Sun Tzu and Clausewitz Applied to War at Sea
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Although neither Sun Tzu nor Clausewitz wrote specifically about war at sea, their respective philosophies are applicable to naval warfare. Clausewitz and Sun Tzu shared a belief in the predominance of politics in war and in devising an appropriate strategy to protect the national interests. Clausewitz and Sun Tzu would agree that the maximum concentration of forces was the key to winning the decisive battle and overthrowing the enemy. Unlike Clausewitz, Sun Tzu's philosophy emphasizes the relevance of deception in the achievement of concentration at the decisive point. For Sun Tzu, concentration is not simply amassing the largest number of ships, as Clausewitz would have advocated. Instead, it means manipulating the enemy's perceptions so that he will fight on his terms. Sun Tzu describes it as: "Those skilled at making the enemy move do so by creating a situation to which he must conform. They entice him with something he is certain to take, and with lures of ostensible profit, they wait for him in strength." There is evidence that governments have applied Sun Tzu's philosophy to naval warfare in the past. The tactics employed by Elizabeth I in dealing with the Spanish Armada in 1588 are more reflective of the philosophy of Sun Tzu.

Two hundred English vessels met the great Spanish Armada in the English Channel. The English craft were lighter, and faster and well furnished with guns. They harassed the lumbering ships of the Armada, broke up its formations, and attacked its great vessels one by one. It found no refuge at Calais, where English fireships drove it out to sea. The employment strategy of the Spanish Armada more closely resembles the philosophy of Clausewitz. The search for the decisive battle is closely related to Clausewitz's principle of destruction and achievement of victory through the greatest possible concentration of forces at the decisive point. Clausewitz describes it this way:

> Combat is the only effective force in war; its aim is to destroy the enemy's forces as a means to a further end. . . . It follows that the destruction of the enemy's forces underlies all military actions; all plans are ultimately based on it, resting on it like an arch on its abutment. . . . The decision by arms is for all major and minor operations in war what cash payment is in commerce. . . . Thus, it is evident that destruction of the enemy forces is always the superior, more effective means, with which others cannot compete. We do claim that the direct annihilation of the enemy's forces must always be the dominant consideration. We simply want to establish this dominance of the destructive principle.
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> As many troops as possible should be brought into the engagement at the decisive point. . . . This is the first principle of strategy" Also, "The best strategy is always *to be very strong*; first in general, and then at the decisive point. . . . There is no higher and simpler law of strategy than that of keeping one's forces concentrated.

Superior concentration at sea cannot necessarily force a major engagement. It is easier for the enemy's fleet to avoid battle at sea, than it is for an army to do so on land. It follows that the greater the concentration achieved by a fleet, the more likely the weaker opponent is to avoid battle. Only through dispersing, or rather pretending to disperse its fleet, can the stronger navy lure the enemy into battle. The more one concentrates one's force and efforts to secure the desired decision, the more exposure there is to sporadic attack. Superior concentration of naval forces creates yet another serious problem. The greater the concentration of a fleet, the more difficult it is to conceal its whereabouts and movements. Once a fleet is formed, concealment and flexibility are almost impossible. Sun Tzu's approach calls for the need to keep one's own dispositions "shapeless" in order to avoid disclosing one's intentions. Sun Tzu states:

> 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. It is according to the shapes that I lay plans for victory, but the multitude does not comprehend this. Although everyone can see the outward aspects, none understands the way in which I have created victory.

Sun Tzu is interested in the diplomatic alliance systems and coalitions formed before and during a war, and he is concerned with the economic and financial dimensions of waging war as well as with the technological and material aspects of war, which were of no interest to Clausewitz. Technological changes in armament, ship design, and tactics prevalent to changes in war itself are best dealt with by the philosophy of Sun Tzu. Sun Tzu stated that the intelligent strategist must fight only on his own preferred terms and exploit his comparative advantage. As Sun Tzu puts it, "Therefore the clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy but does not allow the enemy's will to be imposed on him and therefore those skilled in war bring the enemy to the field of battle, and are not brought by him." Sun Tzu also wrote about his desire to win at the lowest possible cost. Since this entails taking minimum risks for maximum gains, his theories are dominated by the constant search for low-cost victories and force multipliers. He embraced new technologies and developments. Convinced that an economy of force was a dangerously false economy, Clausewitz instead preferred to focus on the effectiveness of force—that is, on the outcome, not the cost. "Since in war," he says, "too small an effort can result not just in failure but in positive harm, each side is driven to outdo the other." Clausewitz's conception of a true economy of force was not to win at the lowest possible cost but rather to make use of all available forces regardless of the cost.

Sun Tzu believed in the indirect approach, which relates to the search for comparative advantage, economy of force, surprise and deception, and limited war. For Clausewitz, clarity is the objective and decisive action where the means. The very idea of tolerating an ongoing dispute or a "shared sea" would be completely contrary to his beliefs. Sun Tzu is clearly more adequate to the task of describing war at sea, than Clausewitz is.

Bibliography

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