglements of the period, tends ultimately to leave the decision about hegemony in the international system to the outcome of the battlefield. In this way, Thucydides locate the phenomenon of war at a grand strategic level. Yet, war in *The Peloponnesian War* assumes its meaning *primarily* in connection with "human nature." Thucydides explained that "war is a violent master… it usually generates passions to match our circumstances."[56] In this way, war cannot be a rational instrument of policy because it necessarily compels states and decision makers to "fall prey to forces beyond their control."[57]

Machiavelli's interest in war sprang from his preoccupation with the notion of order and stability. Machiavelli realized that the Italian city states were subject to the whims of mercenaries in their internal affairs and that these states were exposed to external threats too,

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[53] Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, 3rd ed. (London, Frank Cass, 2005), 24.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Williamson Murray, "Thucydides: Theorist of War," *Naval War College Review* 66, no.. 4 (Autumn 2013): 32.
[56] Thucydides, *The War,* 212.
[57] Ibid.

either from other city states or foreign states like France or Spain. It is for this reason of order

and stability that Machiavelli observed, "The main foundations of all states are good laws and

good armies."[58]

Machiavelli as a Renaissance man believed that "war could be studied systematically by

historical observation, by the selection of successful forms of organization, and by the imitation

of stratagems emerged in antiquity."[59] By doing so, Machiavelli "wanted to deduce the laws and

principles that stood behind the facts of Roman military history, and show their applicability to

the present."[60] Therefore, Machiavelli saw continuity in the working of war throughout ages like

Thucydides, with one significant difference between them: Thucydides saw human nature as the

driver behind that continuity while Machiavelli saw rationality as the agent producing general

patterns. Machiavelli's idea that general patterns in war are reproduced continued to influence

future thinkers in the Age of Enlightenment and eventually had its impact on Clausewitz. Felix

Gilbert fittingly underscored the impact of Machiavelli's methodical thinking on Clausewitz:

> despite the new features which Clausewitz introduced into military theory and which are
> outside the framework of Machiavelli's thought; he agreed with Machiavelli in his basic
> point of departure. Like Machiavelli he was convinced that the validity of any special
> analysis of military problems depended on a general perception, on a correct concept of
> the nature of war. Thus, even this great revolutionary among the military thinkers of the
> nineteenth century did not overthrow Machiavelli's fundamental thesis but incorporated it
> in his own.[61]

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[58] Skinner, introduction to *The Prince*, xxiii.
[59] Gat, *Origins*, 1.
[60] Gilbert, "Machiavelli," 22.
[61] Ibid., 31.

Friction, Chance, and Uncertainty

Curiously, "the English word 'war' has its origin in the old Germanic term, *werra*, which means more or less the same as 'confusion' or 'disorder'."[62] The significance of friction, chance and uncertainty as the sources of confusion and disorder in war has particularly been stressed in *On War*. Clausewitz was well aware that war is highly unlikely to go according to plan. He noted, "The entire difficulty [in waging war] lies in this: To remain faithful in action to the principles we have laid down for ourselves."[63] He called all those factors that stand between plan and action, between theory and practice generally as "friction," a term borrowed from mechanics.

Clausewitz identified two lists of friction in *On War*, on two separate occasions. One was related to what he called the "climate of war" which is composed of "danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance."[64] The other list included "danger, physical exertion, intelligence, and friction [or circumstantial incidents]."[65] Having examined both lists, Barry Watts has persuasively identified the main components of the Clausewitzian friction as such:

- danger's impact on the ability to think clearly and act effectively in war
- the effects on thought and action of combat's demands for exertion
- uncertainties and imperfections in the information on which action in war is unavoidably based
- friction in the narrow sense of the internal resistance [on the battlefield] to effective action stemming from the interactions between the many men and machines making up one's own forces

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[62] Ulrike Kleemeier, "Moral Forces in War," in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 109 (emphasis in the original).
[63] Quoted in Peter Paret, "The Genesis of On War," in *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Prince-ton University Press, 1989), 17.
[64] Clausewitz, *On War*, 104.
[65] Ibid., 122.

- the play of chance, of good luck and bad, whose consequences combatants can never fully foresee.[66]

Moreover, for Clausewitz, "chance" is not only part of the friction present *on* the battlefield, but also a force whose interaction with "passion and reason" forms a paradoxical trinity that affects the whole phenomenon of war making it "a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case."[67]

Clausewitz's introduction of friction, chance and uncertainty into theory of war dismisses the idea that war is an entirely controllable activity. This notion stood against the thinking of Clausewitz's contemporaries such as Dietrich Heinrich von Bülow (1752-1807) who had attempted to develop "science of war" through mathematics or Antoine Henri Jomini (1779-1869) who sought to pin down strategic truths through his principles of war. Yet Clausewitz, as already noted, was not dismissive of existence of patterns in war either. "Clausewitz's truly groundbreaking achievement within the thinking of war is to open the vast middle realm of knowledge between the equally misleading absolutes of certainty and randomness—a highly complex realm that is terrifically difficult to manage but that nevertheless displays patterns and regularities when viewed through a probabilistic lens."[68]

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[66] Barry D. Watts, *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War*, Revised ed. (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2004), chapter 4, esp. 17-19. Antulio Echevarria also takes a similar approach by comparing the two lists of the Clausewitzian friction and concluding there is no significant difference between the two lists.. However, the only disagreement appears to be on interchangeability of chance and incidental(/circumstantial friction. Echevarria thinks that chance and unexpected incidents (incidental/circumstantial friction) can be used instead of one another as they act the same way wile Watts does not think so. For comparison, see Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 103.
[67] Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.
[68] Anders Engberg-Pedersen, *Empire of Chance: The Napoleonic Wars and the Disorder of Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 215), 67.

Other thinkers' thoughts on the role of friction, chance and uncertainty have not been as sophisticated as that of Clausewitz. By implication, all, except Sun Tzu, appear to agree with Moltke the Elder (Prussian general during the wars of German unification (1866-1871)), that "no plan survives the first contact with the enemy."[69] For example, in the case of Thucydides, we can see friction and particularly chance played an important role in the entire course of the war between the Athenians and the Spartans. These words from the Athenians about the nature of war before the war started are revealing: "Think in advance about how unpredictable war can be before you find yourselves involved in one. The longer a war lasts the more likely it is to turn on matters of chance, which we are all equally unable to control and whose outcome is a matter of risk and uncertainty. Men go to war and launch into action as their first rather than what should be their last resort, and only when they come to grief do they turn to discussion."[70]

Ironically, the greatest victim of chance or fortune in the Peloponnesian War were the Athenians themselves. In fact, we might say, at the risk of exaggeration, that Athens lost the war to chance and fate before they lost it to Sparta. The eruption of the Plague in Athens in 430 BC killed almost one third of the population, and subsequently had an adverse effect on the morale of the Athenians to pursue he Periclean strategy of active denial with determination. Yet the greatest impact of the plague showed itself when Pericles as a strong leader and competent strategist contracted the disease and died as a result of which the Athenian politics and strategy were thrown into disarray. It is ironic that *tyche* or fortune, in this case misfortune, ended the life the man who was the personification of the Greek *techne* and *gnome* (perception, foresight, and planning).[71]

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[69] Quoted in Strachan, *Direction of War*, 245.
[70] Thucydides, *The War,* 48.
[71] See Lowell Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

Also, on the battlefield friction and chance contributed to the nonlinearity of the war. The Peloponnesian War began to develop with an instance of friction: the Theban attack on Plataea in 431 BC. Here is the story. The Thebans, the Athenian ally, decided to seize their longtime hostile neighbor, Plataea, by planning a coup in cahoots with traitors inside the city. Therefore, they sent a commando force across the Boeotian hills which separated the two cities, and together with the conspirators they succeed in seizing control of Plataea. As the Thebans are waiting for the reinforcements to arrive to secure their victory friction and *tyche* intercede. While the main force is making its way across the hilly terrain it begins to rain which slow the movement of the reinforcements. Here, the locals who had been terrorized by the Thebans in the first place recovered their courage as they notice there is only a small body of the enemy in their city. They subsequently regained control of the city and make the Thebans surrendered. When the reinforcements arrived and yet become aware of their commando force being taken captive, they left the Plataean territory in the hope that the Plataeans would give their men back. However, the Plataeans killed the captives. Following that, the Athenians invaded Plataea as a result of which the war broke out.[72] Indeed, weather has remained one of the most important causes of friction in the history of war. This story along with similar events indicates that Thucydides' "universe is one where uncertainty, ambiguity, and friction, as well as incompetence, dominate the actions of men."[73]

The ideas of friction, chance, and uncertainty are also influential in Machiavelli's theory of war. These ideas chiefly are concerned with, if not limited to, the concept of *Fortuna*. The notion of *Fortuna*, as ambiguous as it may be, can principally be identified with the "incalculable

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[72] Thucydides, *The War*, 89-93.
[73] Murray, "Thucydides," 33.

and fortuitous" or sometimes with a cosmic force like destiny.[74] The influence of *Fortuna* on human affairs from Machiavelli's perspective is so great that he contended "fortune is the arbiter of half our actions"[75]

Yet as a Renaissance man, Machiavelli did not want to "to eliminate human freedom," and, subsequently, made his attempt to come up with some ideas that enable man to "control roughly the other half" of our actions.[76] This attempt have led some scholars such as Michael Handel and Felix Gilbert to think that Machiavelli believed "wars could be fought on the basis of *rational laws*."[77] This cannot be true. Gilbert and Handel based their arguments primarily on Machiavelli's thoughts on politics and statecraft rather than war and its nature. Machiavelli observed about the nature of war by referring to Livy, the Ancient Roman historian, that: there are "three things [that] are required in war: many soldiers and good ones, prudent leaders, and good fortune."[78] Despite Felix Gilbert's idea about Machiavelli viewing war as a rational phenomenon, "Machiavelli did not exaggerate the scope of strategy." In his view "There would always be risks." Therefore, it was "not always possible to identify a safe course."[79] To deal with uncertainty of war at the strategic level, the best advice the strategist can get from Machiavelli is to adapt his ways to "the times and circumstance."[80] Nonetheless, he is aware of the difficulty of adaption when he noted:

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[74] See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, trans. Neal Wood (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), Book 1, n. 1.
[75] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and trans. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 82. ; also, Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella, and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 234.
[76] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 82.
[77] Handel has *hesitantly* accepted Gilbert's judgment noting in the parenthesis somewhat down the page that "This [rationality in waging war] is a somewhat puzzling observation in light of Machiavelli's emphasis on the role of Fortune in war." Handel, *Masters of War*, 307.
[78] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 180.
[79] Freedman, *Strategy*, 50-51.
[80] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 83, 95.

Indeed, anyone who was shrewd enough to understand the times and circumstances, and was capable of adapting to them, would always be successful (or, at least, he would be able to avoid failure), and it would then be true that a wise man could control the stars and fates. But such shrewd men are not to be found: first, because *men are short-sighted*, and secondly because *they cannot change their own characters*. It follows that fortune is changeable and dominates men, keeping them under its yoke.[81]

At the tactical level and on the battlefield, however Machiavelli believed battles and campaigns were highly fluid situations that uncertainty would rise to its highest level.[82] Here Machiavelli observed that the supreme quality that would be required would be "*virtu*" which I will discuss under the Moral Forces section.

In contrast to other thinkers, Sun Tzu is the one who thought that the dynamics of war could be harnessed and that war can be conducted in a rational way. Right at the beginning of *The Art of Warfare*, he made the strategist rest assured that: "If you heed my assessments, dispatching troops into battle would mean certain victory, and I will stay. If you do not heed them, dispatching troops would mean certain defeat, and I will leave."[83]

As noted earlier, one of the great sources of friction in warfare is weather or climate and, broadly speaking, the interference of nature in the conduct of war. Sun Tzu was aware of the hazards and the advantages of nature. As such, apart from other parts of the book, he devoted two full chapters (chapters 10, and 11) of his thirteen chapters to the significance of terrain. The reason for such emphasis, of course, is rooted in the Chinese strategic culture. The Chinese throughout their history "have always had a special feeling for nature" which are reflected in

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[81] Ibid., 96 (emphasis added).
[82] Neal Wood, "Machiavelli's Concept of Virtù Reconsidered," *Political Studies* XV, no. 2 (1967): 170.
[83] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 74.

their art, history and literature.[84] Ku Tsu-yu (Ku Chin-fang) (1631-92), China's greatest military geographer, as General Samuel Griffith noted, has revealed the significance of climate and nature for devising strategy to the Chinese in these lines: "Anyone who is to start military operations in one part of the country should know the condition of the country as a whole. To start such an operation without such a knowledge is to court defeat regardless of whether it is defensive or offensive operation."[85]

Sun Tzu, who was admired by Ku Tsu-yu for his appreciation of the influence of terrain on strategy,[86] attempted to determine the course of war through "terrain advantage" (*ti shih*). This was contrary to the thinking of the other theorists, who considered nature as part of the fog of war or friction. In taking advantage of terrain, Sun Tzu, as an example, observed: "he [the commander] should not make camp on difficult terrain; he should join with his allies on strategically vital intersections. …The territory of several neighboring states at which their borders meet is a strategically vital intersection. The first to reach it will gain the allegiance of the other states of the empire."[87] *Ergo*, Sun Tzu made effort to shape the situation and create a "frictional imbalance" "whereby the friction inherent in any conflict would weigh more heavily on the opponent than on one's own forces."[88] The attempt to rationalize combat on the battlefield, to gain mastery over nature, and to reduce uncertainty on the battlefield has resulted in "Sun Tsuen optimism."[89]

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[84] Samuel B. Griffith, "Sun Tzu on War," in *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 43-44.
[85] Ibid., 44.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 97, 111.
[88] Toshi Yoshihara, "Sun Zi," 76.
[89] Ibid., 77.

Moral Forces

War is human in that once enemies decide to go to war, the uncertainty that surrounds the battlefield combined with the prospect of death and suffering bring individuals down to their very basic and intense feelings as two sides become engaged in fighting. As such, Field Marshal Archibald Wavell, the superior British general who had the experience of fighting in both World Wars noted, "The final deciding factor of all engagements, battles and wars is the morale of the opposing forces."[90]

Among theorists of war and strategy, Clausewitz is the one who widely credited for the in-depth analysis of the role of moral forces in war. Nonetheless, it should be noted Clausewitz was not the first thinker in the modern era who recognized the importance of moral forces in war. In the early modern period (1500-1800), Niccolò Machiavelli was first to address the role of moral forces in war. "Machiavelli's emphasis on moral forces is indeed undisputed," as Azar Gat noted.[91]

There are two ways to look at Machiavelli's idea of moral forces: through the concept of *virtu* or the general discussion of moral forces. Central to Machiavelli's thinking about moral forces is the concept of *virtu*. Matthew Kroenig argues that the quality of *virtu* in Machiavelli's theory of war and politics pertains to the ruler's ability to maintain the security of state by whatever means and expand state's power as the ultimate aim.[92] However, this interpretation of *virtu* appears to be secondary to the meaning of *virtu* as the quality of the soldier and the commander.

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[90] Quoted in Gray, *Strategy Bridge*, 61.
[91] Gat, *Origins*, 5.
[92] Kroenig, "Machiavelli," 104-107.

In Machiavelli's theory of war and politics, the concept of *virtu* is very much related to the concept of *fortuna*,[93] which together form binary opposites and generate thesis-antithesis dynamics. In Machiavellian thinking, *fortuna* has a female character while *virtu* has manly qualities that seeks to attract *fortuna* or else overcome her.[94] It is primarily in war that we can witness "the archetypal contest between *virtu* and *fortuna*, between all that is manly, and all that is changeable, unpredictable, and capricious, a struggle between masculine rational control and effeminate irrationality."[95] Therefore, in Machiavellian theory of war and politics, *virtue*, whether used in military or political context, inherently has a military meaning with courage at its core which "is essential to the survival and well-being of a people in this alien and hostile world."[96] However, Machiavelli at times used the term explicitly to mean courage in war. For example, Machiavelli used the word to air his criticism of mercenaries, and warned the prince of recruiting of auxiliaries (foreign forces): "if your mercenary is not a brave [*virtuoso*] leader, he will ruin you with his incompetence,"[97] and elsewhere, he said, "when you have mercenaries, their cowardice is most dangerous to you; when you have auxiliaries, it is their courage [*virtu*] you must fear. Hence a wise prince has always kept away from troops like these[98] and made use of his own, preferring to lose under his own power than to win with other people's troops — since it isn't a real victory when alien armies win it for you."[99] In this sense, *virtu* as courage or

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[93] Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli*: *A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29, 32-33; 38-40; also, Wood, "Machiavelli's Concept of Virtù," 170.

[94] Skinner, *Machiavelli*, 29, 32: also, Wood, "Machiavelli's Concept of Virtù," 170.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Wood, introduction to *The Art of War*, 1iv-1v.

[97] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince,* ed. and trans. Robert A. Adams, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1992), 34.

[98] One with no courage and the other with courage and thus becoming a threat to the state and/or prince as a foreign troop. Machiavelli was in favor citizen-army.

[99] Ibid., 38.

even aggressive behavior not only is desirable, but also required of the soldier if he is to withstand *fortuna* and its manifestations such as uncertainty, fate, and adversity.[100]

Apart from his use of "*virtu*," Machiavelli expressly used the words "bravery or courage" as a required quality for the soldier in warfare. For example, he advised the commander, "Never come to an engagement until you have inspired your men with courage and see them in good order and eager to fight, nor hazard a battle until they seem confident of victory."[101] On the whole, in Machiavelli's view what could develop the sense of courage in man is through training and discipline which provided man the experience to withstand the danger. As he noted, "inexperience is the mother of cowardice, and compulsion makes men mutinous and discontented; but both experience and courage are acquired by arming, exercising, and disciplining men properly."[102]

Clausewitz appears to have followed Machiavelli's lead in formulating his own binary opposites in that "Moral forces are a counterweight to friction," in Clausewitz's theory.[103] However, Clausewitz was not the first thinker, on the whole, to have noticed the significance of moral forces in war after Machiavelli. Henry Lloyd (ca. 1718-1783), the Welsh army officer and mercenary, pioneered the study of "the psychological motives of troops with a practical purpose in mind," during the Enlightenment.[104] Yet the military thinkers of the Enlightenment including Lloyd and Clausewitz's contemporary, Antoine-Henri Jomini, "saw no use in elaborating upon the moral, incalculable, and unforeseen which could hardly produce practical results."[105]

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[100] Wood, introduction to *The Art of War*, 1iv-1v.
[101] Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, 202.
[102] Ibid., 29, 58.
[103] Kleemeier, "Moral Forces," 119.
[104] Gat, *Origins*, 182.
[105] Ibid.

Clausewitz, in contrast, observed, "the moral elements are among the most important [factors] in war. They constitute the spirit that permeates war as a whole, and at an early stage they establish a close affinity with the will that moves and leads the whole mass of force, practically merging with it, since the will is itself a moral quantity." Yet he noted, "Unfortunately they will not yield to academic wisdom. They cannot be classified or counted. They have to be seen or felt."[106] The intangibility of moral forces did not prevent the philosophical mind of Clausewitz from studying them. He maintained moral forces are comprised of three elements:: "the skill of the commander, the experience and courage of the troops, and their patriotic spirit."[107] In describing the skill of the commander, Clausewitz put forward one of the most intriguing ideas of his: military genius. Curiously, Clausewitz's military genius is not "an exceptional, once-in-a-generation individual such as Napoleon."[108] Military genius is the commander who is able to keep "the harmonic balance of sense and sensibility."[109] He takes action only after the correct assessment of the overall situation, though that "assessment might occur so rapidly as to seem spontaneous."[110] His actions always follow "insight gained by means of knowledge, experience, and the commander's special coup d'œil, his use of the physical as well as the mind's eye to see the situation clearly."[111] On the whole, As Lawrence Freedman observes, "Clausewitz was wary of the general who tried to be too smart. He preferred those who kept their imaginations in check and a firm grip on the harsh realities of battle."[112]

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[106] Clausewitz, *On War*, 184.
[107] Ibid., 186.
[108] Freedman, *Strategy*, 88.
[109] Echevarria, *Clausewitz*, 115; also, Kleemeier, "Moral Forces," 110.
[110] Echevarria, *Clausewitz*, 112.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Freedman, *Strategy*, 88.

Clausewitzian moral forces are not limited to the qualities of the commander. Troops are also required to be brave and courageous. However, this bravery is not the one which is "part of the natural make-up of a man's character," but one developed in a soldier as "a member of an organization," who would obey orders, who is trained to sustained constant activity and exertion, who takes "professional pride" in his service, and sees his efforts "as a means to victory rather than a curse on its cause". In short, the soldier will have to develop the "true military spirit."[113] Clausewitz thought that troops' national feelings such as enthusiasm, fanatical zeal, faith, and general temper will play particular a role in irregular warfare such as mountain warfare "where every man, down to the individual soldier is on his own."[114]

Clausewitz's notion of military genius appears to be unique in the theory of war and strategy. However, it may not actually be the case. Sun Tzu's "ideal strategist or commander," to whom Sun Tzu communicated his wisdom throughout his book, can *arguably* be seen as the parallel to Clausewitz's military genius in that both types of commanders possess qualities that distinguish them from the ordinary. Michael Handel was probably the first who spotted the parallel and noted, "Clausewitz's 'military genius' and Sun Tzu's 'master of war' or 'skillful commander' have much in common when their superficial differences are stripped away."[115] However, he observed, Sun Tzu's commander "favors caution and measured calculation" rather than, for example, boldness or else *coup d'œil*, which is intuitional.[116] Apart from the distinguished commander, Sun Tzu, similarly to Machiavelli Clausewitz, believed that morale of the troop is material. However, as a calculative and proactive strategic thinker, Sun Tzu's

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[113] Clausewitz, *On War*, 187-189.
[114] Ibid., 186.
[115] Handel, *Maters of War*, 196.
[116] Ibid.

reflection on the morale of the troop was rather prescriptive than descriptive in that he sought to exercise "moral control" over the enemy in his treatment. For example, he stated: "in the morning of the war, the enemy's morale is high; by noon, it begins to flag; by evening, it has drained away. Thus the expert in using the military avoids the enemy when his morale is high, and strikes when his morale has flagged and has drained away. This is the way to manage morale." Alternatively, "Use your proper order to await the enemy's disorder; use your calmness to await his clamor. This is the way to manage the heart-and-mind."[117]

In Thucydides' work, "courage" is consistently referred to as a supreme quality. Pericles, Thucydides' hero, regarded courage as the main factor on which prosperity and freedom of state depends: "happiness depends on freedom and freedom on courage."[118] Also, he made courage the most important theme of his funeral speech:

> My main points are already made: the qualities praised in the city were the ones these men and others like them enhanced by their virtues, and there are few other Greeks whose reputation would be found equalled [*sic*] by their deeds, as would theirs. The end they met is surely proof of their manly courage – whether in its first revelation or its final confirmation. Even those with other failings deserve to be first of all remembered for their manly courage in war in the service of their country.[119]

Likewise, in Book 2 chapter 87, the speech by the talented Spartan commander, Brasidas, on the significance of courage gives the passage a distinct character relative to other passages in *The Peloponnesian War*:

> you should realise [*sic*] that though all men can suffer reverses of fortune the brave in spirit always remain true to their character, and as such they would never offer inexperience as a good excuse for cowardice in any situation. Any lack of experience on your part is more than compensated for by your advantage in physical courage…unless

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[117] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 95.
[118] Thucydides, *The War*, 115.
[119] Ibid., 114.

you are brave at heart no amount of expertise can prevail in the face of danger. Fear drives things from the mind, and expertise without inner strength is of no use.[120]

However, Thucydides showed us that bravery and courage cannot be the distinguishing marks of a great commander unless they are coupled with "prudence." In this regard, he provided us with a perfect foil for Pericles's character: the Athenian statesman and general of extreme talent, Alcibiades. Pericles, who greatly admired bravery and "manly courage," manifested prudence in not taking his men to the battlefield having examined the state of affairs holistically and beyond the battlefield. In contrast, Alcibiades who can be regarded as an archetypal Clausewitzian military genius, became so obsessed with personal glory that he made the Athenians embark on an unnecessary journey, the Sicilian Expedition (415-413 BC), as a result of which Athens' internal divide ensued, he lost his position as the commander and put his life at risk, and the Athenian Empire overstretched.

The Enemy

War and strategy do not happen in a vacuum. They should be directed against something, and that thing happens to be an intelligent living being that refuses to cooperate, and violently so. That thing gives war, strategy and policy the purpose. That thing is the enemy. Thus, we have no choice but to know him. Indeed, "Knowing the enemy is the bedrock of the business of strategy," as Ken Booth noted.[121]

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[120] Ibid., 148-149.
[121] Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 16.

In strategic studies, Sun Tzu is identified more than anything else with the maxim that:
"He who knows the enemy and himself will never in a hundred battles be at risk."[122] In this
maxim, he made it plain that the strategist has to have a correct assessment of both the strengths
and weaknesses of the enemy as well as of his own side if he wants to achieve victory. To
understand what he meant by "knowing the enemy," we shall have to place that maxim into its
proper context since scholars might confuse gaining knowledge of the enemy with intelligence
gathering.

Sun Tzu states that "the highest excellence is to subdue the enemy's army without
fighting at all."[123] As such, "the best military policy is to attack [the enemy's] strategies."[124]
Attacking the enemy's strategy requires understanding his strategy before it is implemented.
Strategic planning does not develop in the abstract. All strategies are context-dependent. As
Colin Gray noted, "The pragmatic task of making and executing historically specific strategies
authoritative for every level of war—grand or national, military, operational, joint as well as
single- geography— though a creative challenge, is commanded significantly by its contexts,
wherein contingency is always a factor, actual or potential."[125] As such, the strategist is required
to intellectually develop his assumptions about different strategic contexts in order to be able to
deal with specific plans.[126]

Clausewitz was equally aware of the role that the enemy plays in war. He observed
enemies are like "a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do

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[122] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 80.
[123] Ibid., 79.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Gray, *Strategy Bridge*, 38.
[126] Gray identified seven strategic contexts. See Gray, *Strategy Bridge*, 38-41.

his will."[127] However, this sentence, on the first page of *On War*, indicates, as an example, that

Clausewitz's view about the enemy differed from that of Sun Tzu in two ways. First, Clausewitz

stressed that we are required to destroy the enemy's armed force if we want to achieve victory.

This is in contrast to Sun Tzu's preference for attacking the -enemy's strategy and alliances over

attacking their army.[128] Second, Clausewitz "*emphasizes the reciprocal nature of war, that is, the*

action and reaction of equally capable enemies," but Sun Tzu tried to educate the strategist and

commander how they could manipulate the adversary without noticing that "the enemy can be

expected to follow the same advice."[129]

Curiously, Machiavelli's perception of the enemy and the way he should be encountered

was similar to Sun Tzu than Clausewitz. In reference to the Greek general of the fourth century

BC, Machiavelli approvingly noted, "Epaminondas the Theban used to say that nothing was

more necessary and more useful to a commander than having some knowledge of the

deliberations and decisions of the enemy."[130] Machiavelli thus believed in having the

foreknowledge of the enemy's plan if the strategist or commander intends to win the warfare and

the war. In this situation, the commander or the strategist has to rely on "speculations,"

Machiavelli observed.[131]

The role of speculation or the "strategic assumption" is vitally important in planning war.

The Department of Defense has defined an assumption as "A supposition on the current situation

or a presupposition on the future course of events, either or both assumed to be true in the

absence of positive proof, necessary to enable the commander in the process of planning to

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[127] Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.
[128] Yoshihara, "Sun Zi," 73.
[129] Handel, *Masters of War*, 107 (emphasis in the original).
[130] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 301.
[131] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 301.

complete an estimate of the situation and make a decision on the course of action."[132] This

definition highlights that "key factors that are unknown to the planners."[133] Yet speculation

about unknown factors are not avoidable since we cannot have full knowledge, if any knowledge

at all, of the enemy's planning. However, the salient point the strategist has to bear in mind in

developing his assumptions is that if he develops wrong assumptions, the armed forces will be

ill-prepared, and subsequently will fight a wrong war putting the life of soldiers at risk.[134]

Machiavelli admitted developing assumption is not an easy task.[135]

Machiavelli's attempt in dealing with the enemy was not limited to developing

assumptions about the enemy's plan, but also included "knowing the enemy" too. "If a general

knows his own strength and that of the enemy perfectly, he can hardly miscarry, he noted.[136] On

the battlefield, because Machiavelli thought that moral considerations are not material in war (or

rather pagan morality is material not Christian morality), he advocated the thinking that "Every

type of trickery and violence is legitimate when used against the enemy." In his view, "The ideal

military commander is one capable of constantly devising new tactics and stratagems to deceive

and overpower the enemy."[137] Nevertheless, his first preference was using trickery rather than

violence.[138] Battle should not be avoided, unless the enemy insists.[139]

Thucydides believed that enemies at the grand strategic level belong to different leagues,

and therefore, based on the natural order of things in international politics, are treated according

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[132] Quoted in T. X. Hammes, "Assumptions -A Fatal Oversight," *Infinity Journal* 1, no. 1, (Winter 2010): 5.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 5.
[135] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 301.
[136] Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, 203.
[137] Wood, introduction to *The Art of War*, xxv.
[138] Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, 202.
[139] Ibid., 126.

to the quality of their power. Those who are weak are naturally subdued by the strong. As the

Athenians noted frequently, "it has always been established practice for the weaker to be ruled

by the stronger."[140] With regard to military strategy, however, the weaker enemy has the same

vote as the strong. Archidamus, the Spartan king, who was aware of the superiority of the

Spartan army and those of the allies against the Athenians observed:

> So even if you may think that it is a huge force we are taking against them and that there
> is little risk the enemy will come out to face us in a battle, we must not for these reasons
> be any less cautious in preparing our advance. On the contrary, the commanders and
> soldiers from every city should be on constant alert against some direct threat. In the
> murk of war attacks come fast and furious; and often it is the smaller force, inspired by
> fear, that puts up the better defence [sic] against a larger one caught overconfident and
> unprepared.[141]

In this way, the strategist is advised to approach the business of war with prudence, through

correct assessment of the enemy's forces. "Knowing the enemy," its strengths and weaknesses

will become then of the essence. The Athenians may not have been in the same league as the

Spartans on the battlefield, but they had their own type of capabilities. As Archidamus noted:

> In a war against Peloponnesians and neighbouring [sic] states our military might is of a
> similar kind to theirs and can be quickly deployed wherever it is needed. But this war
> would be against men whose land is far away; their expertise at sea, moreover, is
> supreme; they are the best equipped in every other respect – with wealth, both public and
> private, with ships, horses, arms and a larger populace than is found in any other single
> place in Greece; and they also have many allies paying tribute.[142]

In other words, the strategist has to take the reality of geography into account when planning

strategy. As Colin Gray observed, "All strategy is geostrategy." Strategy is always done in

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[140] Thucydides, *The War*, 46-47.
[141] Ibid. 96
[142] Ibid.

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specific geographical contexts.[143] Also, Archidamus or rather Thucydides underscored the "asymmetry of power." In war, the enemy may be at a disadvantage in one way, but at an advantage in another. The Athenians may have been wanting on land, but could counterbalance the inadequacy at sea.

Intelligence

Everything in war is murky and yet both sides do their best to make it murkier by hiding their motives and even by misleading the enemy through deception. In such a situation, each party attempts to penetrate the murkiness of war by gathering intelligence.[144] Sun Tzu was the theorist who was most emphatic about the significance of intelligence in the conduct of war.

As noted earlier, Sun Tzu thought that the course of war can be rationally determined. He perceived war as a linear phenomenon. However, in order to influence that linearity favorably and plan the course of war desirably, the strategist needs to have information about the enemy's military operations. While understanding the strategic context aims at helping the strategist to know the enemy, and attack his strategy before the war starts, rendering his army of no use,[145] intelligence gathering, despite the fact that it happens before the war, influences the course of war as the fighting actually takes place. The intelligence estimates will enable military planning to "be tailored to specific conditions rather than formulated in a vacuum" and "to exploit the enemy's weaknesses" as fighting goes on.[146] Sun Tzu contended, "Intelligence is of the essence

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[143] Colin S. Gray, "Inescapable Geography," in *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, ed. Colin S. Gray, and Geoffrey Sloan (London: Routledge, 2013), 164.
[144] Van Creveld, *More on War*, 88.
[145] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 79.
[146] Handel, *Masters of War*, 177.

in warfare – it is what the armies depends upon in their every move."[147] Yet that intelligence,

that "foreknowledge cannot be had from ghosts and spirits, deduced by comparison with past

events, or verified by astrological calculations. It must come from people who know the enemy's

situation."[148] The strategist must spare no cost in recruiting the right person and in acquiring

reliable intelligence.[149]

Contrary to Sun Tzu, Clausewitz was pessimistic about the role of espionage in war. He

maintained that if the strategist plans war based on intelligence, war "can easily collapse and

bury us in its ruins." This is, he thought, because intelligence is inherently "unreliable and

transient."[150] He thought intelligence is not a practical tool in war, thought in theory it might be

justified.

> The textbooks agree, of course, that we should only believe in reliable intelligence, and
> should never cease to be suspicious, but what is the use of such feeble maxims? They
> belong to that wisdom which for want of anything better scribblers of systems and
> compendia resort to when they run out of ideas. Many intelligence reports in war are
> contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain.[151]

The criticism of intelligence by Clausewitz was not limited to the applicability of

intelligence in war, due to discrepancies of information, but also about the consequences of

intelligence when the commander decides to apply it as the information arrives during fighting.

Clausewitz used human psychology to explain the difficulty. He believed that with the flood of

information arriving in the thick of fighting, "most men would rather believe bad news than

good, and rather tend to exaggerate the bad news." This tends to create an atmosphere of fear

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[147] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 125.
[148] Ibid., 123.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Clausewitz, *On War*, 117.
[151] Ibid.

that multiplies "lies and inaccuracies" which can lead to bad decisions or no decisions by the commander.[152] In this way, "*Clausewitz actually saw intelligence as a source of friction* and a possible cause of failure."[153] Thus, in this situation, Clausewitz noted, "The commander must trust his judgment and stand like a rock on which the waves break in vain. It is not an easy thing to do. If he does not have a buoyant disposition, if experience of war has not trained him and matured his judgment, he had better make it a rule to suppress his personal convictions, and give his hopes and not his fears the benefit of the doubt. Only thus can he preserve a proper balance."[154]

Thucydides saw some value in intelligence, but it does not appear that intelligence on the enemy was a priority for him. In *The Peloponnesian War*, intelligence is primarily used for surprise attacks. This was enabled by what we today call the fifth column: "a group or faction in a state which acts traitorously or subversively in cooperation with the enemy."[155] As a case in point, in 428 BC, the fifth column in the city-state of Mytilene informed the Athenians that Mytilene had decided to secede from the Delian League in cooperation with Spartans and Boeotians. Initially, the Athenians were hesitant to act as a result of "suffering from the effects of the plague and from the full force of the war that was now under way."[156] However, when negotiation and diplomatic measures failed, Athens became alarmed and sent forty ships. While they were keeping the Mytilenaeans in check, the fifth column, the Athenian *proxenoi*, provided the Athenians with crucial information that there was to be a festival of Apollo *Maloeis*, that the whole population was outside the city, and that the Mytileneans could be taken by a surprise

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[152] Ibid.
[153] Michael I. Handel, *War, Strategy and Intelligence* (London: Frank Cass, 1989), 68.
[154] Clausewitz, *On War*, 117.
[155] Luis A. Losada, *The Fifth Column in the Peloponnesian War* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 4.
[156] Thucydides, *The War*, 163.

attack.[157] Although the Mytilenaeans became aware of the Athenians' plan through their own informer, and canceled the festival, war took place, and they were still caught unprepared. The following military engagements with Athens, and communications with Sparta could not save the underprepared Mytilene from defeat.[158] As Luis Losada noted, "The fifth column was a major instrument of strategy in the Peloponnesian War. …the necessities of warfare made the exploitation of a fifth column the most efficient method of capturing a city."[159]

Apart from the surprise attacks, the use of intelligence in war in *The Peloponnesian War* does not appear to be strategically as important for Thucydides as Luis Losada claimed.[160] There are two main reasons for that. First, Thucydides related the first use of intelligence in war not in Book One or Two when he set the stage but in Book Three, in the fifth year of the war and mentioned it in just a couple of lines: "The Peloponnesians, however, continued wasting the land until midday and then sailed away; and towards nightfall *the news was flashed to them* that sixty Athenian ships were heading in their direction from Leucas. These were ships the Athenians had decided to dispatch, under the command of Eurymedon son of Thoucles, when they learned about the civil unrest in the city and the impending attack on Corcyra by Alcidas and his ships."[161]

Second, when Thucydides wrote about intelligence or the role of informers, he mentioned it in passing, he spoke about his sources in an obscure manner, and he took a passive tone in narration. For example, Thucydides described the Battle of Olpae in 426 BC as such:

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[157] Ibid.;also, Losada, *The Fifth Column*, 80-81.
[158] Thucydides, *The War*, 162-164.
[159] Losada, *The Fifth Column*, 116.
[160] Ibid.,136.
[161] Thucydides, *The War*, 211 (emphasis added).

Demosthenes [Athenian general] with his Acarnanian fellow commanders granted permission for a quick retreat to the Mantineans and to Menedaıus and the other Peloponnesian leaders and any others of note among them. Their objective was to isolate the Ambraciots[162] and the mob of mercenaries, and more especially to discredit the Spartans and Peloponnesians in the eyes of the Greeks in that region for betraying their own side and serving their own interests. So the Peloponnesians took up their dead and quickly buried them as best they could, and those to whom permission had been granted began secretly planning their retreat. *Word was now brought to Demosthenes* and the Acarnanians, however, that the Ambraciots from the city of Ambracia were advancing through Amphilochia in full force in response to the original message from Olpae and intended to join up with the forces at Olpae, knowing nothing of what had happened. Demosthenes straightaway sent part of his army to set ambushes on the route and to occupy strongholds in advance, and at the same time prepared to deploy the rest of his army against them.[163]

When we consider how emphatically Thucydides spoke of human nature, fortune, morale and courage, or personal ambitions, and compare it with his tone, so to speak, about intelligence, we notice that he did not attach much importance to intelligence. In other words, Thucydides' way of thinking corresponds to the conventional narrative that "the art of reconnaissance and the gathering of intelligence was not a strong point of fleets or armies in antiquity."[164]

Machiavelli's theory of intelligence has three sides to it: gathering intelligence, concealing plans, and spreading disinformation. Machiavelli thought when war happens, the commander should perform intelligence gathering because then he will be able to adapt the military operation to the new circumstances. For example, he said, "In order to penetrate the enemy's secret designs and to discover the disposition of his army, some have sent ambassadors with skillful and experienced officers in their train dressed like the rest of their attendants; these

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[162] Ambracia was a Corinthian colony.
[163] Ibid., 230-231 (emphasis added).
[164] Quoted in Losada, *The Fifth Column*, 114.

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officers have taken the opportunity of viewing their army and observing their strength and weakness in so minute a manner that it has been of much service."[165]

Machiavelli thought hiding information from the enemy is as important as gathering intelligence. "After you have consulted with many about what you ought to do, confer with very few concerning what you are actually resolved to do."[166] Also, his anecdote about Caecilius Metellus Pius (ca. 128 – 63 BC), the Roman general and statesman, is revealing: "When Metellus commanded the Roman armies in Spain, someone took the liberty of asking him what he intended to do the next day; he told him, that if he thought his tunic could know that, he would immediately burn it."[167]

According to Neal Wood, an American historian of political thought, it is possible that Machiavelli in his treatment of war and politics had been influenced by Frontinus (ca. 40 – 104 BC), Roman general and governor of Britain, as well as Vegetius.[168] Considering this, Machiavelli's advocacy of gathering intelligence and hiding information appears to correspond to Frontinus's position on intelligence when he conceived that the commander would be well-advised to follow certain type of stratagems in war including: "concealment of his plan," and "finding out the enemy's plans"[169]

Machiavelli also came up with the idea of spreading disinformation in the enemy's camp: "It is also sometimes of great service in time of battle to circulate a report that the enemy's

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[165] Machiavelli, *The Art of War,* 171.
[166] Ibid., 203.
[167] Ibid., 171.
[168] See Neal Wood, "Frontinus as a Possible Source for Machiavelli's Method," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28, no. 2 (Apr-Jun 1967): esp. 244-248.
[169] See Sextus Iulius Frontinus, *The Stratagems and the Aqueducts of Rome*, trans. Charles E. Bennett, ed. Mary B. McElwain (London: William Heinemann for Loeb, 1925), 7-22.

general is killed, or that one part of his army is giving way; it has not been unusual to throw cavalry into disorder by strange noises and uncommon appearances,"[170] or that, "In order to throw the enemy into confusion after the battle has begun, it is necessary to resort to some invention that can strike terror into them; you may do this either by spreading a report that you have supplies coming up, or by making a false show of such supplies at a distance—this has often occasioned such consternation in an army that it has been immediately defeated."[171]

In general, Machiavelli perceived that intelligence has value. Machiavelli noted, "He who is most careful to observe the motions and designs of the enemy and takes the most care in drilling and disciplining his army, will be least exposed to danger and will have the most reason to expect success in his undertakings."[172] In other words, intelligence, in addition to training, can enable the commander to reduce the friction in war, and facilitate victory. Nonetheless, he was cautious about entirely relying on intelligence in strategy making. He knew that the enemy too can spread disinformation, and that he can plant their own spies among sources from whom the strategist receive deceptive information. For this reason he advised that the strategist should keep inspecting his sources: "If you suspect anybody in your army of giving the enemy intelligence of your designs, you cannot do better than to avail yourself of his treachery by seeming to trust him with some secret resolution which you intend to execute, while you carefully conceal your real design; hence, you may perhaps discover the traitor and lead the enemy into an error that may possibly end in its destruction."[173]

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[170] Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, 117.
[171] Ibid., 116.
[172] Ibid., 202.
[173] Ibid., 170.

CHAPTER 3

STRATEGY

As Colin Gray stated, "strategy provides the 'how' answer to what in its absence are political ambition and military activity, with each effectively isolated."[174] In short, strategy provides war with its direction. This chapter investigates how the classic theorists thought about various strategic approaches. In this regard, this author examines the theorists' ideas on strategies of annihilation and attrition, direct and indirect, deterrence and coercion, and defensive and offensive.

Annihilation and Attrition

The German military historian, Hans Delbrück, at the beginning of the twentieth century, made a theoretical distinction between the strategy of annihilation, and strategy of attrition. Delbrück observed:

> In the strategy of annihilation there is such a measure [as to how much force to apply]—
> that is, the combat forces of the enemy. One must either commit all the forces that are in
> any way available, or at least so much that one can count with certainty on victory. If that
> does not come about, an error has been made. In the strategy of attrition, the standard is
> more subjective. To concentrate all one's forces at the same time would be wrong and
> would contradict one's own plans. No matter what takes place, it is always possible for a
> critic to come along and say that, in addition, this or that should also have been done.[175]

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[174] Colin S. Gray, *The Future of Strategy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 23.
[175] Hans Delbrück, *Warfare in Antiquity: History of the Art of War*, trans. Walter J. Renfroe, Jr. (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 1:140.

To be more specific, "a strategy of attrition aims to win by grinding down an opponent's material strength."[176] Hence, a great deal of time, effort, patience and resilience is required if this strategy is going to become successful. Moreover, the adversarial nature of war allows the enemy to conduct his own attritional warfare. In this condition, the strategist and his state are expected to destroy "an opponent's forces faster than they can be replaced, while at the same time ensuring one's own rate of loss remains bearable".[177] Contrary to the strategy of attrition, annihilation strategy aims at "severely reducing or eliminating an opponent's material strength through one or two major battles."[178] In this regard, seeking battle will become the main purpose of warfare through which the political ends will be determined. In attrition strategy, on the other hand, a variety of approaches can be adopted "to achieve the political ends of war, including occupying territory, destroying crops, and blockading."[179]

Impressed and influenced by the Napoleonic way of warfare, Clausewitz saw the annihilation of the enemy's forces as the main purpose of war. As he maintained, "we must not fail to emphasize that the violent resolution of the crisis, the wish to annihilate the enemy's forces, is the first-born son of war,"[180] or as he noted elsewhere in *On War*, "direct annihilation of the enemy's forces must always be the *dominant* consideration."[181] Antoine Henri Jomini, Clausewitz's contemporary, also was influenced by Napoleon's conduct of war, and perceived the decisive battle as the key to victory. Yet Clausewitz's emphasis on the decisive battle varied from Jomini's in one important respect. Unlike Jomini, for Clausewitz the role of moral factors

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[176] Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Military Strategy: A very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 30.
[177] Ibid., 31.
[178] Ibid., 13.
[179] Freedman, *Strategy*, 108.
[180] Clausewitz, *On War*, 99.
[181] Ibid., 228 (emphasis in the original).

in the decisive battle was important: "the capacity of the commander to maintain his determination, in spite of all temptations to the contrary, to concentrate his forces against that decisive point."[182] Moreover, by emphasizing the decisive battle, Clausewitz distanced himself from the idea of the eighteenth century that "skillful strategic combinations could make tactical confrontation unnecessary, that the strategist might have any means to serve his purposes other than hard fighting."[183] Nonetheless, Hans Delbrück opined that "if Clausewitz had lived to revise his work he would have devoted far more appreciation and attention to this strategy of attrition" which in Delbrück's view was the characteristic of Fredrick the Great's way of war in which Clausewitz showed more interested later in his life.[184]

Despite being a rational thinker who attempted to control the course of war through his maxims, Sun Tzu was aware that the conduct of war is not without risk. Thus, he argued: in order to triumph over the enemy, "the best military policy is to attack strategies;" then making alliance.[185] Nonetheless, Sun Tzu would have agreed with the renowned American strategist, J.C. Wylie that, "*despite whatever effort there may be to prevent it, there may be war*."[186] Once war happens, Sun was thought the strategy of annihilation would be preferable to attrition strategy. As Master Sun contended, "In joining battle, seek the quick victory. If battle is protracted, your weapons will be blunted and your troops demoralized."[187] Not only is the course of war likely to transform over time as a result of change in the moral and physical factors inherent in war, but war can also goes off the initial track as other states begin to interfere in the conflict as time

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[182] Howard, *Clausewitz*, 43.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Michael Howard, "The Influence of Clausewitz," in *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Prince-ton University Press, 1989), 87.
[185] Sun Tzu, *Art of Warfare*, 79.
[186] J.C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 66.
[187] Sun Tzu, *Art of Warfare*, 75.

passes. As Sun Tzu observed, "Where you have blunted your weapons, demoralized your troops, exhausted your strength and depleted all available resources, the neighboring rulers will take advantage of your adversity to strike. And even with the wisest of counsel, you will not be able to turn the ensuing consequences to the good."[188]

Despite his preference for the strategy of annihilation, Sun Tzu was not entirely indifferent to the strategy of attrition. In his book, *The Art of Warfare*, Sun Tzu devoted an entire chapter, chapter 12, to an instance of the strategy of attrition: "incendiary attack." He observed, "There are five kinds of incendiary attack: The first is called setting fire to personnel; the second, to stores; the third, to transport vehicles and equipment; the fourth, to munitions; the fifth, to supply installations."[189] In this way, Sun Tzu expanded the domain of the attritional warfare to the logistics, assets, and even civilians, we may conjecture, of the hostile country.

In dealing with the enemy, Sun Tzu made a subtle point about attrition strategy: the strategist has to constantly adapt his conduct according to the new situation. Since the strategy of attrition takes place over a longer period of time, adaptation becomes necessary. In doing so, Sun Tzu contended, "With the incendiary attack, you must vary your response to the enemy according to (yin) the different changes in his situation induced by each of the five kinds of attack."[190] It is worth noting that in seeking "incendiary attack," Sun Tzu was, first and foremost, interested in the moral and psychological effect of the strike rather than the physical and material effect. As he stated, "If in spite of the outbreak of fire, the enemy's troops remain calm, bide your time and do not attack. Let the fire reach its height, and if you can follow through, do so."[191]

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[188] Ibid., 76.
[189] Ibid., 121.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.

As noted earlier, the character of the Peloponnesian war is defined by the asymmetry of power. The Spartan land power versus the Athenian sea power made it impossible foe each side to decide the fate of the war quickly. Pericles was aware of this reality. "In a single battle the Peloponnesians and their allies are able to withstand the whole of Greece, but they are incapable of sustaining a war against a power so differently organised [*sic*] from theirs," Pericles told the Athenians. Accordingly, he put forward his strategy of attrition: "let your land and houses go, but keep guard over the sea and the city; do not let your anger with the Peloponnesians over these losses make you fight it out against their much greater numbers (for if we win we have to fight again with the same disadvantage and if we lose we lose our allies too, the source of our strength, since they will not stay quiet once we no longer have the capacity to send out a force against them)."[192] Pericles asked the Athenians to stay behind the Athenian Long Walls, avoid giving battle, and raid the Athenian coastal towns from sea whenever the occasion arises. By doing so, Pericles sought to wear the Spartans down dissuading them from pursuing war against the Athenian Empire. The ultimate political objective of this military strategy for Pericles was the dissolution of the Peloponnesian League.[193] Pericles hoped that by the passage of time, the Spartan allies would become disappointed at Sparta winning the war against the Athenian Empire, and consequently, lose faith in the Spartan leadership which ultimately would culminate in the collapse of the Peloponnesian League. The sinew of the strategy of attrition is economic strength, and Pericles knew that. Pericles noted:

> The Peloponnesians are farming people and have neither private nor public funds available; and besides, they have no experience of protracted overseas wars because their own campaigns against one another are kept briefly the fact of their poverty. People in this situation are not capable of manning ships or constantly sending out armies by land,

[192] Thucydides, *The War*, 87
[193] Paul A. Rahe, "The Primacy of Greece: Athens and Sparta," in *Great Strategic Rivalries From the Classical World to the Cold War*, ed. James Lacy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 72.

if at the same time they are going to be absent from their property, spending from their own savings and in addition barred from the sea. Capital is what sustains a war rather than forced contributions.[194]

However, what Pericles failed to appreciate was that the strategy of attrition did not correspond to the Athenian, or rather Greek, strategic culture (or culture of war) in that the Athenian culture and habit of mind favored pitched battle, and could not show restraint in avoiding it. So, as Donald Kagan argued, it was "hard to persuade Athenians to go to war with such a strategy and harder still to hold them to it once the war began."[195] Strategy has many dimensions,[196] and Athens' healthy economy was no substitute for the Athenian strategic culture (or culture of war). As Colin Gray reminded us, notwithstanding the possible fungibility among dimensions of strategy, genuine major weakness in any dimension can prove fatal to the whole enterprise of strategy.[197]

On the other side, Archidamus, the Spartan king, was aware that war against Athens was not like Sparta's previous wars in that Athens was not in the vicinity of Sparta and that Sparta as the land power had to fight a wealthy sea power which received support from its allies.[198] Nonetheless, the Spartans decided for war seeking the strategy of annihilation as they attempted to provoke the Athenians into giving battle by destroying crops at Acharnae (the town only seven miles away from Athens) which in itself was an instance of attrition.

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[194] Thucydides, *The War*, 85.
[195] Kagan, *Origins*, 64-65.
[196] See Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[197] Ibid., 26.
[198] Thucydides, *The War*, 49.

Machiavelli believed that "A knockout blow should always be sought in preference to a long war of attrition."[199] Machiavelli's interest in the Roman way of warfare inclined him towards the strategy of annihilation as he thought field battles are the essence of war, and that they "decide the fate of nations."[200] The recipe for making war short, from Machiavelli's perspective, was by using great number of troops. Having taken the Roman way of warfare as his conceptual model, he asserted, "by fielding enormous armies, the Romans brought to a very swift conclusion all the wars that they waged against the Latins, the Samnites, and the Etruscans. …as soon as war was declared, they marched forth against the enemy with their armies and immediately waged a decisive battle."[201] Machiavelli observed that annihilating the enemy's forces prevents them from continuous engagements with our forces which in turn can forestall the achievement of the political objective. As he contended, "if victory is achieved, and the defeat inflicted is so decisive that the enemy forces cannot regroup, there remains no other obstacle except the ruler's family [as the political end]. If they are wiped out, there is no other focus of resistance to be feared, since no one else enjoys any standing with the inhabitants."[202]

Direct and Indirect

The strategy of the indirect approach is widely associated with General Basil Liddell Hart, the famous British strategist of the twentieth century. In explaining the strategy of indirect approach versus the strategy of direct approach, Liddell Hart noted:

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[199] Wood, introduction to *The Art of War*, 1xiv.
[200] Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, 53.
[201] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 170.
[202] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 16.

[T]he fact [has] emerged that a direct approach to the object or objective along the 'line of natural expectation' has ever tended to negative results. The reason being that the strength of an enemy country or force lies far less in its numbers or resources than in its stability or equilibrium – of control, morale and supply … To move along the 'line of natural expectation' is to consolidate the enemy's equilibrium. And by stiffening it to augment its resisting power … In contrast, the decisive victories in military history have come from the strategy of indirect approach, wherein the dislocation of the enemy's moral, mental or material balance is the vital prelude to an attempt at his overthrow.[203]

If the enemy is to be coerced you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make. The hardships of that situation must not of course be merely transient-at least not in appearance. Otherwise the enemy would not give in but would wait for things to improve.[204] In other words, while the direct approach takes "the obvious route into a confrontation with a prepared enemy, the indirect approach would 'diminish the possibility of resistance'" by acting against the enemy's expectations. In the indirect approach strategy, movement is the key to catching the enemy out physically, and surprise is the key to influencing the enemy's psychology.[205] As Liddell Hart himself observed, the strategy of indirect approach is "the highest and widest fulfilment of the principle of surprise."[206] Liddell Hart stated he had found many points in Sun Tzu's thinking that coincided with his own lines of thought, "especially his constant emphasis on doing the unexpected and pursuing the indirect approach."[207]

The Chinese theorist, Sun Tzu is commonly known as the classic theorist of indirect approach. Nonetheless, in considering Sun Tzu's indirect approach, one should note that Sun

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[203] Quoted in Heuser, *Evolution of Strategy*, 187.
[204] Clausewitz, *On War*, 76.
[205] Freedman, *Strategy*, 137.
[206] Quoted in Heuser, *Evolution of Strategy*, 186.
[207] B.H. Liddell Hart, forward to *The Art of War*, by Sun Tzu, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), vii.

Tzu's indirect approach, although more important, is but one component of Sun Tzu's combined strategy of direct and indirect. Sun Tzu said:

> It is 'surprise' (*ch'i*) and "straightforward" (*cheng*) operations that enable one's army to withstand the full assault of the enemy force and remain undefeated… For gaining strategic advantage (*shih*) in battle, there are no more than "surprise" and "straightforward" operations, yet in combination, they produce inexhaustible possibilities. "Surprise" and "straightforward" operations give rise to each other endlessly just as a ring is without a beginning or an end.[208]

Thus, in Sun Tzu's strategic theory both approaches are material. The strategy of direct approach or the "straightforward" is necessary to engage the forces of the enemy as is the strategy of indirect approach or the "surprise" to win the victory. Having said that, in his analysis of direct and indirect approaches, Sun Tzu gave more importance to the strategy of indirect approach or the surprise which aligns with his general theory of strategy where warfare is considered as the art (*tao*) of deceit. Principally, "In Sun Tzu's formulaic aphorisms, the key to deception was simply a matter of doing the opposite of what was expected."[209] For example, in chapter 7 of *The Art of Warfare*, entitled Armed Contest, Sun Tzu argued if the strategist deceive the enemy by "making the enemy's road long and tortuous, and lure him along it by baiting him with easy gains" he arrives before the enemy even if he sets our after the enemy.[210] The strategist who is able to do this, in Sun Tzu's view, understands the "tactic of converting the tortuous and the direct" or simply the strategy of the indirect approach, as Derek Yuen notes.[211]

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[208] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 85.
[209] Freedman, *Strategy*, 43.
[210] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 93.
[211] Derek M.C. Yuen, *Deciphering Sun Tzu: How to Read The Art of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 129.

In contrast to Sun Tzu, Clausewitz favored the strategy of direct approach rather than indirect. As Clausewitz observed:

> an active, courageous, and resolute adversary will not leave us time for long-range intricate schemes; but that is the very enemy against whom we need these skills most. It seems to us that this is proof enough of the superiority of the simple and direct over the complex… The probability of direct confrontation increases with the aggressiveness of the enemy. So, rather than try to outbid the enemy with complicated schemes, one should, on the contrary, try to outdo him in simplicity.[212]

Clausewitz's advocacy for battle and direct confrontation made General Liddell Hart highly critical of him. Liddell Hart asserted that Clausewitz's rejection of the strategy of indirect approach and adherence to the idea that "blood is the price of victory" ha taken us "back towards [*sic*] *tribal* warfare."[213] Although Clausewitz approved of the direct approach instead of the indirect, Liddell Hart's chastisement does not seem to be entirely justified in that Clausewitz also acknowledged the significance of the indirect approach in warfare: "Battle…should not be considered as mutual murder—its effect…is rather a killing of the enemy's spirit than of his men."[214] In this regard, Michael Handel observed, "Clausewitz would be the last one to deny the utility of the indirect approach whenever possible. The only difference is that Clausewitz did not shy away from describing the bloody battle that often occurs at the culmination of the indirect approach, when maneuver must be translated into costly action."[215] Moreover, deception has always been part of the western tradition of war since the Trojan Horse, but Clausewitz perceived it as dangerous to overestimate it in that "Too much emphasis on subtlety, indirect approach, etc., may encourage false hope in 'miracle' solutions and cause neglect of physical,

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[212] Clausewitz, *On War*, 229.
[213] B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 340 (emphasis in the original).
[214] Clausewitz, *On War*, 259.
[215] Michael I. Handel, "Introduction," in *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*, ed. Michael I. Handel (London: Frank Cass, 1986), 23.

material, and other, more *direct* aspects of war."[216] Clausewitz contended, "The best strategy is always to be very strong; first in general, and then at the decisive point."[217] Conversely, he saw the enemy's decisive point "where the mass is concentrated most densely" as "the most effective target for a blow". Clausewitz called the enemy's decisive point as the "center of gravity."[218]

As noted earlier, Machiavelli contended that quick victory is preferable to the war of attrition. However, whether that quick victory and annihilation of the enemy's forces can be achieved through a direct attack or by resorting to surprise has been open to question. Matthew Kroenig rightly states that there is a division as to whether Machiavelli was in favor of the direct approach, similar to Clausewitz, the indirect approach, like Sun Tzu.[219] For example, Felix Gilbert argued, "Machiavelli states that the aim of war must be to face an enemy in the field and to defeat him there; this is the only way 'to bring a war to a happy conclusion.'"[220] Indeed, there is no denying that Machiavelli who saw the Roman army as an ideal model did not dismiss the importance of battle in deciding the fate of war. Nonetheless, this did not mean that fighting the battle should be done adopting the straightforward and direct approach. Machiavelli put it clearly: "Although employing deceit in every action is detestable, in waging a war it is, nevertheless, a laudable and glorious thing, and the man who employs deceit to overcome the enemy is to be praised, just like the man who overcomes him by force."[221] For example, he said:

> when [Hannibal was] on the lake of Perugia[222] he simulated a retreat to trap the consul and the Roman army, and when to escape from the hands of Fabius Maximus he lit the horns of his cattle. Similar to this kind of deceit was that employed by Pontius,

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[216] Handel, *Masters of War*, 257 (emphasis in the original).
[217] Clausewitz, *On War*, 204.
[218] Ibid., 485.
[219] Kroenig, "Machiavelli," 112-113.
[220] Gilbert, "Machiavelli," 23.
[221] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 348.
[222] This was at the battle of Lake Trasimeno in 217 BC

commander of the Samnites,[223] to encircle the Roman army at the Caudine Forks: having stationed his army behind the mountains, he sent out some of his soldiers in the disguise of shepherds with a large flock on the plain; once they were captured by the Romans and asked where the Samnites' army was, they all agreed in saying, according to Pontius' orders, that it was at the siege of Nocera. This story, believed by the consuls, caused them to enclose themselves.[224]

Machiavelli's preference for the indirect approach strategy is also confirmed by the value he placed on intelligence in war. For instance,

> In order to deceive an enemy, it may not be amiss to vary or to omit some particular custom or signal that you have constantly used before, as a certain great general did of old; he, having had some of *his advance parties always give him notice of the enemy's approach by fires at night and smoke during the day*, thought proper to vary that custom at last; he ordered those parties to keep constant fires all night long and to make smoke throughout the day, but to extinguish them when they perceived the enemy in motion; thus the enemy, advancing again and not seeing the usual signals made to give notice of his approach, imagined he was not discovered and pushed on with such precipitation to the attack, that he fell into disorder and was routed by his adversary who was prepared to receive him.[225]

In ancient times, however, the direct approach strategy in general was preferable to the indirect approach. For example, when the Spartans decided to invaded Athens the military strategy they voted for was "a simple and direct approach: march into Attica; burn the crops, temples, and houses that lie outside Athens's walls; and then defeat the Athenian hoplites, who, furious at the destruction occurring before their eyes, would inevitably come out to fight."[226] The Athenian's maritime strategy of hiding behind the Long Walls and raiding the Peloponnesian coastal towns was not so much an indirect approach strategy as it was an attrition or even deterrent strategy which aimed at denying the enemy victory rather than defeating him by

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[223] Gaius Pontius (fl.321 BC) was a Samnite commander during the Second Samnite War (326-304 BC).
[224] Ibid., 349.
[225] Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, 177-178.
[226] Murray, "Thucydides," 38.

surprise. [227] As Liddell Hart observed, "In contrast to a strategy of indirect approach which seeks to dislocate the enemy's balance in order to produce a decision, the Periclean plan was a grand strategy with the aim of gradually draining the enemy's endurance in order to convince him that he could not gain a decision."[228] Despite this, the indirect approach was employed by the Spartan general, Brasidas on one of its rarest occasions in the Peloponnesian War. When Brasidas learned of the movement of Cleon, the Athenian general, he took up a position on Cerdylium for observation purposes. When Cleon advanced, Brasidas decided that his only advantage lay in a surprise attack before the Athenians learned that his army was inferior in quality.[229] Brasidas spoke approvingly of the indirect approach strategy as such: "The best chance of success in war comes from clearly identifying such mistakes on the part of an enemy and then adjusting your mode of attack to your own strengths, relying less on an obvious move in standard counter-formation than on exploiting the opportunities of the moment. These are the tricks and tactics that bring the greatest glory, when you completely deceive the enemy and thereby most benefit your friends."[230]

Apart from rare occasions such this, we can, by and large, agree with Sir Frank Adcock, the British classical historian, that "surprise is highly valued by all good judges of war, and the power to achieve it is one criterion of military or naval resourcefulness. Yet surprises are not common in Greek or Macedonian war by land or sea."[231] To this, we might add that the direct approach, or the indirect approach for that matter, was of little or no avail when the

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[227] The prime example of the indirect approach strategy in ancient times was manifested by Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, who during the Second Punic War (218 to 201 BC) sought to take the enemy by surprise by taking the most unexpected route over the Alps in his thrust into the Italian Peninsula with the aim of defeating the Romans.

[228] Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 10.

[229] Thucydides, *The War*, 323-329.

[230] Ibid., 326.

[231] Quoted in Losada, *The Fifth Column*, 114.

Peloponnesians or Athenians wanted to attack a city. As Losada noted, "since direct attacks involved a high incidence of casualties, a factor unacceptable to states with primarily citizen armies, the only conventional method of taking a city during the Peloponnesian War was reduction by siege."[232]

Deterrence and Coercion

As Colin Gray has described it, military strategy is "The direction and use made of force and the threat of force for purposes of policy as decided by politics." As such, strategy is about the "threat of force" as well as the use of use of force. The threat of force can be applied for deterrence purposes or coercion. In this regard, we can define deterrence as "making people decide not to do something" while we would describe coercion as "compelling people to do something."[233] In essence, these strategies seek to influence the will and mind of the enemy.

In examining the Clausewitzian theory of war, scholars primarily pay attention to Clausewitz's analysis of the use of force. The aspect of his theory that has remained understudied, however, concerns the achievement of political ends by the threat of force without becoming engaged in fighting the enemy or rather by the threat of force. In this regard, Clausewitz observed, "If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand. That side will force the other to follow suit."[234] In this way, Clausewitz saw deterrence to be pursued by moving

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[232] Ibid., 35.
[233] Echevarria, *Military Strategy*, 47.
[234] Clausewitz, *On War*, 75-76.

towards the extreme. Deterrence is not a half-hearted attempt. As such, Clausewitz suggested that the strategist will be successful in deterring the enemy if he is able to "repay cruelty with cruelty, reply to acts of violence with more acts of violence" In doing so, "It will be easy to outdo the enemy and to lead him back to the path of moderation and humanity."[235] Clausewitz contended if the strategist can make the enemy face "unacceptably high costs" in pursuit of his political objectives. To do this, the strategist should go to the extreme. Also, he noted that,

> If the enemy is to be coerced you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make. The hardships of that situation must not of course be merely transient-at least not in appearance. Otherwise the enemy would not give in but would wait for things to improve. Any change that might be brought about by continuing hostilities must then, at least in theory, be of a kind to bring the enemy still greater disadvantages.[236]

Accordingly, the subtle point about coercion is that correction is a condition which must last long for it to have its effect. Coercion is not a single act. Moreover, coercive measures must make that condition so unpleasant for the enemy that he feels compelled to comply with our will. Yet, the prospect of defying our will must be painted even bleaker so that the enemy is discouraged from taking undesirable measures. This depends on having the ability to inflict unbearable suffering on the enemy if he does not comply. In Clausewitz's view, "readiness to fight must always underpin the threatening, deterrent, or coercive gesture.[237] In this case, even if coercion does not succeed or even backfires, or if deterrence fails, we will have the ability to actually engage the enemy.

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[235] Quoted in Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle: The Political Theory of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 2007), 40-41.
[236] Clausewitz, *On War*, 77.
[237] Beatrice Heuser, "Clausewitz's Ideas of Strategy and Victory," in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 156.

While Clausewitz's thinking about deterrence and coercion was determined by military capability or military might, Sun Tzu's idea about deterrence and coercion was influenced by knowledge of the enemy. As Sun Tzu said, "to win a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence; the highest excellence is to subdue the enemy's army without fighting at all."[238] This is to win by correction and deterrence. The subjugation of the enemy without fighting on the battlefield is best done, in Sun Tzu's view, by attacking the enemy's strategy. At this point, strategy turns into a battle of wits and wills, and psychological manipulation. In winning such battle, the strategist is required to have a deep understanding of the enemy. However, the problem is that "Concentration on influencing the will and mind of the enemy may merely enable him to avoid fighting at a disadvantageous time and place and make it possible for him to choose a better opportunity as long as he is in possession of the necessary means – weapons and armed forces."[239]

Deterrence for Machiavelli, more than anything else, was a matter of statecraft. Machiavelli found it desirable for states to avoid war rather than be involved in it in that war causes, in his view, harm to the economy of the warring states. Machiavelli noted, "you will admit that wars, as they are currently conducted, impoverish not only those beaten, but also those conquering; for if one side loses its territories, the other is at an immense expense in gaining them; this was not the case in former times when the conqueror was always enriched by victory."[240] In this regard, he found deterrence as a desirable strategy. Machiavelli believed a state can deter its enemies from waging war if they have three conditions in place namely strong army, strong defense system, and supportive population. First, he observed, a strong army is

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[238] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 79.
[239] Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz's Puzzle*, 8.
[240] Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, 140.

necessary, which could engender reliable alliance which itself contributes to deterrence: "rulers should have two main worries: one is internal, and concerns his subjects; the other is external, and concerns foreign powers. Against the latter threat, good troops and reliable allies are an effective defense; and possessing good armies always results in having allies who are reliable."[241] Second, Machiavelli saw a strong defense system had to be developed to dissuade the enemy from an attack. At his time, Machiavelli perceived fortification of the town could act as a deterrent against foreign invasion stating that other states "will be very slow to attack any ruler who fortifies his city well."[242] Last but not least, Machiavelli saw the support of people as essential to deterrence.[243]

Thucydides has addressed strategies of deterrence and coercion deeper than the other thinkers in his magnum opus, *The Peloponnesian* War. As Richard Ned Lebow observes, "One of the most striking features of Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War is the unremitting failure of both deterrence and compellence."[244] Perhaps the most incident of deterrence failure can be found in the defensive alliance between Athens and Corcyra against Corinth. When Corcyra turned to Athens for help against Corinth in their rivalry over Epidamnus, a remote Greek city, Athens made a defensive alliance with Corcyra against Corinth. The intent of the defensive alliance was "to bring the Corinthians to their senses" and deter them from waging war against Corcyra.[245] To show their commitment, the Athenians, as the most formidable naval power of the time, sent ten warships to Corcyra. Yet, against the Athenians' expectations, the Corinthians who were replete with hatred towards the Corcyraeans refused to be deterred and

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[241] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 63.
[242] Ibid., 37.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Richard Ned Lebow, "Thucydides and Deterrence," *Security Studies* 16, no. 2 (Jun 2007): 164.
[245] Kagan, *Origins*, 46.

waged its war against Corinth. Thucydides reminded us that deterrence is not a half-hearted affair. The Athenians only committed ten warships out of hundreds they possessed to the Corcyraean cause. As Donald Kagan noted, "The small Athenian squadron did not deter the Corinthians, as a larger fleet might have done."[246]   Noting that the Corinthians' decision to enter the war against Corcyra was out of hatred towards them as their colony (see the Background), the strategist needs to know that "A policy of deterrence can work even where passions reign, but to be effective it must counterbalance passion with passion, fear with fear."[247] The Athenians failed to induce fear in the Corinthians because of the small force they committed to the cause.

Also, Richard Lebow notes that long before Thomas Schilling proposed the strategy of the balance of terror in the 20th century, Thucydides had seen it as a real possibility to deter the enemy from attacking.[248] In the Mytilenaean debate, the Mytilenaean envoys observe, "Equivalence in the balance of fear is the only basis for trust in an alliance; for then the party that wants to break faith in some way is deterred from doing so by not having the advantage for any aggression."[249] The Mytilenaean envoys reminds us that coercion could be drawn upon as a useful strategy against those who are not equal in power, be it the enemy or allies. The Mytilenaeans say, "we were constrained to remain allies more by fear than friendship; whichever of us was first emboldened by a sense of security was also going to be the first to transgress in some way."[250]

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[246] Ibid., 47.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Lebow, "Thucydides," 164.
[249] Thucydides, *The War*, 167.
[250] Ibid., 168.

Defensive and Offensive

Clausewitz famously said, "defense is a stronger form of fighting than attack."[251] Then he continued to say, "I am convinced that the superiority of the defensive (if rightly understood) is very great, far greater than appears at first sight."[252] Clausewitz suggested three reasons a to why defense is stronger than offense. The reasons are as follows: first, it relates to the notion of preservation which means "It is easier to hold ground than take it. It follows that defense is easier than attack." Second, the passing of time in war would be in favor of the defense. "It is the fact that time which is allowed to pass unused accumulates to the credit of the defender." As such, any delay or hesitation on the part of the attacker will favor the defender: "He reaps where he did not sow." Third, the defender has the advantage of position as he is familiar with the terrain on which he fights, and having known the terrain, he can decides on the theater of engagement which benefits him the most.[253] Yet, Clausewitz observed that defense has a negative purpose, and that is, the preservation of the terrain and territory, and therefore, "it should be used only so long as weakness compels, and be abandoned as soon as we are strong enough to pursue a positive object", which is conquest.[254] Hence, in Clausewitzian thinking, contrary to the common belief, defense per se has no merit. Defense and offense are intertwined activities, and defense is only a prelude to offense. Clausewitz informed us that if defense remains as it is during fighting, it will turn to a passive activity. Clausewitz observed, "a war in which victories were used only defensively without the intention of counterattacking would be as absurd as a battle in which the principle of absolute defense-passivity, that is-were to dictate every action."[255]

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[251] Clausewitz, *On War*, 84.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid., 357-358.
[254] Ibid., 358.
[255] Ibid.

Similarly to Clausewitz, Sun Tzu perceived defense has a priority over offense as it enables the state to avoid defeat. Sun stated, "Being invincible lies with defense."[256] Sun Tzu's thinking about the priority of defense over offense lies in "quintessentially Confucian worldview that disfavors the use of force, sees the use of force as a last resort, and holds in high esteem a defensive strategy."[257] Like Clausewitz, "Sun Tzu also implies that although the defense is the stronger form of warfare, it cannot in and of itself enable one to triumph over the enemy. Sooner or later, the defender who aspires to victory must move over to the attack."[258] Sun Tzu contended, "the vulnerability of the enemy comes with the attack."[259]

Yet the major differences between Sun Tzu and Clausewitz reside in the target against which the offense should be carried out and how it should be done. While Sun Tzu saw the enemy's soft underbelly as the aim of the attack, Clausewitz perceived the enemy's center of gravity as the target. Clausewitz maintained, as noted earlier, "A center of gravity is always found where the mass is concentrated most densely. It presents the most effective target for a blow." In contrast, Sun Tzu contended, "To attack with the confidence of taking one's objective is because one attacks what the enemy does not defend."[260] The disagreement is not limited to the target of the attack, but also includes the way in which the attack should be carried out. As noted earlier, while Clausewitz promoted the direct approach and thought "as many troops as possible should be brought into the engagement at the decisive point,"[261] Sun Tzu advocated the

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[256] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 82.
[257] Yoshihara, "Sun Tzi," 80.
[258] Handel, *Masters of War*, 123.
[259] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 82.
[260] Ibid., 90.
[261] Clausewitz, *On War*, 198.

indirect approach, and advised, "Attack where he [the enemy] is not prepared; go by way of places where it would never occur to him you would go."[262]

In the Peloponnesian War, the attack was the norm and defense was the exception. This was the way of warfare that corresponded with the spirit of the age in the ancient Greece or indeed with that of the ancient world, for that matter. Yet adopting the offensive or defense strategies in *The Peloponnesian War* had much to do with the status of power. The strong was the likely candidate to design its strategy offensively while the weak tended to devise its strategy in a defensive manner. As Archidamus noted, "In the murk of war attacks come fast and furious; and often it is the smaller force, inspired by fear, that puts up the better defence."[263] In Thucydidean thinking, the offensive strategy should serve one purpose: "control over the enemy," otherwise an offensive strategy has no merit of its own: "It is just foolishness to attack people when conquest does not lead to control and where failure leaves one worse off than before the attempt."[264]

Neal Wood, an expert on Machiavelli's thoughts, believed that Machiavelli was more in favor of offensive strategy rather than the defensive. Wood stated, "the true Machiavellian spirit is manifested in Frederick's constant emphasis, in theory and practice, upon the attack. Even when on the defensive, one should always attempt to seize the initiative in an audacious manner. The best defense is a vigorous and purposeful offense."[265] Contrary to this opinion, Machiavelli, at some point in *The Art of War*, stated, "Most prudent generals have chosen to receive the enemy rather than to attack him because the fury of the first shock is easily withstood by men

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[262] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 74.
[263] Thucydides, *The War*, 96.
[264] Ibid., 393.
[265] Wood, introduction to *The Art of War*, xlii.

standing firm, resolute, ready, and prepared in their ranks; when that shock is over, their fury commonly subsides into languor and despair."[266] Machiavelli admired Fabius, the Roman general, for his defensive strategy: "By proceeding in this manner [adopting the defensive strategy], Fabius routed both the Samnites and the Gauls; but his colleague Decius took the other course, was defeated, and slain."[267] Also, elsewhere Machiavelli noted, "the prince whose people are armed and organized for warfare should always wait at home for a violent and dangerous war and should not go out on the attack."[268]   These clear statement by Machiavelli show that, in essence, Machiavelli preferred the defensive strategy to the offensive. The preference of the defensive to the offensive particularly resonates with us when we remember that, similar to Clausewitz, Machiavelli was mindful of the role that chance or *fortuna* can play in warfare making it an unpredictable activity. Yet Machiavelli appears to show flexibility in his thinking, and approved of the offensive strategy instead the defensive when conditions are favorable for defeating of the enemy, and achieving victory in war. In this regard, while Machiavelli admired Fabius for his defensive strategy against Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, on a number of occasions, he criticized him for invariably adhering to his strategy as circumstances change. Machiavelli's thoughts the strategies of three brilliant generals of the ancient times, namely Fabius Maximus, Hannibal, and Scipio Africanus, and the conditions within which they acted deserves a lengthy citation:

> Everyone knows how carefully and cautiously Fabius Maximus advanced with his army, far removed from any impetuous act and Roman daring, and good fortune caused his method to fit well with the times. Thus, when Hannibal had invaded Italy as a young man and, with fresh fortune, had already defeated the Roman people twice, and when that republic was almost completely stripped of its good militia and terrified, Rome could not have enjoyed a better fortune than having a general who, with his deliberateness and

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[266] Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, 123.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 185.

caution, held the enemy at bay. Nor could Fabius have encountered times any more suitable to his methods than those from which he emerged in glory. It is evident that Fabius did this by nature rather than by choice, because when Scipio wished to move into Africa with his armies to conclude the war, Fabius strongly opposed him, being unable to detach himself from his methods and his habits. Thus, had it been up to Fabius, Hannibal would still be in Italy, for Fabius was a man who did not see that the times had changed and that it was necessary to change the methods of warfare. And if Fabius had been king of Rome, he could easily have lost the war, because he would never have known how to vary his conduct in accord with the variation of the times.[269]

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[269] Ibid., 281.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICS

In strategic thinking, politics provides strategy with its purpose, and hence, this is where strategy finds its meaning. Understanding the political level of war comprises the highest level of a strategic analysis. In this Chapter, this author deals with the ideas of the four theorists on the political aspect of military strategy. First, the author addresses theorists' thoughts on the relationship between the political leadership, and the nation. Then the significance of the relationship between political decision makers and military leaders will be examined.

Political Leadership and Population

The interaction between politicians and population has always had an important impact on the conduct of war. In this section, we will examine what the classic thinkers' ideas are about the significance of the relationship between the political leadership, and population for strategy making.

Among modern strategists, Machiavelli was the earliest thinker, and a most formidable one, who came to realize that the role population can play in strategy making was significant. This understanding was, at one level, due to the fact that Machiavelli as a political thinker was especially concerned with statecraft, and perceived the consent of the population as necessary for a strong and stable state, As Beatrice Heuser, the eminent historian of war and strategy, notes, "Characteristic of Machiavelli's thinking is the argument that the good prince, in treating his subjects well and thus winning their goodwill, serves himself and his sons well. So for

Machiavelli, relations between prince and population are not a zero-sum game: both stand to benefit from benign cooperation."[270]

Nonetheless, Machiavelli did not see a strong nation-sate in and of itself as an end. Machiavelli viewed the world politics as a competition among states, and as a result, deemed it necessary for a country to be strong to vie with other states. Sir Isiah Berlin insightfully wrote: "He [Machiavelli] is convinced that States [*sic*] which have lost the appetite for power are doomed to decadence and are likely to be destroyed by their more vigorous and better-armed neighbours [*sic*]."[271] As such, in Machiavelli's theory, "Good government is correlated with freedom, participation, and patriotism, which in turn inspire the citizen-soldiers' readiness to fight and die for their state."[272] "Machiavelli argues that the city-state in which the people are unwilling to fight for their own interests is less likely to succeed in the long run.[273] In this situation, Machiavelli viewed "a proper balance among the government, the people, and the citizen-army (the military) as the necessary condition for waging a successful war."[274]

Similarly, Clausewitz in his philosophical and systematic way of thinking pointed towards the relationship between the government, the people and the army by putting forward his concept of the "remarkable or paradoxical trinity." Clausewitz noted,

> As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity--composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government. 'The passions that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people; the scope which the play of

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[270] Heuser, *Strategy Makers*, 24
[271] Berlin, *Against the Current*, 75-76.
[272] Handel, *Masters of War,* 100.
[273] Ibid., 98.
[274] Ibid., 100.

courage and talent will enjoy in the realm of probability and chance depends on the particular character of the commander and the army; but the political aims are the business of government alone.[275]

In this way, Clausewitz saw war as a social, military, and political phenomenon which like an object is suspended by three magnets, namely population, military and government which, to a great degree but not totally, represent respectively passion or hostility, chance or probability, and reason or purpose.

Under the influence of the French Revolution, by placing population next to political leaders, and military men, Clausewitz made war an affair of the people. He believed that "If the people themselves are not prepared if necessary to take part in the defence of their country, they cannot in the long run be protected; and if they are not prepared to acquiesce indefinitely in alien conquest, that conquest cannot in the long run be sustained."[276] Yet, Clausewitz's attempt to mobilize the people's support in war did not go "so far as to permit the people to influence the direction of the war itself."[277]   The direction of war was to be decided by the political leadership.

Entering the element of population into the analysis of war by Clausewitz has an important strategic implication, that is, war can be won militarily and yet not politically when the militarily defeated nation refuses to be subdued. In this condition, "The forms of resistance and disaffection a defeated people might show could soon compromise the apparent achievements on the battlefield."[278] Subsequently, the mode of warfare will change from regular or conventional warfare into irregular warfare. For example, "Spaniards waged irregular warfare, in guerrilla

[275] Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.
[276] Howard, *Clausewitz*, 76.
[277] Handel, *Masters of War*, 97.
[278] Freedman, *Strategy*, 95.

mode, with their popular resistance to French occupation from 1808 to 1814."[279] Also,

Clausewitz said, "We maintain that the 1812 [Napoleon's] campaign failed because the Russian

government kept its nerve and the people remained loyal and steadfast. The campaign could not

succeed."[280] "The people in arms" was term Clausewitz used to describe "war by means of

popular uprisings."[281]

As Michal Handel noted, the Clausewitzian trinity can be applied particularly to the early

stage of the Peloponnesian War in that the decision about the conduct of the war became an

interplay of the rational decision making by the political leadership and the passion of the

Athenian people. Handel stated:

> Although the political and strategic decision to wage a war of attrition makes sense, it is
> unpopular with the Athenian people, whose innately restless character and active
> temperament chafes at the idea of remaining passive. This makes it doubly difficult for
> them to stand by while their property outside the city walls is destroyed. Thus, the
> Periclean strategy does not match the temperament of the Athenian people and the
> divisive nature of their democratic system.[282]

As such, in the Athenian democratic political system, the opinion of the majority of the people

became subordinate to the decision of a single aristocratic leader. This may be due to the fact that

the Athenian democratic system prevented the common people from interfering into policy

making process the way the population does today in democratic countries. Vincent Azoulay

explains the constraints of the Athenian democracy as follows:

> In truth, these egalitarian principles masked powerful internal hierarchies. In the first
> place, according to the orator Aeschines, Athenian law ruled that turns for speaking be

[279] Colin S. Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 246.
[280] Clausewitz, *On War*, 628.
[281] Ibid., 479.
[282] Handel, *Masters of War*, 311.

determined by the speakers' respective ages: the oldest citizens had the right to speak first and this lent a particular force to their words. Second, not many Athenians dared to speak in public. Unless a man had mastered the art of oratory, he would soon expose himself to ridicule or even to *thorubos*, the kind of general tumult often mentioned in the speeches of the Attic orators. Furthermore, speaking in public involved a legal risk: the orator was responsible before the magistrates for the motions for which he requested the people's assent. Even if his point of view triumphed in the Assembly, he might then be pursued by his opponents within the framework of a legal trial in which he was accused of illegality.[283]

Having said that, the death of Pericles put an end to the Periclean strategy of hiding behind the long walls, and raiding the coastal cities of the Peloponnese. This indicates that those strategies and policies that are closely associated with the robust personality of the leader, are doomed to fail before long.[284] In this regard, we can conclude that, if a strategy, be it military or grand

is going to work, it must be developed in a relatively stable political environment so that the security interests of a state—especially in a condition of war—will not be held hostage by partisan/personal considerations. This last parameter of *dynamis* (power) is to be more closely identified with Sparta, since, as Thucydides notes, "she has preserved the same form of government for rather more than four hundred years, reckoning to the end of the Peloponnesian War. It was the excellence of her constitution which gave her power, and thus enabled her to regulate the affairs of other states.[285]

By comparison, "National unity was deemed by Sun Tzu to be an essential requirement of victorious war."[286] Consequently, "Sun Tzu perceived "psychological influence" as the principle strategic means for bringing the population into line with the policy objectives set by

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[283] Vincent Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 41.
[284] The modern example of a similar failure in policy was the collapse of the balance of power in Europe in the late 19th century which was associated with the Prussian Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck whose dismissal by King Wilhelm II put an end to the system, and eventually resulted in the First World War.
[285] Theodore George Tsakiris, "Thucydides and Strategy: Formations of Grand Strategy in the History of the Second Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.)," *Comparative Strategy* 25, no. 3. (2007): 193.
[286] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 39.

the leadership. As Sun Tzu noted, "The way (*tao*) [or moral influence][287] is what brings the thinking of the people in line with their superiors. Hence, you can send them to their deaths or let them live, and they will have no misgivings one way or the other."[288] The moral influence, and the subsequent unity "could be attained only under a government which was devoted to the people's welfare and did not oppress them."[289] In this regard, the Chinese expert, Sun Hsing-yen, observed "Sun Tzu's theories we based on 'benevolence and righteousness'."[290] In contrast, with regard to the enemy, "Sun Tzu believed the goal of warfare was to destroy the conditions of prosperity and order that formed the link between the ruler and his people. If the link was broken, then the ruler's claim to legitimacy was forfeited. The creation of a state of chaos meant the moral failure of a rule or leader and the shift of moral leadership to the opposition: a rebel, usurper, or invader."[291]

Sun Tzu discouraged the political and military leadership from sharing decisions not only with the population but also with lower ranking officers. Secrecy is much encouraged by Sun Tzu when it comes to security and military affairs of the state: "As for the urgent business of the commander: He is calm and remote, correct and disciplined. He is able to blinker the ears and eyes of his officers and men, and to keep people ignorant. He makes changes in his arrangements and alters his plans, keeping people in the dark."[292]

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[287] Samuel Griffith has translated the word "*tao*" as "moral influence" which sounds plausible in this context. See, Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 64.
[288] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 73.
[289] Ibid., 39; also, Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 64.
[290] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 39.
[291] Edward O'Dowd, and Arthur Waldron, "Sun Tzu for strategists," in *Comparative Strategy* 10, no.1 (1991): 27.
[292] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 117.

Civil-Military Relations

Hew Strachan observes that "The notion of war's subordination to policy is congruent with *democratic* norms of civil-military relations."[293] In this section, we will examine to what degree the four thinkers separated the two areas of activities from each other, and whether the theorists viewed war and warriors as subordinate to politics and politicians.

Clausewitz has been admired by some advocates of the liberal democratic system in the West as the one who, in their views, has supported the control of the civilian over the military. For example, "The American social scientist Samuel Huntington went so far as to declare that Clausewitz's *On War* was, in fact, the 'first theoretical justification for civilian control' over the military."[294] This interpretation of the Clausewitzian thinking in which he is thought to have advocated civilian control over the military remains dominant today.[295]

However, Hew Strachan refutes this reading of Clausewitz saying "Clausewitz…never developed a theory of civil--military relations that adhered to the rigid lines of demarcation suggested by Huntington. The American read Clausewitz as saying that 'the soldier must always be subordinate to the statesman.' In fact, Clausewitz suggested the exact opposite."[296] To support his view, Strachan quotes Clausewitz as such: "We say that the general becomes a statesman, but he must not cease to be the general. On the one hand, he must comprehend in one

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[293] Strachan, *Direction of War*, 55 (emphasis added).
[294] Echevarria, *Clausewitz*, 88.
[295] Ibid
[296] Hew Strachan, "The Elusive Meaning and Enduring Relevance of Clausewitz," in *The New Makers of Modern Strategy: From the Ancient World to the Digital Age*, ed. Hal Brands (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 120.

glance all the political conditions; on the other, he knows exactly what he can do with the means at his disposal."[297]

In this author's view, Clausewitz's magnum opus, *On War*, like sacred text contains contradictory views on certain issues such as civil-military relations. Thus, it may not be possible to form a firm opinion on the murky subject of civil-military relation in Clausewitz's work. Nonetheless, this author would make two observations on Clausewitz's view on that issue. First, in my judgment, Clausewitz's opinion on the primacy of politics or policy over military decision making is valid since Clausewitz distinctly promotes this notion in his revised edition of book eight. Clausewitz said,

> a major military development, or the plan for one, should be a matter for purely military opinion is unacceptable and can be damaging. Nor indeed is it sensible to summon soldiers, as many governments do when they are planning a war, and ask them for purely military advice. But it makes even less sense for theoreticians to assert that all available military resources should be put at the disposal of the commander so that on their basis he can draw up purely military plans for a war or a campaign. It is in any case a matter of common experience that despite the great variety and development of modern war its major lines are still laid down by governments; in other words, if we are to be technical about it, by a purely political and not a military body. This is as it should be. No major proposal required for war can be worked out in ignorance of political factors.

Hence, for Clausewitz war was subordinate to policy. Yet, the subtle point, as Antulio Echevarria puts it, is that, "political control over the use of force was, for Clausewitz, less a question of the proper relationship between civilian policymakers and military commanders, than a matter of subordinating an operational point of view to a strategic or, better, a grand strategic

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[297] Quoted in ibid., 121.

perspective. Whether the individual holding this perspective was a civilian or a member of the military was immaterial."[298]

Second, despite the primacy of policy, Hew Strachan is correct when he states there is no "the rigid lines of demarcation" between war and policy in Clausewitzian thinking. This is because Clausewitz was aware that drawing a distinct line between war and policy is not possible *in practice*. As Strachan noted,

> War is not simply the continuation of policy or politics by other means. Of course in theory war should be used, as it frequently is used, as an instrument of policy. But in reality that is a statement about its causation more than its conduct, and about intent more than practice. Once war has broken out, two sides clash, and their policies conflict: that reciprocity generates its own dynamic, feeding on hatred, on chance and on the play of military probabilities.[299]

In Clausewitzian thinking, Strachan noted, "War has its own nature, and can have consequences very different from the policies that are meant to be guiding it… war itself shapes and changes policy."[300] Clausewitz stated, "War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case."[301] Also, the contrary is true too. Policy intervenes in the operational conduct of war too. Strachan contended, it "is profoundly un-Clausewitzian, that the army - once set in motion - should be left, unfettered by politicians, to deliver the policy objectives that those politicians have set it."[302] Policy also determines the conduct of war to the extent that it does not run against the nature of the conduct.[303]

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[298] Echevarria, *Clausewitz*, 89.
[299] Strachan, *Direction of War*, 54.
[300] Ibid., 54-55.
[301] Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.
[302] Strachan, *Direction of War*, 55.
[303] Clausewitz, *On War*, 608.

Both Machiavelli and Clausewitz suggested that it is necessary for the political leadership to have a knowledge of military affairs as they both perceived war as "a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."[304] In that connection, Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, suggested it was necessary for the ruler or the political leadership to be an expert in military affairs: "A ruler, then, should have no other objective and no other concern, nor occupy himself with anything else except war and its methods and practices, for this pertains only to those who rule."[305] In the similar vein, Clausewitz noted, "In the same way as a man who has not fully mastered a foreign language sometimes fails to express himself correctly, so statesmen often issue orders that defeat the purpose they are meant to serve. Time and again that has happened, which demonstrates that a certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy."[306]

Machiavelli believed that the political leadership ought to be directly involved in the conduct of war and control it, but if the political context is not permissive for the direct political control of the ruler, as it would be the case with the republican form of government, the political leadership must ensure those who wield in charge, i.e. commanders, do not undermine the political control over the military force. As Machiavelli maintained, "arms are used either by a ruler or by a republic. If the former, the ruler should personally lead his armies, acting as the general. If the latter, the republic must send its own citizens as generals; and if someone is sent who turns out not to be very capable, he must be replaced; and if the general sent is capable, there should be legal controls that ensure that he does not exceed his authority."[307]

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[304] Ibid., 87.
[305] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 50.
[306] Clausewitz, *On War*, 608.
[307] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 43.

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Michael Handel noted that "Sun Tzu…cannot come to a definitive conclusion on the matter of political control versus the delegation of independent decision-making authority to the commander in the field; on the whole, though, he favors the latter." Handel then continued to say that in Sun Tzu's thinking "the ideal political leader will discern when and how to grant the commander just enough freedom of action to be able to make the best possible professional decisions on his own initiative."[308] But as Roger Ames contends, in Sun Tzu's view, "The first condition of effective command is that this commander must have complete control of the campaign, unchallenged even by the authority of the ruler at home."[309] As Sun Tzu maintained, "The side on which the commander is able and the ruler does not interfere will take the victory."[310] "The reason why, in this model, the commander must have sole control over his localized area is because an effective harmony must be pursued through the coordination of the immediate constituent elements, unmediated by some distant and undoubtedly less informed perspective."[311] This reading of Sun Tzu's work sounds plausible if we note that "the state of communications in antiquity precluded timely interaction and adaptation between the sovereign's wishes and the commander's plans, thereby explaining the Sun Zi's [or Sun Tzu's] ambivalence about interference from the capital."[312]

Politics, in *The Peloponnesian War*, generally rules over the military instrument, but Thucydides showed that the friction between the statesman, and the commander could lead to the strategic deficit in war. On one occasion, Thucydides suggested that generals acting independently of political control can become a threat to strategic decision making. This was the

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[308] Handel, *Masters of War*, 55.
[309] Ames, introduction to *The Art of Warfare*, 61.
[310] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 80.
[311] Ames, introduction to *The Art of Warfare*, 61.
[312] Yoshihara, "Sun Tzi," 74.

case with Brasidas' campaign in the ninth year of the war. On another occasion, Thucydides indicated that the lack of a genuine dialogue between policymakers and generals would lead to the strategic failure. This was the case with Nicias's comportment in the Sicilian expedition in 415 BC.

After Brasidas, the skillful Spartan general, captured Amphipolis, an Athenian colony, in the eighth year of the war, the Spartan statesmen decided to sue for peace as they feared that the imminent ending of the thirty-year peace treaty with Argos could bring that state into war with Sparta. The Spartan policymakers did not want to be simultaneously at war with both Athens and Argos which was a strong land power.[313] The Athenian policymakers were, on the other hand, willing to make a peace treaty with Sparta as they had lost Amphipolis, from which they received timber, and feared more defeats by Brasidas. Yet both sides were unable to make peace because the generals on both sides were opposed to the peace: "Brasidas because of his success and the prestige he got from the war, Cleon because he thought that in time of peace his misdeeds would be more transparent and his slanders less credible."[314] Karl F. Walling observes, "Brasidas' geographical distance from Sparta thus contributed to his political distance from Sparta's leaders at home, who grew increasingly envious of his success in battle and determined to end the war as soon as possible. Their blunt way of telling him to slow down was to delay reinforcements for Brasidas' command."[315]

Also, in another instance, a lack of genuine dialogue between Nicias, as a military man, and the Athenian political leadership resulted in Athens' strategic failure. After Nicias failed to

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[313] Thucydides, *The War*, 330.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Karl F.Walling, "Thucydides on Democratic Politics and Civil—Military Relations," in *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel*, ed. Bradford A. Lee, and Karl F.Walling (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 138.

convince the Athenians not to send forces to Sicily arguing, "you are leaving many enemies behind you here in your desire to sail off there and attract yet new ones over in this direction,"[316] he attempted to use subterfuges like asking for increase in the number of forces in the hope that he will be denied, instead of pressing the Athenian policymakers harder, or else resign during his Sicilian campaign. This was because "Nicias especially feared to tell the truth to the Athenians, lest he pay with his head. He refused to assume the responsibility for his command because the price of failure was lethal to him, and it continued to be lethal for other Athenian commanders."[317] The lack off a healthy conversation between the policymakers and the general contributed to the ultimate Athenian demise as the Athenian policymakers became less democratic in their approach, and more intolerant of disagreements or failure.[318]

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[316] Thucydides, *The War*, 392.
[317] Walling, "Thucydides," 154.
[318] Ibid., 155.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Since Clausewitz's widow published *On War* in 1832, our modern world has faced

various strategic challenges. The different characters of these challenges may deceive the

modern strategist into thinking that the strategic ideas of classic thinkers like Sun Tzu,

Thucydides, Machiavelli and Clausewitz are archaic, and that their thoughts are immaterial to the

problems of the day. For example, Williamson Murray lamented that among American military

colleges

> The Naval War College is the only American war college that has consistently used
> Thucydides as a basic building block of its curriculum. The Air War College did for a
> brief period in the 1990s but then relapsed, when the golf-playing fighter pilots regained
> control of its curriculum. The National War College has used Thucydides occasionally
> over the past several years, while the Army War College has never placed Thucydides in
> its basic curriculum.[319]

This author argues that *the comparison of Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Machiavelli and*

Clausewitz reveals their thinking is highly relevant to modern strategic challenges. For example,

in today's wartime environment, most modern military organizations are preoccupied with the

material and technological aspects of war overlooking war's moral dimensions.[320] The classic

strategic thinkers reminds the strategist that moral forces comprise the nature of war which

cannot be substituted by technology. This prevents the strategist from downplaying the

resolution of the enemy's forces and exaggerating the effectiveness of technology in the Vietnam

War. Also, in today's strategic environment

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[319] Murray, "Thucydides," n 4.
[320] Handel, *Masters of War*, 62.

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many military experts who have developed the current theories of 'information war', 'cyberwar', and the 'Revolution in Military Affairs' (RMA) often imply or suggest that war has been transformed into a rational activity that can be based on perfect or nearly perfect information; in this case, they claim, the precise execution of carefully laid pre-war plans combined with thorough preparations and use of state-of-the-art technology will make the outcome of war highly predictable.[321]

But as the classic thinkers point out, friction, chance, and uncertainty are inherent in the nature of war, and no matter how sophisticated the new technology is, it cannot simply transform the nature of war into something else making it a rational activity. Hence, war cannot be predicted.

All the classic theorists lived prior to the nuclear age. Therefore, the modern strategist may assume that these thinkers were concerned with the use of force only, and as such finds the ideas of the classic thinkers are irrelevant. However, the examination of the theorists shows that strategies of deterrence and coercion are not limited to the nuclear age. The classic thinkers also viewed the threat of force as a real strategic possibility. Thucydides' ideas can be particularly seen as a precursor to Thomas Schilling when he noted, "Equivalence in the balance of fear is the only basis for trust in an alliance; for then the party that wants to break faith in some way is deterred from doing so by not having the advantage for any aggression." The other strategists found other ways to deter the enemy, Machiavelli saw the a strong defense system as necessary while Clausewitz put forward the idea of strong armed force, and Sun Tzu suggested influencing the enemy's mind, and physiological manipulation.

One of the challenges of recent years has been the (re)emergence of irregular warfare. The modern strategist may think of the classic strategic thinkers as irrelevant because he views the classic strategists as theorists of conventional warfare. Martin van Creveld, and Mary Kaldor

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[321] Ibid.

are scholars who advocate this view. The two scholars assert that now we live in a world of new wars. "For Kaldor, as for Martin van Creveld, new wars were 'irregular', conflicts in which the participants used guerrilla tactics and aimed to avoid battle rather than to seek it."[322] However, as Colin Gray aptly put it in his treatment of irregular warfare, "War is war; it is prosecuted in a greater or lesser part by military force, and it is always, and by definition, about politics."[323] The political objective of irregular war may, for example, be winning over the population, as David Galula asserted,[324] but nonetheless, it is still a political objective for the attainment of which armed forces should be used in one way or another. In doing so, moral forces, fraction, knowledge of the enemy, and intelligence should be taken into consideration if the strategist intends to achieve his objective the way he wishes to.

When the four classic strategic thinkers began to write down their thoughts on war, and strategy, they all did so with each having the intention of writing a treatise that would stand the test of time. Thucydides spoke of his intention by saying,

> Perhaps the absence of the element of fable in my work may make it seem less easy on the ear; but it will have served its purpose well enough if it is judged useful by those who want to have a clear view of what happened in the past and what – the human condition being what it is – can be expected to happen again some time in the future in similar or much the same ways. It is composed to be a possession for all time and not just a performance-piece1 for the moment.[325]

Likewise, Clausewitz noted, "It was my ambition to write a book that would not be forgotten after two or three years, and that possibly might be picked up more than once by those

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[322] Strachan, *Direction of War*, 50.
[323] Colin S. Gray, "Concept Failure? COIN, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Theory," *Prism* 3, no. 4 (June 2012): 23.
[324] David Galula, *Counterinsurgency warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 5.
[325] Thucydides, *The War*, 15-16.

who are interested in the subject."[326] Sun Tzu made the same point in his own way by saying, "If you heed my assessments, dispatching troops into battle would mean certain victory, and I will stay. If you do not heed them, dispatching troops would mean certain defeat, and I will leave."[327] Machiavelli, having drawn his lessons from the ancient history, spoke implicitly of the timelessness of his works in that he saw them as the reflection of the unchanging world. Machiavelli observed, "although there has always been as much good as evil in it, this evil and this good vary from province to province; this can be seen from what we know of ancient kingdoms that differed from one another according to the variations in their customs, while the world remained as it always had been."[328]

The classic strategic theorists' remarks on the timelessness of their works attests to their agreement on the cornerstone of strategic studies, that is, "*Despite changes in culture and circumstances, human beings both as individuals and in society have revealed a common nature in the characteristics they are able to detect or surmise across boundaries of time and place.*"[329]

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[326] Clausewitz, *On War*, 63.
[327] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, 74
[328] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 150.
[329] Gray, *The Future of Strategy*, 12 (emphasis added).

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