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**APPLYING SUN TZU'S ANCIENT "ART OF WAR"  
TO THE FUTURE**

**BY**

**PATRICIA J. COOK**

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PAPER

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## ABSTRACT

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The strategist, Sun Tzu, developed "The Art of War" in China around 500 B.C. His precepts of "warfare" have endured for more than 2000 years and have influenced strategic decision-making and warfare through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the United States enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the information age, it is useful to re-examine Sun Tzu's precepts as they relate to the strategic needs forecasted for 2010 and beyond. This paper first develops a profile of strategic operations expected in the Army After Next timeframe, then reviews Sun Tzu's precepts from the perspective of modern diplomacy and warfare, and correlates the precepts with the future characteristics to determine specific areas for further consideration. From a discussion of these areas, seven mandates are culled for the U.S. political-military system to prepare for strategic decisions and operational implementation between now and the year 2025.



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## Applying Sun Tzu's Ancient "Art of War" to the Future

Among all the military thinkers of the past, ... Sun Tzu has clearer vision, more profound insight, and eternal freshness.<sup>1</sup>

-- B. H. Liddell Hart

Much controversy surrounds the writing of 'The Art of War.' The authorship of the collection of essays has been attributed to a Chinese general Sun Wu around 550 B.C., to later disciples of his, and to disputing scholars of an even later period who simply attributed the words to Sun Tzu. The date of authorship is no more firm. The essays were probably written sometime between 550 B.C. and 200 B.C.; in any case 'The Art of War' is generally acknowledged as the first classic on the martial arts. What is certain is that the ancient essays have received much attention from Chinese and Japanese strategists and soldiers over the centuries following its writing and continue to form a handbook on conducting war. The Western world only gained the insights of Sun Tzu late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century through a French translation.<sup>2</sup>

Liddell Hart, in his foreword to Samuel Griffith's 1963 translation of 'The Art of War,' terms the essays "the concentrated essence of wisdom on the conduct of war."<sup>3</sup> Further, he states that "only Clausewitz is comparable, and even he is more 'dated' than Sun Tzu, and in part antiquated, although he was writing more than two thousand years later."<sup>4</sup> In the words of Griffith, "Sun Tzu was not primarily interested in the elaboration of involved stratagems or superficial and transitory techniques. His purpose was to develop a systematic treatise to guide rulers and generals in the intelligent



prosecution of successful war.”<sup>5</sup> By the time later translations (German and Russian) of Sun Tzu were produced, “the military world was under the sway of the Clausewitz extremist, and the voice of the Chinese sage had little echo.”<sup>6</sup> Liddell Hart supposes that

[c]ivilization might have been spared much of the damage suffered in the world wars of this century if the influence of Clausewitz’s monumental tomes *On War*, which moulded European military thought in the era preceding the First World War, had been blended with and balanced by a knowledge of Sun Tzu’s exposition on ‘The Art of War’. Sun Tzu’s realism and moderation form a contrast to Clausewitz’s tendency to emphasize the logical ideal and ‘the absolute,’ which his disciples caught on to in developing the theory and practice of ‘total war’ beyond all bounds of sense.... The clarity of Sun Tzu’s thought could have corrected the obscurity of Clausewitz’s.<sup>7</sup>

So maybe Sun Tzu is applicable to the Oriental cultures or maybe his precepts are more broadly applicable to war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and before. Are they applicable for the United States (U.S.) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? This paper looks at Sun Tzu’s precepts to see if important mandates can be culled for the military and the nation’s leaders for consideration as they prepare for the 21st century. The focus is on those precepts which are most applicable to the strategies for the timeframe of the Army After Next (AAN), 2010 to 2025 A.D., and hence require consideration now if they are to be implemented in time to make a difference.

War of Sun Tzu’s time was different from war in the Modern Age in terms of equipment and capabilities, and even in scope and visibility. There was no air force, no navy, no peacekeeping missions, and no CNN or other visual media coverage of the battlefield. But there were professional soldiers (primarily on foot, with some mounted and some in chariots), national goals, sovereigns and belligerents, weaponry

(crossbows, swords, spears), secret agents, hills and other terrain considerations, rain and other weather, cities, casualties, ....<sup>8</sup> This paper focuses on the basic strategies and Army elements of war, but it also attempts to explore the applicability of Sun Tzu to the broader national defense imperatives the U.S. is expected to face in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Approach**

This paper follows a five-step approach:

- Develop a profile of strategic operations, including war and military operations other than war (MOOTW), expected in the AAN 2010 to 2025 timeframe.
- Review Sun Tzu's precepts, exploring their meaning for war as Sun Tzu knew it but also from the perspective of more modern military operations. Consider the possibility of tactical concepts that may now be applicable to the operational and strategic levels.
- Correlate the characteristics of future operations with 'The Art of War' precepts to determine specific areas that require further consideration.
- Explore those areas from examples of the ancient and modern past, the doctrine of the present, and a view of the future to determine areas needing emphasis.

- Cull mandates for the U.S. political-military system to prepare for strategic decisions and operational implementations between now and the year 2025 and beyond.

### **Profile of Future Strategic Operations**

There is much speculation as to what military operations will be like by 2025. There is no less speculation about what the global populations and their formal and informal relationships will be. The most common theme among futurists, both professional and self-proclaimed, is that we are entering a time of uncertainty beyond which the U.S., and for that matter that the whole world, has ever known. However, the more viewpoints that are thrown into the cauldron, the more some central aspects bubble up as probable. This profile is built on those central tendencies.

- **Uncertainty** -- There will be continuing uncertainty as to where, when, by whom, and using which capabilities conflict will arise and be prosecuted. In any case, the U.S. will continue to be involved in global affairs as the world's only superpower and self-appointed world policeman.
- **No Peer Competitor** -- No peer competitor will rise by 2025 although there may be several major competitors in the field; these could include China, Russia, and/or an alliance of smaller nation-states. In Back to the Future, GEN Hartzog and LTC (Ret) Bonn postulate it this way:

We believe that state-on-state warfare will remain the *raison d'être* for military forces through the foreseeable future. Although some

futurists have proclaimed the demise of the state system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we do not see such developments occurring during the AAN window, namely 2010 –2025. New nation-states will appear and others will decline during the period, and some threats will continue to exist from supranational economic entities, but the principle purpose of military forces will be to deal effectively with the military threats posed by those actors which can muster the money, men, and materiel to seriously challenge the peace...and in the foreseeable future, those actors can only be nation-states.<sup>9</sup>

Most futurists agree that concomitantly there will be a rise in the number of rogue states and terrorist organizations which, by themselves or in alliance with others, will harass and threaten violent conflict throughout the world. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5 defines subnational threats as “the political, racial, religious, cultural, and ethnic conflicts that challenge the defining features and authority of the nation-state within.”<sup>10</sup> The potential for simultaneous conflict throughout the world at varying levels of ferocity and at differing national/subnational levels remains high and may grow exponentially over the next two decades as it has in the past decade.

- **Response in Other Areas of the World** -- While there may be homeland defense needs in terms of terrorism, anti-drug operations, and natural disaster relief, the U.S. will find itself fighting outside the Continental United States and most probably outside North America. Strategic lift, prepositioned equipment, forward basing, and the synergy of the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines will be important issues in preparation for military operations. Long distance logistics and the time required to sustain forces will have heavy influence on technology

developments and doctrine for the AAN concept. In the role as world policeman, the U.S. will always be in the response mode, i.e., will be responding to **some** provocation. In most situations this will mean that the other side will fire the first shot, if shots are fired.

- **Asymmetric Warfare** -- Since the beginning of man's conflict, attempts have been made to develop asymmetric warfare techniques to counter the opponent. Seeing -- or guessing at -- what the opponent has or the way in which he will use it has forced development of new weapons and techniques throughout history. For example, when an armored vehicle concept was developed by one side, the other side not only developed armored vehicles for symmetric warfare, but anti-armor weapons for asymmetric warfare. Asymmetric warfare discussions today tend to focus on the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), on terrorism, and on information warfare. Proliferation of these capabilities will grow in nation-states, rogue states, and terrorist organizations. A major effort of the U.S. in the next decades will be to find ways to counter these capabilities either symmetrically, asymmetrically, or both. It is not expected that a combatant at any level will challenge the U.S. in massive conventional warfare -- both sides lined up against each other on the battlefield. Any fighting may quickly move to the cities so as to occur in the midst of noncombatants.

- **Mixed Battlefield** -- Although there will be new technologies present on the battlefield and new unit structures to execute missions, there will not be enough funding or personnel to permeate the battlefield with the “new.” The “new” will coexist with the “old”, creating a mixed battlefield. The doctrine will be developed for the new equipment, capabilities, and concepts to supplement the current ones (modified and enhanced as possible) rather than to replace them. There will be a reliance on information dominance using new equipment, including many space-based capabilities, but networked to the older equipment. Interoperability will continue to be a challenge, not only with other countries and between Services, but also between the old and new equipment of a single service.
- **Involvement and Priorities of the National Command Authority** -- Over the past decade the military has been used increasingly for operations other than war – for peacekeeping, peace enforcement, anti-drug operations, humanitarian efforts, natural disaster relief, and so on. This tendency will continue over the next decades as more opportunities for regional conflict develop due to increased regional instability, transnational dangers, asymmetric threats, and the likelihood of other unpredictable events. Access to media will allow global or official audiences to become involved in, or react to, any and all events. Having atrocities seen on the screens in living rooms across the nation puts

additional pressure on the National Command Authorities (NCA) to respond quickly, using the military for missions which might more rightly fall to the State Department or Justice Department. The military has become, and will continue to be, a first choice in dealing with military, diplomatic, and natural disasters present around the world. Not only will the military be called upon to respond in all types of operations, it will be asked to do so quickly, with few casualties, and in a way to minimize the possibility of harm to the opponent's noncombatants. With the restraints placed on the military and the capability to "see" the battlefield from Washington D.C. with extraordinary command and control systems, the NCA will continue to detail specific targets for the military as was done in Vietnam and in Desert Storm and in each conflict situation since.

- **Not Doing It Alone** -- Seldom will the U.S. conduct any kind of operation on its own. Popular support in-country and around the world for the operation seems to depend on knowing that others agree with the U.S.'s assessment of right and wrong. Further, given the downsizing of the military, other Department of Defense organizations, and other government departments, the U.S. has been placed in a dependence relationship with alliance partners and coalitions in order to have enough manpower, money, and equipment to meet the numerous and varied requirements around the world. The emphasis on combined operations

will be mirrored by the emphasis on joint operations – every operation will have a joint flavor even if not required by the actual tasks to be performed.

### **Sun Tzu's Precepts**

The thirteen chapters of Sun Tzu's essays on war cover a broad spectrum of topics: Estimates, Waging War, Offensive Strategy, Dispositions, Energy, Weaknesses and Strengths, Maneuvers, The Nine Variables, Marches, Terrain, The Nine Varieties of Ground, Attack by Fire, and Employment of Secret Agents. They span from tactical aspects for the commander in the field for waging war to strategic deliberations in the council chambers as to whether or not to wage war.

Samuel Griffith sums up Sun Tzu's basic philosophy as follows:

Sun Tzu believed that the moral strength and intellectual faculty of man were decisive in war, and that if these were properly applied war could be waged with certain success. Never to be undertaken thoughtlessly or recklessly, war was to be preceded by measures designed to make it easy to win. The master conqueror frustrated his enemy's plans and broke up his alliances. He created cleavages between sovereign and minister, superiors and inferiors, commanders and subordinates. His spies and agents were active everywhere, gathering information, sowing dissension, and nurturing subversion. The enemy was isolated and demoralized; his will to resist broken. Thus without battle his army was conquered, his cities taken and his state overthrown. Only when the enemy could not be overcome by these means was there recourse to armed force, which was to be applied so that victory was gained:

- (a) in the shortest possible time;
- (b) at the least possible cost in lives and effort;
- (c) with infliction on the enemy of the fewest possible casualties.<sup>11</sup>

Sun Tzu's precepts consist of 395 "one-liners" or at least "one-thoughters."

This section distills the strategic thoughts from the strategic-tactical mix and



organizes them into summary areas for comparison with the profile of future operations. The words are all Sun Tzu's (translation by Samuel Griffith).<sup>12</sup>

- **Go for Victory.** Victory is the main object of war. If this is long delayed, weapons are blunted and morale depressed. When troops attack cities, their strength will be exhausted. (II.3) When your weapons are dulled and ardour damped, your strength exhausted and treasure spent, neighbouring rulers will take advantage of your distress to act.... (II.5) For there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited. (II.7) Treat the captives well, and care for them. (II.19) Generally in war the best policy is to take a state intact; to ruin it is inferior to this. To capture the enemy's army is better than to destroy it;.... To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill. Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy, next best is to disrupt his alliances; the next best is to attack his army. The worst policy is to attack cities. Attack cities only when there is no alternative. (III.1-7) Thus a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle; an army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning. (IV.14) Now there are five circumstances in which victory may be predicted: He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot will be victorious. He who understands how to use both large and small forces will be victorious. He whose ranks are united in purpose will be victorious. He who is prudent and lies in wait for an enemy who is not, will be victorious. He whose generals are able and not interfered with by the sovereign will be victorious. (IV.24-29) Generally, he who occupies the field of battle first and awaits his enemy is at ease; he who comes later to the scene and rushes into the fight is weary. And therefore those skilled in war bring the enemy to the field of battle and are not brought there by him. (VI.1-2) In war, numbers alone confer no advantage. Do not advance relying on sheer military power. (IX.45)
- **Know your Enemy and Environment.** Therefore I say: 'Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. (III.31) When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning and losing are equal. (III.32) Thus I say that victory can be created. For even if the enemy is numerous, I can prevent him from engaging. Therefore, determine the enemy's plans and you will know which strategy will be successful and which will not; agitate him and ascertain the pattern of his movement. Determine his dispositions and so ascertain the field of battle. Probe him and learn where his strength is abundant and where deficient. (VI.19-23) Those who do not know the conditions of mountains and forests, hazardous defiles, marshes and swamps, cannot conduct the march of an army; those who do not use local guides are unable to obtain the advantages of the ground. (VII.10-11) When the enemy's envoys speak in humble terms, but he continues his preparations, he will advance. When their language is deceptive, but the enemy pretentiously advances, he will retreat. When the envoys speak in apologetic terms, he wishes a respite. When without a previous understanding the enemy asks for a truce, he is plotting. When light chariots first go out and take position on the flanks the enemy is forming for battle. When his troops march speedily and he parades his battle chariots he is expecting to rendezvous with reinforcements. When half of his force advances and half withdraws he is attempting to decoy you. When his troops lean on their weapons, they are famished. When drawers of water drink before carrying it to camp, his troops are suffering from thirst. When the enemy sees an advantage but does not

advance to seize it, he is fatigued. When birds gather above his camp sites, they are empty. When at night the enemy's camp is clamorous, he is fearful. When his troops are disorderly, the general has no prestige. When his flags and banners move about constantly he is in disarray. If the officers are short-tempered, they are exhausted. When the enemy feeds grain to the horses and his men meat and when his troops neither hang up their cooking pots nor return to their shelters, the enemy is desperate. When the troops continually gather in small groups and whisper together the general has lost the confidence of the army. Too frequent rewards indicate that the general is at the end of his resources; too frequent punishments that he is in acute distress. If the officers at first treat the men violently and later are fearful of them, the limit of indiscipline has been reached. When the enemy troops are in high spirits, and, although facing you, do not join in battle for a long time, nor leave, you must thoroughly investigate the situation. (IX.25-44) Conformation of the ground is of the greatest assistance in battle. Therefore, to estimate the enemy situation and to calculate distances and the degree of difficulty of the terrain so as to control victory are virtues of the superior general. He who fights with full knowledge of these factors is certain to win; he who does not will surely be defeated. (X.17)

- **Don't Let the Enemy Know You.** Appear at places to which he must hasten; move swiftly where he does not expect you. (VI.5) Therefore, against those skilled in attack, an enemy does not know where to defend; against the experts in defence, the enemy does not know where to attack. (VI.8) The enemy must not know where I intend to give battle. For if he does not know where I intend to give battle he must prepare in a great many places. And when he prepares in a great many places, those I have to fight in any one place will be few. (VI.14) The ultimate in disposing one's troops is to be without ascertainable shape. Then the most penetrating spies cannot pry in nor can the wise lay plans against you. (VI.24) Therefore, when I have won a victory I do not repeat my tactics but respond to circumstances in an infinite variety of ways. Now an army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strength and strikes weakness. And as water shapes its flow in accordance with the ground, so an army manages its victory in accordance with the situation of the enemy. And as water has no constant form, there are in war no constant conditions. Thus, one able to gain victory by modifying his tactics in accordance with the enemy situation may be said to be divine. (VI.24-30) Speed is the essence of war. Take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness; travel by unexpected routes and strike him where he has taken no precautions. (XI.29) He [the general] changes his methods and alters his plans so that people have no knowledge of what he is doing. He alters his camp-sites and marches by devious routes and thus makes it impossible for others to anticipate his purpose. (XI.45-46)
- **Use Deception at All Levels.** All warfare is based on deception (I.17) Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity. When near, make it appear you are far away; when far away, that you are near. Offer the enemy a bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike him. When he concentrates, prepare against him; where he is strong, avoid him. Anger his general and confuse him. Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance. Keep him under a strain and wear him down. When he is united, divide him. Attack when he is unprepared; sally out when he does not expect you. These are the strategist's keys to victory. It is not possible to discuss them beforehand. (I.18-27) Apparent confusion is a product of

good order; apparent cowardice, of courage; apparent weakness, of strength. (V.18) Now war is based on deception. Move when it is advantageous and create changes in the situation by dispersal and concentration of forces. (VII.12)

- **Use Secret Agents.** Now the reason the enlightened prince and the wise general conquer the enemy whenever they move and their achievements surpass those of ordinary men is foreknowledge. What is called 'foreknowledge' cannot be elicited from spirits, nor from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from calculations. It must be obtained from men who know the enemy situation. Now there are five sorts of secret agents to be employed. These are native, inside, doubled, expendable, and living. When these five types of agents are all working simultaneously and none knows their method of operation, they are called 'The Divine Skein' and are the treasure of a sovereign. Native agents are those of the enemy's country people whom we employ. Inside agents are enemy officials whom we employ. Doubled agents are enemy spies whom we employ. Expendable agents are those of our own spies who are deliberately given fabricated information. Living agents are those who return with information [gain access to those of the enemy who are intimate with the sovereign and members of the nobility]. Of all those in the army close to the commander none is more intimate than the secret agent; of all rewards none more liberal than those given to secret agents; of all matters none is more confidential than those relating to secret operations. He who is not sage and wise, humane and just, cannot use secret agents. And he who is not delicate and subtle cannot get the truth out of them....There is no place espionage is not used. (XIII.3-14) And therefore only the enlightened sovereign and the worthy general who are able to use the most intelligent people as agents are certain to achieve great things. Secret operations are essential to war; upon them the army relies to make its every move. (XIII.23)
- **Ensure Character of the General.** If a general who heeds my strategy is employed he is certain to win. Retain him! When one who refuses to listen to my strategy is employed, he is certain to be defeated. Dismiss him! (I.15) Therefore a skilled commander seeks victory from the situation and does not demand it of his subordinates. He selects his men and they exploit the situation. (V.21-22) ...the wise general in his deliberations must consider both favourable and unfavourable factors. By taking into account the favourable factors, he makes his plan feasible; by taking into account the unfavourable, he may resolve the difficulties. (VIII.12-13) There are five qualities which are dangerous in the character of a general. If reckless, he can be killed; if cowardly, captured; if quick-tempered, you can make a fool of him; if he has too delicate a sense of honor you can calumniate him; if he is of a compassionate nature you can harass him. Now these five traits of character are serious faults in a general and in military operations are calamitous. (VIII.17-23) If troops are punished before their loyalty is secured they will be disobedient. If not obedient, it is difficult to employ them. If troops are loyal, but punishments are not enforced, you cannot employ them. Thus, command them with civility and imbue them uniformly with martial ardour and it may be said that victory is certain. If orders which are consistently effective are used in instructing the troops, they will be obedient. If orders which are not consistently effective are used in instructing them, they will be disobedient. When orders are consistently trustworthy and observed, the relationship of a commander with his troops is satisfactory. (IX.47-50) When troops are strong and officers weak the army is subordinate. When the officers are valiant and the troops ineffective the army is in distress. When the general is morally weak and his discipline not strict, when his

instructions and guidance are not enlightened, when there are no consistent rules to guide the officers and men and when the formations are slovenly the army is in disorder. When a commander unable to estimate his enemy uses a small force to engage a large one, or weak troops to strike the strong, or when he fails to select shock troops for the van, the result is rout. When any of these six conditions prevails the army is on the road to defeat. It is the highest responsibility of the general that he examine them carefully. (X.11-16) It is the business of the general to be serene and inscrutable, impartial and self-controlled. He should be capable of keeping his officers and men in ignorance of his plans. He prohibits superstitious practices and so rids the army of doubts. Then until the moment of death there can be no troubles. (XI.42-44)

- **Give the General Authority Along with Responsibility.** Now there are three ways in which a ruler can bring misfortune upon his army: When ignorant that the army should not advance, to order an advance or ignorant that it should not retire, to order a retirement. This is described as ‘hobbling the army’. When ignorant of military affairs, to participate in their administration. This causes the officers to be perplexed. When ignorant of command problems to share in the exercise of responsibilities. This engenders doubts in the minds of the officers. (III.19-22) He whose generals are able and not interfered with by the sovereign will be victorious. (III.29) There are occasions when the commands of the sovereign need not be obeyed. (VIII.8) If the situation is one of victory but the sovereign has issued orders not to engage, the general may decide to fight. If the situation is such that he cannot win, but the sovereign has issued orders to engage, he need not do so. And therefore the general who in advancing does not seek personal fame, and in withdrawing is not concerned with avoiding punishment, but whose only purpose is to protect the people and promote the best interests of his sovereign, is the precious jewel of the state. Because such a general regards his men as infants they will march with him into the deepest valleys. He treats them as his own beloved sons and they will die with him. If a general indulges his troops but is unable to employ them; if he loves them but cannot enforce his commands; if the troops are disorderly and he is unable to control them, they may be compared to spoiled children, and are useless. (X.18-21)

### **Correlation of Profile with Precepts**

The following matrix attempts to correlate the current expectations of future warfare/national defense strategies of the United States with the age-old insights of Sun Tzu. The matrix consists of the seven profile categories versus seven categories of Sun Tzu’s precepts. The assessment that one is relevant to another is denoted by an “X”. In some cases the precept was given in tactical terms; if it could be applicable in strategic terms to future war, then it also was marked as relevant.

PRECEPTS OF SUN TZU →							
→ PROFILE OF FUTURE STRATEGIC OPERATIONS	Go for Victory	Know Your Enemy and Environment	Don't Let the Enemy Know You	Use Deception At All Levels	Use Secret Agents	Ensure Character of General	Give Authority to General
Uncertainty		X	X	X	X		
No Peer Competitor		X	X	X	X		
Response in Other Areas of the World	X	X	X	X	X		X
Asymmetric Warfare	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mixed Battlefield	X		X	X			X
Involvement/Priorities of NCA	X					X	X
Not Doing It Alone	X						

INFORMATION  
DOMINANCE/DECEPTION

COMMIT TO VICTORY

INTERAGENCY  
ACTIVITY

FIELD AUTHORITY

Correlation Matrix of Future Profile with Sun Tzu Precepts

As can be seen, the coverage is great. The precepts of Sun Tzu are widely applicable to our view of national security of the future. The correlations map into four domains: Commitment to Victory, Information Dominance/Deception, Interagency Activities, and Field Authority. These four areas will be briefly explored in the next section.

### **Discussion of the Four Mapped Domains**

Sun Tzu focuses on the great need for information/intelligence about yourself, the enemy, and the environment in which you will be operating. He calls for war as a last resort, with the first priority being to “win” through diplomacy. When war is started, it is to be conducted quickly, with minimal casualties on both sides, but also with a commitment to victory. Phrases that describe the U.S. future security strategy include shaping the environment to avoid war, information dominance, precision strike, and no casualties. The correlation is great. Sun Tzu’s ideas appear more relevant today for the security operations of tomorrow than ever before in history. GEN Schoomaker, Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command, affirms this correlation with the following statement. “We must also have the intellectual agility to conceptualize creative, useful solutions to ambiguous problems and provide a coherent set of choices to the supported CINC or Joint Force Commander – more often like Sun Tzu, less like Clausewitz. This means training and educating people *how to think, not just what to think.*”<sup>13</sup>

- **Commitment to Victory.** All of the principal elements of national

security power -- diplomatic, political, economic and military -- must be undertaken with the commitment to win the negotiation, the argument, the conflict.... In all of the cases, it is incumbent on the U.S. President and the National Security Council to have strategic plans and firmly established political and military endstates. "They must communicate the goals of policies and the objectives of military operations clearly and simply enough so that the widest of audiences can envision the ways and means being used to reach those goals."<sup>14</sup> The audience not only includes the American people but also potential allies and coalition members. It is hard to "sign up" for something without clearly defined objectives and end states. It is also hard to know when you've won.

The National Defense Panel suggested that the U.S.

establish an interagency long-range, strategic planning process to ensure the long-term consequences of near-term decisions are taken into account. The process should be supported by long-range strategic planning cells in the National Security Council staff, the Departments of State and Defense, and other relevant departments and agencies.<sup>15</sup>

When other means fail and military personnel are to be sent to conduct defense operations, it is even more important to define the purpose and end states so that the generals can efficiently and effectively plan for engagement. "American military forces must be able to fight and win on any battlefield, under any conditions, and with whatever means the nature of the contest requires."<sup>16</sup> In other words, they too must be committed to victory, but

decisive victory in the direct engagement is not enough. The Army has a moral obligation to the American people to lessen the cost of battle in American blood. To honor such an obligation, there can be no such thing as a fair fight. An eye-to-eye battle is not a boxing match or a

football game. An even match either in quality or quantity only serves to prolong the horror with needless casualties on both sides. The object of future wars, therefore, will be to collapse an enemy by maneuvering an overwhelming joint force against him so that his will to resist is broken and close-in killing becomes a coup de grace rather than a bloody battle of attrition.<sup>17</sup>

As in the tactical battle, to gain victory in the strategic domain requires taking the initiative.

Because of the time gap between strategic cause and effect, the successful strategist must mold the strategic environment from the outset and seize the initiative, thereby forcing others to react. Simply put, policymakers or strategists who passively wait for an opponent to act can make no strategic decisions on their own, and eventually will be at the mercy of their adversary. Thus seizing, retaining, and exploiting the initiative allows one to set the strategic agenda, to shape the strategic environment in directions of one's choosing, and to force an opponent constantly to react to changing conditions that concomitantly inhibit his ability to regain the initiative.<sup>18</sup>

An example of taking the strategic initiative can be found in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm:

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, upset the fragile strategic balance in the region, and threatened not only world oil supplies, but also the long-held U.S. aim of peace and stability in the Middle East. After the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, however, the United States seized the strategic initiative by building an unexpected coalition that included Arab countries to support Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.<sup>19</sup>

To seize and retain the initiative will require

strategists to distinguish between the internal and external components of initiative. The internal is based on ensuring that one's decisionmaking processes are the most efficient and effective possible. The external is based on understanding the expectations and decisionmaking capacities of an opponent, as well as allies and coalition partners who also will greatly influence the ability to seize and maintain the initiative. These two elements must be pursued concurrently to produce the maximum strategic benefit.<sup>20</sup>

- **Information Dominance/Deception.** This area includes information



and intelligence gathering, information and intelligence analysis, fusing of information, sharing of information, information warfare, and surprise and deception, and forms a central aspect of Sun Tzu's "art of war." In an age of uncertainty and at the concurrent dawning of the Information Age, there are many strategic decisions needed to focus and guide the use of new technologies and new implementations of old concepts. For example, military commanders have used tactical deception at some level in almost every battle the U.S. has ever fought. Today, more focus needs to be placed on strategic deception and surprise, something not done very much in the past. Similarly, information has always been gathered at all levels on the battlefield as opportunity and means presented themselves. Now that we have advanced technology to exponentially increase the amount of information available at all levels of command, it is imperative that strategic and operational decisions be made on the purpose, dissemination, and use of such information. Some guiding thoughts from the recent literature in line with Sun Tzu's intent follow.

Sun Tzu says know your enemy and the environment. MG Scales states it this way for the Army in the future:

In any future contingency, the Army will require detailed intelligence before the arrival of an intervening force. Particularly in the case of early arriving light forces, commanders need a clear picture of what awaits them on the ground. As the Army shifts increasingly to a force projection Army, the ability to observe, analyze, and understand potential enemies and the operational environment in any area of the globe must be enhanced and adjusted to better support such operations.<sup>21</sup>

The increased information and intelligence available are only useful if there are adequate means to analyze them and fuse them into usable knowledge and if the result is disseminated to the right places of command and decisionmaking.

Our intelligence structure faces immensely more complicated tasks than during the Cold War. Asymmetric threats pose particular difficulties. Information technologies are a two-edged sword of both tremendous opportunities and vulnerabilities. The various facets of the intelligence community must merge their efforts and information, handle highly complicated technical challenges, ensure all parts of the intelligence gathering apparatus are robust, and work to ensure their products are easily accessible and meet the needs of the warfighter.<sup>22</sup>

So, the intelligence/information process must include

integrating technologies (especially space-based capabilities), reducing the overlap in intelligence efforts among agencies (without sacrificing the redundancy necessary to safeguard capability), eliminating bureaucratic boundaries that debilitate the dissemination of information, and allowing for surge capacity in times of multiple crises.<sup>23</sup>

Sun Tzu focuses considerable attention on the use of secret agents, defining the different types, the usefulness to the ruler and to the commander, and the relationships that must be maintained in order to realize the benefits. The National Defense Panel recognizes the

critical importance of revitalizing human intelligence (HUMINT) to include the need for military personnel with extensive regional knowledge and language skills. Given our lack of experience in and knowledge about certain countries, regions, and groups, HUMINT can provide local data that may prove to be crucial, particularly in helping our leaders understand the intent behind capability. The effective use of HUMINT will help our leaders take the appropriate actions to diffuse conflict and promote regional stability. If conflict should occur despite our best efforts, then HUMINT will complement our other means of intelligence to assist commanders in conducting operations rapidly and decisively. Revitalizing HUMINT requires the United States to invest in robust capabilities. Such capability will not be achieved overnight; the skills and relationships needed for effective HUMINT take years to develop. This long lead-time underscores the urgency of defining the requirements and meeting them now.<sup>24</sup>

Another aspect of information warfare is the use of information to surprise or deceive the adversary in either the diplomatic or the military realm.

For the United States, surprise at the strategic level is perhaps the most dichotomous principle of war. The openness of the U.S. system of government that features unclassified national security and military strategies, as well as intensively reported public debates on virtually all aspects of national defense, leaves it poorly postured for acts of strategic surprise. Additionally, the United States cannot embrace strategic surprise without infusing a certain amount of unpredictability in its foreign policy which may provide short-term advantages that are outweighed by long-term adverse consequences.<sup>25</sup>

Deception at the strategic level needs to be well thought out, with consideration of the second and third order affects. However,

an increased number and variety of employment options can contribute to strategic surprise. During the Cold War, potential U.S. adversaries could predict fairly reliably the manner in which the United States would mount a military response....If, however, U.S. armed forces organize around information (vice weapon) systems and military organizations become less hierarchical and more decentralized, greater variations of methods are possible, hence enhancing uncertainty about potential U.S. responses.... Information Age technologies also hold considerable potential to improve the capacity for strategic deception. Not only will technologically advanced militaries be able to identify, define and exploit an adversary's indications and warnings networks, they may be able to influence an adversary's perceptions. They must be careful, however, not to deceive other elements of government or friends and allies, thereby hindering achievement of national objectives. Information highways run in many directions, making all states susceptible to electronic penetration and deception measures.<sup>26</sup>

Psychological operations units will continue to use television, radio, and printed media to sow doubt, confusion and even discord among the enemy, posturing them mentally for failure.<sup>27</sup> In the future, electronic media will increasingly be used for psychological operations as the world continues to be more highly networked.

- **Interagency Activities.** Primary focus according to Sun Tzu should be on activities other than war. The National Defense Panel agrees with Sun Tzu that

the most effective tool should be diplomacy. Diplomacy can help shape the environment and establish the preconditions for successful use of other national security tools. The responsibility for stability in a region should fall first on nations in the region, or on regional

organizations. Diplomatic efforts should encourage proactive measures that promote regional stability, focusing on those nations whose interests are compatible with ours. To do this in the fractured post-Cold War world requires more robust diplomatic capabilities than we budget for today.<sup>28</sup>

Today the U.S. military is called on to conduct a large variety of operations around the world, from peacekeeping to peace enforcement to war. Some of these tasks are more appropriately led by the Departments of State or Justice (with support from the Defense Department). The National Defense Panel proposed the following:

The current approach to addressing national security engages the Department of Defense and services too often and too quickly in situations that should have been resolved by non-military means. Failure to devote adequate attention and resources to promoting regional stability and security increasingly results in the use of military forces to restore social normalcy in areas not central to U.S. strategic interests, such as Somalia, Haiti, and Rwanda. Put in a more positive way, by strengthening our diplomatic, political, economic and other assistance efforts, we may be able to prevent the breakdown of order, which requires the use of military force.<sup>29</sup>

In order to operate efficiently and effectively in the future security realm, integration of the U.S. agencies is needed, as the Services have now started to be integrated. In a time of downsizing, it is imperative that redundancies be minimized and that planning for all aspects of security be done in a team fashion rather than as individual agencies, often at cross purposes. The National Defense Panel provided recommendations in this area:

We should also pay more attention to interagency representatives overseas. Representatives from other than the Department of Defense should be assigned to CINCs. Similarly, Defense representation at embassies in important countries must be carefully considered. The Defense representative should be a senior officer or civilian with interagency and joint experience and should represent the Department of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the National Defense Panel proposes some ways to ensure better cooperation between agencies so that the U.S. Government as a whole can work toward shared goals:

Create an interagency cadre of professionals, including civilian and military officers, whose purpose would be to staff key positions in the national security structures.... A certain number of "interagency" slots should be identified within the national security community, including domestic agencies that have foreign affairs responsibilities (e.g., Justice, Commerce, Energy) and staffed by the interagency cadre.... Establish a national security curriculum combining coursework at the National Defense University and National Foreign Affairs Training Center, with a mix of [interagency] civilians, military, and foreign students to receive training and education in strategic affairs.... Improve coordination between State and Defense Department geographic and functional bureaus and unified commands to harmonize and integrate regional coverage and policy implementation.<sup>31</sup>

- **Field Authority.** Sun Tzu makes it clear that while the ruler (read NCA) is involved in the diplomatic negotiations, in the decision whether to wage war or not, and in the definition of purpose and endstate for conflict, it is the general who must have the authority in the field, even if it means disobeying the ruler. Not only must the general not be hindered by the ruler, he must know how to effectively command his soldiers and to wisely use his resources. Some are "betting the farm" in the future war on the advanced technologies that will be available. Sun Tzu would point out that the most important resources are the soldiers and the generals' ability to think creatively. TRADOC PAM 525-5 agrees that "we must also recognize that success on past battlefields has resulted not so much from technological advances but from innovative ways of considering and combining available and sometimes new technologies as they

apply to warfighting.”<sup>32</sup> Hartzog and Bonn explain this concept more in their Back to the Future piece:

Army leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be enabled, not encumbered, by the technologies with which Army XXI will achieve victory.... Far from being narrow technologists, however, the leaders of the Army XXI will also have to be well informed in the social sciences as well, to assure mission accomplishment anywhere in the world to which they are deployed. Historically, this requirement is truly revolutionary for our leaders.... Even as recently as six years ago, except for those assigned to rapid-deployment units, leaders were sure to have an adequate amount of time with which to become familiar with the necessary rudiments of the culture and the political situation their target areas. With the advent of modular deployment directly to combat for all types of Army XXI organizations, and in the light of recent trends toward more numerous and lengthy deployments to a wider variety of venues than ever before, the realization of full spectrum dominance will require our leaders to possess the comprehensive knowledge and skills that will enable success across a broad range of operational destinations and missions.<sup>33</sup>

As a final word in this area, Hartzog and Bonn continue:

Amidst the tumult and techno-wizardry of the Information Age, it will not be technical knowledge or doctrinal adroitness which will bind soldiers together, but the trust, confidence, and respect earned by leaders who share hardship, set the example and put their soldiers, unit and country before themselves. It is ironic that our greatest challenge in the next century may be developing sufficient numbers of caring, competent leaders who focus on their mission first while remaining ever devoted to their soldiers.<sup>34</sup>

### **Mandates for the Future**

From the discussion of the four domains, a number of mandates emerge for consideration by strategic leaders in the determination and implementation of national security strategy for the future. These mandates require planning concerning their effective implementation and potential refinement as the “future” security environment comes closer and closer to being the “now.” Leadership can accept some of the mandates immediately and just follow them. Some of the mandates need interagency planning for implementation but also need immediate attention to have them in place in

time to make a difference for the Army After Next timeframe. Others can be considered for a somewhat longer time to ensure the most efficient way to implement programs to achieve them.

1. **Enhance and integrate information gathering/intelligence/analysis systems for continuous use around the world.** Start doing this now so as to take advantage of the current relative pause in military conflict. To partially counteract the uncertainty that pervades our national security future, the US must utilize all of its available intelligence capabilities and technologies to understand potential adversaries in terms of culture, how they think about security-related issues, what equipment they have and where it is, the terrain on possible battlefields of the future, etc. To do this requires an integration of space, air, land and sea assets; a concentration on enhancing analytical capability; a focus on developing a sufficient number of HUMINT sources; and close interagency sharing in plans, requirements and resulting information. Militarily, the goal is to have “expert generals” grown during peacetime from lower ranks for each area of potential conflict around the world and to have comprehensive, state-of-the-art (perhaps virtual) “tutorials” about the country, terrain, and people for all of the armed forces to use on their way over to the region.
2. **Focus U.S. assets and energies -- during peacetime as well as during**

**conflict and MOOTW -- more on information operations, to include psychological operations and deception.** The uncertainty of the future must be matched with more sophisticated intelligence gathering and increased analytical tools and efforts. In this information age, the United States must learn to project the picture of its capabilities and intents as it desires the picture to be seen by potential adversaries. Since the United States is founded on the idea of an open society and truthfulness in our leaders, our pictures must be able to be supported by the media and the general population. This requires a balance of current fact and planned future, not an easy task. The use of all types of intelligence sources, including "secret agents," must be coordinated and integrated among all governmental departments, with capabilities supplementing each other. Some activities must remain sensitive to public disclosure, but the intelligence gained must be shared absolutely among departments and with the general in the field. The military should creatively expand its techniques for the use of psychological and deception operations now to prepare for contingencies on the ground in the future. This may require altered structures, numbers and training for special military units.

- 3. Commit to victory in diplomacy, shaping of regional relationships, and actual battle.** Victory here means resolution of the problem, not necessarily always getting the U.S. way, and will often include legitimate compromise on all sides. The goal should be to resolve the conflict without having to put



soldiers on the ground. There must always be a way for the adversary to escape from the situation diplomatically, having saved face. More emphasis needs to be placed on continuous diplomatic, political, and economic efforts (shaping aspect) by other than just the military. Nation building and peace monitoring are activities for the State Department with help from the other departments and agencies. Training must support a leadership role in these efforts as well as develop the interagency cooperation and coordination needed. The government must act more like a single entity moving toward a single goal than as multiple groups that simply get in each others' ways.

- 4. In the event of military involvement/conflict, clearly define the purpose and desired endstate.** This is the responsibility of the NCA (with input from advisors from all fields). If it is right for the U.S. to be there, it is right to have a commitment to win, and to win quickly. The other responsibility of the NCA is to clearly explain through the media the purpose and endstate to the American people to garner their support. This explanation does not require the details of execution. When the purpose and desired endstate are defined, the NCA must turn the planning and execution over to the generals to develop the military operations to achieve the endstate. While war should be quick and should minimize casualties as possible, the intent must be to win the war and war does create casualties. If casualties are not acceptable for the purpose stated, then the U.S. should not send its military. A precedent has been set for using precision strikes and surgical insertions, but without

assuring resolution of the conflict (i.e., without getting to the endstate). The NCA should not be doing targeting; the NCA's responsibility is making the decision to go and defining the purpose and endstate. At that point, the responsibility has to be transferred to the generals to execute to the endstate.

5. **Utilize diversity smartly.** Diversity is present in individuals' capabilities, thinking processes, expertise, personalities, and cultural backgrounds. Diversity is also present in functions of departments, in services of the military, and in units of the branches within services. Physical regions of the world, cultures and capabilities of countries, and strengths of governments also create diversity. The goal is to share responsibilities in such a way that capabilities are supplemented. Match individuals, agencies, and even countries with tasks for which they have expertise and talents. Count on creative soldiers to develop plans, on the State Department for nation building, on countries with good diplomatic abilities or useful access to conduct negotiations. It is important that diversity is not eliminated by trying to squeeze all into the same mold. For example, do not be so quick to throw out young soldiers who do not fit the mold of the past. The best solutions may come from the past gang members who understand street fighting, or from academicians who are whizzes with the computer networks, or from the "malcontents" who are always looking for different ways and questioning the norm. All need to be trained to be soldiers, but not necessarily soldiers of the

same mode in this day of uncertainty, specialization, information focus, and global-sized problems.

6. **Solicit and reward creativity.** Decisions in an environment of uncertainty and good global information for all sides require flexibility, variety, and spontaneity. At all levels, strategic, operational and tactical, decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis, striving for the non-routine. The motto should perhaps be “Keep ‘em on their toes” and this should apply to ourselves (stimulating new thought) as well as potential adversaries.
  
7. **Choose generals who can lead, command, think creatively, and stand up for what they believe.** The character needed to be a general has not changed over the years. The criteria the U.S. uses to pick them and high-level expectations of them appear to have changed. Soldiers who do not say “yes” are eliminated at all ranks. Those chosen to move forward seem to be of the same mold – not many would fit in the category of the intuitive visionaries who moved the military forward in the past. The military leadership needs to consider whether the right balance of officers is chosen for advanced schooling. For example, are the senior service schools more heavily weighted toward good tactical warfighters or good strategic thinkers? In the future, development of experts in cultures/country characteristics may be an equal criterion for attendance at the senior-level schools.

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## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sun Tzu, The Art of War, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), v. (Foreword by B. H. Liddell Hart).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>9</sup> General William W. Hartzog and LTC (Ret) Keith E. Bonn, Back to the Future: A Historical Opportunity for the Army to Effect Balanced Change (Fort Monroe, VA: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Planning Group Paper, n.d.), 14.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Force XXI Operations: A Concept for the Evolution of Full-Dimensional Operations for the Strategic Army of the Twenty-First Century, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5 (Fort Monroe, VA: U.S. Department of Army, 1 August 1994), 2-4.

<sup>11</sup> Sun Tzu, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Sun Tzu, excerpts as marked from pages 63 to 149.

<sup>13</sup> Peter J. Schoemaker, "Special Operations Forces: The Way Ahead," Special Warfare (Winter 98): 8.

<sup>14</sup> Frank J. Stech, "Winning CNN Wars" Parameters 14 (Autumn 1994): 51.

<sup>15</sup> National Defense Panel, Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Arlington, VA: Report of the National Defense Panel to the Secretary of Defense, December 1997), 67.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Van Riper and Robert H. Scales, Jr., "Preparing for War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Strategic Review (Summer 1997): 20.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert H. Scales, Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War (Washington DC: Brassey's, 1997): 367.

<sup>18</sup> William T. Johnsen et al., The Principles of War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Strategic Considerations (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1995): 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Scales, 370-371.

<sup>22</sup> National Defense Panel, v.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>25</sup> Johnsen, 21-22.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Hartzog and Bonn, 7.

<sup>28</sup> National Defense Panel, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>32</sup> TRADOC PAM, 1-5.

<sup>33</sup> Hartzog, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

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