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## MODERN MILITARY STRATEGY AND ITS FOUNDERS: SUN TZU, CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ AND ANDRE BEAUFRE

### ABSTRACT

At the dawn of the twenty-first century there is a widespread belief in the unique character of this moment of history, but military forces still remain a fundamental tool at the disposal of the authorities of the state which wants to play a significant role. Primary role of the armed forces of a sovereign state is still to provide military security of the state and its defence. The capacity of taking action, the nature and structure of the armed forces determines the credibility and effectiveness of national defence, the position and contribution of the state in the creation of its own and collective safety. Ensuring effective implementation of the objectives of the security policy is the subject of a military strategy. This role of strategy has been perceived by philosophers and representatives of other sciences since ancient times. Linking strategy with the policy was stressed and well-characterized by General Andre Beaufre, Carl von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. It is a fascinating subject of studies how military leaders and decision makers from antiquity, through Middle Ages, Renaissance, to the present days implemented Sun Tzu's lessons even without any knowledge about *The Art of War's* existence, and how the ancient Chinese conclusions are similar to the those of the European prophet of strategy – Carl von Clausewitz.

**Keywords:** military strategy, Sun Tzu, Carl von Clausewitz, Andre Beaufre

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, strategy in warfare is the science or art of employing all the military, economic, political, and other resources of a country to achieve the objects of war (STRATEGY). Such a kind of present defining of strategy has its roots in early Chinese and European research on strategy.

## PURPOSE OF THE MILITARY STRATEGY BY ANDRE BEAUFRE

At the dawn of the twenty-first century there is a widespread belief in the unique character of this moment of history. This awareness is a reflection not only of the evolution of historical events such as the advent of the “third wave” of civilization (TOFFLER 1997). It is also the result of, for instance, the extension of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1999, widening the European Union, or ubiquitous globalization.

However, despite these processes military forces still remains a fundamental tool at the disposal of the authorities of the state which wants to play a significant role on the international arena to guarantee defence of the interests of the state and its citizens, respect for the law, the objectives set by the government. The former president of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel described the important role of armed forces of a democratic state in the following way: “The Army will always remain an unspoken expression of the will to live in peace, the defence of freedom and engagement in joint efforts to ensure the freedom of others” (HAVEL 1996). If a state is able to ensure safety in the military sphere, it means that it is sovereign and reliable, and when it comes to foreign policy it is a subject – not an object. In turn, the sovereignty and credibility of a state also affect other areas of security such as economy, rule of law, and even ecology.

Today, there are different models of the armed forces: a professional (vocational) army, a recruitment-based army, a militia-type army, an army being a compilation of various other models. In addition we can observe a dynamic development of private military companies offering very wide spectrum of security and defence services. Structure of the armed forces is a reflection of historical, political, cultural, ideological, economic, and geographic circumstances. However, the primary role of the armed forces of a sovereign state organization is still to provide military security of the state and its defence. These issues are governed by the most important documents such as constitutions and security policies<sup>1</sup>. This in turn compels state authorities to provide the armed forces with the ability to conduct certain activities, to create, to maintain and modernize their structures.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare: The Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland shall safeguard the independence of the state and the integrity of its territory and ensure the security and inviolability of its borders (*The Constitution of the Republic of Poland*, 1997: art. 26, sec. 1) or: The Polish Armed Forces are an essential element of the defense system of the state. The unique capacities within the state make the armed forces a multifunctional tool to perform a wide range of missions, which include: ensuring national defense and opposition to aggression in the context of alliance commitments, participation in the stabilization of the international situation, supporting homeland security and providing aid to the public. (*The strategy of development of the national security system of the Republic of Poland* 2022: 19).

The capacity of taking action, the nature and structure of the armed forces determines the credibility and effectiveness of national defence, the position and contribution of the state in the creation of its own and collective safety. Ensuring effective implementation of the objectives of the security policy is the subject of a military strategy. This role of strategy has been perceived by philosophers and representatives of other sciences since ancient times. Linking strategy with the policy was stressed and well-characterized by General Andre Beaufre<sup>2</sup>, who wrote that a military strategy: “is the art of using force to achieve the objectives of politics” (BEAUFRE 1965(b): 18). The purpose of the strategy is thus: “to achieve objectives set by politics, using the best available means” (BEAUFRE 1965(b): 19). And today, in the United States, the national military strategy is: “the art and science of preparation and use of the nation’s armed forces to secure the objectives of national politics with the use of force or the threat of its use” (DOCTRINE FOR JOINT OPERATIONS: GL-10). Therefore, in the context of the creation of state structures which are supposed to effectively apply the policy of the state, one of the most important tasks of legislative and executive authorities in the area of security policy is to transform the armed forces and their potential in a way that allows effective, immediate and flexible response to re-emerging newly emerging, often unpredictable, threats – but this is not possible without the development of a strategy. What should the decision makers be guided by? General Beaufre argued that:

strategic reasoning should combine psychological data with physical data using an abstract and rational thinking process. It requires a very large capacity of analyzing and synthesizing. The analysis is apparently used to gather the elements needed for the diagnosis; it actually should mean some selection (BEAUFRE 1965(b): 28).

The complexity and variability of the contemporary environment of each country and global systems pose the creators of a military strategy of states a lot of questions. General Beaufre put it in the following way:

versatility and the inability to predict make the builder of the defence system face an extremely difficult problem. It is even more difficult given the fact that in every age there is a fixed truth proclaimed in a scientific manner by prophets and momentary leaders, but very rarely confirmed by life (BEAUFRE 1965(a): 163).

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<sup>2</sup> A French general André Beaufre (1902-1975) is well known as a military strategist and as an exponent of an independent French nuclear force. A. Beaufre in 1921 entered the military academy at École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr. In 1925 he saw action in Morocco against the Rif. While serving as permanent secretary of national defence in Algeria in 1940-1941 during World War II, he was arrested by the French Vichy regime, and after his release in 1942 he served in the Free French Army on several fronts until the end of the war in 1945. Beaufre studied at the École Supérieure de Guerre and at the École Libre des Sciences Politiques and was subsequently assigned to the French army’s general staff. Beaufre also commanded the French forces in the 1956 Suez War campaign against Egypt in 1956. Beaufre later became chief of the general staff of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers in Europe in 1958. He was serving as chief French representative to the permanent group of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in Washington in 1960 when he was named général d’armée.

This creates a number of challenges for reformers of the armed forces and makes them face the need for reliable analysis based on contemporary and historical experience, both of their own and of others. Even more so as:

The difficulty of solving problems connected with creating appropriate armed forces lies in it being impossible to use a well-established and precise pattern (standard) of any state or its armed forces which would be suitable for Poland. The character (shape) of armed forces is in fact an autonomous attribute of each state (JAKUBCZAK 1998: 7).

This does not preclude, however, and does not exempt anyone from the analysis or a summary outline of the achievements and experiences of other states in this field.

## CHANGING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

In the past, the dominance of wars as sources of danger and misery for nations developed two basic areas of security: a military and a political one. However, the development and the evolution of technology, information, as well as human relations means that the subject, object and space of security indicate a tendency to expand. Security is both a state and a process. Protection is sometimes individual and collective by means of subordination and coordination methods.

Such wide frames of security result from equally broad ideas and definitions of its endangerment which is also of diverse dimension and character. In terms of the subject of security the threats may be of: military, political, economic, ecological, social, psychological and social, civilization or cultural nature. They can be internal or external, as well as direct or indirect. Modern understanding of the security does not assume that it is only the opposite of those threats. In addition to physical survival it also means ensuring the preservation of freedom.

Contemporary understanding of security assumes its broad treatment, far beyond military issues. Based on the subject criterion it covers the range of military, political, economic, ecological, social, cultural and other issues. Security is related to the intertwining dimensions: at an individual, national, state and international level. It reaches: a local, sub-regional, regional and supra-regional and universal level. The subject, object and space of security have a tendency to expand. Security is both a state and a process. Protection is sometimes individual and collective by means of subordination and coordination methods.

The essence of a broad perception of national security, in addition to ensuring survival, boils down to the creation of prosperity of nations, and to providing the development of freedoms. This reflects the progress of civilization of nations and the desire to live in prosperity.

After 1989, predictions about the future of international relations were filled with a naive belief in the advent of universal peace, universal prosperity and triumph of rationalism. However, we may witness a renewal of wars waged by powerful empires in order to maintain their spheres of influence, religious wars, development of organized

crime and terrorism. The impact of the so-called asymmetry, which is in fact a strategy of choosing the right tactic, is more and more visible in today's conflicts and wars. French general Andre Beaufre noted:

It is true that technological progress is an essential power factor. Everyone knows that you cannot stop a tank fire with a rifle or shoot down a plane with an arrow from a bow. It is also known that the advantage that the Romans gained by arming and tactics of their legion allowed them to conquer the greater part of the ancient world. It is absolutely clear that advancement in techniques and tactics gives a great advantage to the one who achieved it, because it provides a strategy with additional and more effective measures.

This progress, however, may prove useless if it serves a wrong strategy. This important matter should always be remembered. Recall, for example, our recent experience with Algeria. Did our modern weapons and equipment allow us to solve the issue? In fact, there is no best tactic in itself, because each tactic has a value only in comparison with the tactic of the opponent. We could, for example, come to realize that airplanes and tanks did not seem to succeed in the fight against guerrillas and that the possession of nuclear weapons did not allow the United States to obtain in Korea anything more than a compromise ceasefire (BEAUFRE 1965(b): 56-57).

These statements are perfectly complemented by the exception of Clausewitz:

Theory should also take into account a human element and allow itself to be reflected in courage, boldness and cheekiness. The art of war has to do with the living force and moral factors; it thus follows that it cannot reach confidence and ruthlessness anywhere (CLAUSEWITZ 1958: 31).

The above thesis perfectly reflects the complex contemporary phenomena associated with the growth of asymmetric threats. The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York conducted on 11 September 2001, the course of action in Afghanistan and Iraq, just confirm the above quotes.

The demanding nature of the contemporary security environment and the wide spectrum of modern military forces tasks is explained by *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*. According to the above mentioned paper the United States employs its military capabilities at home and abroad in support of its national security goals in a variety of operations. These operations vary in size, purpose, and combat intensity within a range of military operations that range from military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence activities to crisis response and limited contingency operations, and if necessary, major operations and campaigns. The use of joint capabilities in military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence activities shapes the operational environment and helps to keep the day-to-day tensions between nations or groups below the threshold of armed conflict while maintaining United States global influence. Many of the missions associated with crisis response and limited contingencies, such as civil support and foreign humanitarian assistance, may not require com-

bat. But others, as evidenced by operations like RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, can be extremely dangerous and may require combat operations to protect forces while accomplishing the mission. Individual major operations and campaigns often contribute to a larger, long-term effort (e.g., Operation ENDURING FREEDOM is part of the global war on terror). The nature of the security environment is such that the military often will be engaged in several types of joint operations simultaneously across the range of military operations. For these operations, commanders combine and sequence offensive, defensive, and stability missions and activities to accomplish the objective. The commander for a particular operation determines the emphasis to be placed on each type of mission or activity (DOCTRINE FOR THE ARMED FORCES: I-15/16).

## SUN TZU AND CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ IN THE MODERN VISIONS

Military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, civil wars in Libya and Syria, define a new meaning of security and threats, refresh discussion on strategy, particularly areas of military affairs and warfare. As mentioned above, the present definition of strategy has its roots in Chinese and European early research on strategy.

Today when one considers the use of force, the proposals from classic works by Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz in military theory hold enduring value. For example “The art of cunning and secrecy is divine. It teaches us to become invisible, to be noiseless and consequently hold the enemy’s fate in our own hands” it is a quotation from Sun Tzu which is placed on the title page of the NATO’s *SOTG MANUAL*<sup>3</sup>.

Sun Tzu, traditional accounts place him from c. 544–496 BCE in the Spring and Autumn Period of China (722–481 BCE), a military general serving under King Helü of Wu, and eye witness of Napoleonic Wars, the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz are the most notable authors of such works. Both of them and their treatises (Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* and Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War*) are most popular in modern day’s Western strategic, security and military thinking. Despite almost two and a half thousand years dividing them, Sun Tzu’s and Clausewitz’s creative analysis of the nature of war are surprisingly convergent.

The question is why? Because there are only few authors of classical works in military theory. This of course is not true, as Herve COUTAU-BEGARIE (2011) in his *Traité de stratégie* listed really plenty of them. The reason is, because of the enduring nature on their contributions and of their insights, it is useful to cite these authors on key points using their own words. Both prophets of military strategy note that the decision to go to war has significant consequences. Sun Tzu writes: “War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin.” Similarly, Clausewitz writes that war is “no place for irresponsible enthusiasts” but rather “a serious means to a serious end.” These cautionary notes are the best places to start when thinking about employing the military instrument of power (JORDAN 2009: 267).

<sup>3</sup> Version 1.0 (2009), title page.

Both authors discerned and lay out convincingly that war is not an independent act, and is not only domain of warriors or soldiers. They put war in the frame of a bigger sketch of kingdom or state activity. Clausewitz's famous statement that "war is merely the continuation of policy by other means" has significant implications for those who must make decisions relating to the use of force. It is clear from the context of this passage that Clausewitz is writing against a contemporary view that, when war begins, the role of politics and political leaders recedes and perhaps even vanishes until peace is once again achieved. Clausewitz finds this dichotomous view of peace and war to be "thoroughly mistaken." Politics and diplomacy do not cease when states resort to force; instead, political leaders have just added one more instrument of power to the means that they are applying to achieve their purposes.

I think that we can propose a thesis that Sun Tzu expressed the same theorem more than dozen hundred years before Carl von Clausewitz was born.

In third chapter of *The Art of War* (SUN TZU 2004: 70) found that:

Thus the highest form of generalship is to balk the enemy's plans," and next "Therefore the skilful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them; he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field.

In this passage of his work Sun Tzu points out that victory should be achieved without military tools, rather by the use of diplomatic and economic measures, by active diplomacy, destroying the opponent's alliances, and keeping prevent enemy from accomplishing his plans and strategy. Exploring the history of military conflicts (for example Punic wars, Polish wars with Teutonic Knights, Second World War or the Gulf wars) surely we will find that above-mentioned excerpt contains true important claims in spite of the passing centuries.

The present *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* points out the same elements as important for strategic plans. The security environment is extremely fluid, with continually changing coalitions, alliances, partnerships, and new (both national and transnational) threats are constantly appearing, is appearing, or in remission. The military is well positioned to conduct operations but must also be prepared to address emerging peer competitors and irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive challenges (DOCTRINE FOR THE ARMED FORCES: x).

The subsequent part *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* seems to repeat Sun Tzu's paragraphs but with more modern vocabulary:

The ability of the US to advance its national interests is dependent on the effectiveness of the United States Government (USG) in employing the instruments of national power to achieve national strategic objectives. The military instrument of national power can be used in a wide variety of ways that vary in purpose, scale, risk, and combat intensity. These various ways can be understood to occur across a continuum of conflict ranging from peace to war (DOCTRINE FOR THE ARMED FORCES: x).



In accordance with the further text of the *Doctrine...* these instruments of national power (diplomatic, informational, military, and economic), are normally coordinated by the appropriate governmental officials, often with National Security Council direction. They are the tools the United States uses to apply its sources of power, including its culture, human potential, industry, science and technology, academic institutions, geography, and national will.

In Israel this complex (political and military) nature of war is well recognized, too: Many strategy experts such as Ephraim Inbar or Shai Feldman have argued that Israeli deterrence was restored after the clash with Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006, thus qualifying it as a success. But in a democracy, an assessment cannot be made according to security criteria alone. It must be more thorough, and especially take into consideration international political issues (COHEN 2010: 155).

Title of the Sun Tzu's third chapter according to older western translations is *Attack by Stratagem*, but we can also meet a different translation of this chapter *Offensive Plans*, in fact it has completely different meanings. The older translation of the title of this chapter created a false conviction that Sun Tzu's military methods were based on tricks and deception or simple, primitive means.

In a different part of Sun Tzu's work we can find following excerpt:

When you engage in actual fighting, if victory is long in coming, then men's weapons will grow dull and their ardour will be damped. If you lay siege to a town, you will exhaust your strength. Again, if the campaign is protracted, the resources of the State will not be equal to the strain. Now, when your weapons are dulled, your ardour damped, your strength exhausted and your treasure spent, other chieftains will spring up to take advantage of your extremity. Then no man, however wise, will be able to avert the consequences that must ensue. Thus, though we have heard of stupid haste in war, cleverness has never been seen associated with long delays. There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare. It is only one who is thoroughly acquainted with the evils of war that can thoroughly understand the profitable way of carrying it on (SUN TZU 2004: 66).

This excerpt is especially important in the face of US, Polish or German experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. Not long ago I found a book *The Clausewitz Delusion. How the American Army Screwed Up the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan* by Stephen L. Melton. The author of the book finds out the truth discovered by Sun Tzu many hundreds years ago:

Despite America's overwhelming military firepower and unprecedented global reach, its excessive overmatch in air and naval forces, and its more than ample political and budgetary support, we are now bogged down in both of these countries, unable to conclude wars we began by our own choice over a half decade ago. The American citizenry, once very supportive of these wars, has become increasingly frustrated and disillusioned by the efforts. As victory remains elusive, defeatism grows.

Do we still understand how to win offensive wars? Has the U.S. military emerged from two generations of Cold War with a sufficient understanding of the nature of of-



fensive warfare at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, to enable the neoconservative urge to renew America's historical expansion? Sadly, the answer is no (MELTON 2009: 1-2).

Of course I can make a long list of significant factors described by Sun Tzu which already have been identified as very important for national security and strategic military practice. Among them are for example:

Thus, what enables the wise sovereign and the good general to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men, is foreknowledge. Now this foreknowledge cannot be elicited from spirits; it cannot be obtained inductively from experience, nor by any deductive calculation. Knowledge of the enemy's dispositions can only be obtained from other men. (SUN TZU 2004: 80)

Today the total of the capabilities that will allow a given force to seek out relevant information on the capabilities and intentions of opposing forces, in other words, intelligence (especially human intelligence), surveillance, and reconnaissance are most crucial points of every one military doctrine.

Finally, it is a fascinating subject of studies how military leaders and decision makers from antiquity, through middle ages, Renaissance, to the present days implemented Sun Tzu's lessons even without any knowledge about *The Art of War's* existence, and how the ancient Chinese conclusions are similar to the European prophet's of strategy – Carl von Clausewitz.

Sun Tzu's and Clausewitz's works still remain the cornerstone of the science and practice of war.

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