

~ Military Strategy and Warriorship ~

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In war, military strategy is tailored to meet the enemy's threat, to persuade those who might fight not to fight, and when necessary, to win and achieve Victory in the shortest possible time. In the War against Global Jihad and its network of enablers, America's top leadership appears to be achieving the opposite outcome. American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines are rightly lauded by the American public for their courage and sacrifice in the fight for United States national security, but the high quality of American soldiers and Marines at battalion level and below cannot compensate for inadequate senior leadership at the highest levels in war.

Today, the senior leadership of the U.S. armed forces is overly bureaucratic and process oriented risk averse to some degree in a prevailing strategy. Competent Generals and Admirals must communicate to their civilian superiors the truth of what is really happening and what actions and resources are required for success and Victory. War has no place for political correctness.

President Abraham Lincoln struggled with some incompetents in the Civil War until he found someone who won battles. The man was Ulysses S. Grant, an officer no one in the Army's command hierarchy wanted. Long before America entered World War II, Gen. George C. Marshall, an officer who had waited 36 years for promotion to flag rank, ended his first year in office as Army chief of staff in 1940 by retiring 54 generals.

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Marshall continued to replace hundreds of generals and colonels, elevating men like James Gavin, a captain in 1942, to brigadier general and division commander in 1944. When Gen. Matthew Ridgway assumed command of the Eighth Army in Korea, he was no less ruthless than Marshall had been with commanders in the field who did not measure up.

In war, this condition is dangerous because the nation's three- and four-star generals are the key figures who interface between policy and action. They decisively shape and implement the military component of national strategy that is consistent with American policy goals, ensuring that results are attained within the framework of the mission, and taking into account intangibles such as the reputation of the American people. They determine the metrics that measure success or failure, and they create the command climate that motivates subordinate commanders to take prompt action to overcome any and all difficulties.

Two important corollaries must be mentioned. In war, for generals to succeed, they must be men of character and integrity (and the vast majority are), accepting risk and uncertainty as the unchanging features of war. They must also demonstrate a willingness to stand up and be counted, to put country before career and, if necessary to resign.

Generals, also, must be students of their profession and of their enemies especially now with a thorough understanding of the expanding global Caliphate, Sharia Law and the goals of the Jihadists. They must be able to put themselves in the position of their enemies, avoid rigid adherence to ideas and methods that are ineffective and adopt what works while concentrating their minds on the essential tasks. These attributes have many times been absent in the U.S. senior military and political ranks.

For America's current leaders, attention must be paid. This includes an expanded awareness of the unchanging requirements of vision, national strategy and national survival. Ironically, however, at a moment of unprecedented national peril, our senior political and military leaders have strayed far from such awareness. To correct this loss of direction, they should begin with a close look at Sun-Tzu.

This Chinese military thought originated amidst Neolithic village conflicts almost five thousand years ago. But it was Sun-Tzu's THE ART OF WAR, written sometime in the fifth century BCE, that synthesized a coherent set of principles designed to produce military victory. At best, the full corpus of Sun-Tzu's works and those of the other great strategists should be well understood and followed closely by all who currently seek to strengthen our military posture in the essential global war against terror and radical Islam. Indeed, the timeless Principles of War apply even more aptly to today's global conflict than they did to past historic conflicts.

As set forth in the annals of military history, these principles are best identified as:

1. Objective
2. Offensive
3. Mass
4. Economy of Force
5. Maneuver
6. Unity of Command
7. Security
8. Surprise
9. Simplicity

The United States now needs to re-evaluate the very meanings of power in world politics and of the associated war principles that seek victory in a warfare that is not prolonged. The principle of “Objective” states – “When undertaking any mission, commanders should have a clear understanding of the expected outcome and its impact.”

Today we call it the “endgame.” Following Clausewitz and Sun-Tzu, commanders (to include the Commander-in-Chief and his staff) need to appreciate political ends and to understand how the military conditions they might achieve can contribute to these ends. Another principle, that of the “Offensive,” states that “offensive operations are essential to maintain the freedom of action necessary for success, exploit vulnerabilities and react to rapidly changing situation and unexpected developments.”

America’s leaders should begin with Sun-Tzu’s principles concerning diplomacy. Political initiatives and agreements may be useful, they will be instructed, but prudent military preparations should never be neglected. The primary objective of every state should be to weaken enemy states (today, states that support terror, e.g. Iran, North Korea and Syria) without actually engaging in armed combat. This objective links the ideal of “complete victory” to a “strategy for planning offensives.” “One who cannot be victorious assumes a defensive posture; one who can be victorious, attacks....Those who excel at defense bury themselves away below the lowest depths of Earth. Those who excel at offense move from above the greatest heights of Heaven.”

The principle of “Mass” outlines that commanders at all levels aggregate the effects of combat power in time and space to overwhelm enemies or to gain control of the situation. Time in warfare applies the elements of combat power against multiple targets simultaneously, and space concentrates the effects of different elements of combat power against a single target.

There is another section of the Art of War that can help the United States.

This is Sun-Tzu’s repeated emphasis on the “unorthodox” or, as we prefer to call it today, unconventional warfare. We must, from a high-level strategic view, look at this current global war as combating an enemy who fights in a completely unorthodox manner, and we must fight him the very same way, but more cleverly and more effectively. We must use our full military and intellectual arsenal as a super power to bring victory sooner rather than later. And this can be done only with a specific endgame in mind, and with a corollary commitment to victory.

Drawn from the conflation of thought that crystallized as Taoism, the ancient strategist observes: “...in battle, one engages with the orthodox and gains victory through the unorthodox.” In an especially complex passage, Sun-Tzu discusses how the orthodox may be used in unorthodox ways, while an orthodox attack may be unorthodox when it is unexpected. Taken seriously by our strategic planners, this passage could represent a subtle tool for strategic and tactical implementation, one that might purposefully exploit an enemy state’s particular matrix of military expectations.

For the United States, the “unorthodox” should now be fashioned not only on the battlefield, but also long before the battle. Indeed, to prevent the most dangerous forms of battle, which would be expressions of all-out unconventional warfare, the United States should examine a number of promising new postures. These postures would focus upon a reasoned shift from an image of “orthodox” rationality to one of somewhat “unorthodox” irrationality. This is what the late American nuclear strategist Herman Kahn once called the “rationality of pretended irrationality.”

For now, every enemy state knows pretty much exactly how the United States will initiate and conduct war. President Obama’s speech at West Point disclosing US strategy in Afghanistan is a good example of naiveté. If, however, the United States did not always signal perfect rationality to its enemies – that is, that its actions (defensive and offensive) were not always completely measured and predictable – it could significantly enhance both its overall deterrence posture and its capacity to carry out certain preemption options. These same lessons now apply to diplomacy and politics, which are all too often mired in entirely predictable U.S. policies.

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