

Chapter 5: War, Peace and Coalition Size

Two-thousand five hundred years ago, Sun Tzu, a general in the service of King Ho Lu of Wu, wrote *The Art of War* (James Clavell, ed. New York: Delacorte Press, 1983). On November 28, 1984 Caspar Weinberger, a Secretary of Defense in the service of President Ronald Reagan of the United States, pronounced his doctrine for waging war. These two doctrines, separated by two and a half millennia, one prepared for a leader dependent on a small winning coalition, the other for a leader dependent on a large winning coalition, are remarkable in their similarities and their fundamental differences. Each is concerned with the conduct of warfare that best achieves the objectives of the incumbent leader. Each reaches rather different conclusions about when to fight, what to fight for, and how hard to fight. Each in specific and important ways describes the expectations that follow from the selectorate theory.

Sun Tzu wrote:

The art of war is governed by five constant factors, all of which need to be taken into account. They are: The Moral Law; Heaven; Earth; the Commander; Method and discipline. . . .

These five factors should be familiar to every general. He who knows them will be victorious; he who knows them not will fail. . . .

When you engage in actual fighting, if victory is long in coming, the men's weapons will grow dull and their ardor will be dampened. If you lay siege to a town, you will exhaust your strength, and if the campaign is protracted, the resources of the state will not equal the strain.¹ Never forget: When your weapons are dulled, your ardor dampened, your strength exhausted, and your treasure spent, other chieftains will spring up to take advantage of your extremity. . . .

In all history, there is no instance of a country having benefitted from prolonged warfare. Only one who knows the disastrous effects of a long war can realize the supreme importance of rapidity in bringing it to a close. It is only one who is thoroughly acquainted with the evils of war who can thoroughly understand the profitable way of carrying it on.

The skillful general does not raise a second levy, neither are his supply wagons loaded more than twice. Once war is declared, he will not waste precious time in waiting for reinforcements, nor will he turn his army back for fresh supplies, but crosses the enemy's frontier without delay. The value of time – that is, being a little ahead of your opponent – has counted for more than either numerical superiority or the nicest calculations with regard to commissariat. . . .

Now, in order to kill the enemy, our men must be roused to anger. For them to perceive the advantage of defeating the enemy, they must also have their rewards. Thus, when you capture spoils from the enemy, they must be used as rewards, so that all your men may have a keen desire to fight, each on his own account (pp 9-14).

¹ Enrique IV of Castile, victimized by his use of siege rather than swift combat, might have done well to study Sun Tzu or to have as wise an adviser.

Caspar Weinberger indicated:

First, the United States should not commit forces to combat overseas unless the particular engagement or occasion is deemed vital to our national interest or that of our allies. That emphatically does not mean that we should declare beforehand, as we did with Korea in 1950, that a particular area is outside our strategic perimeter.

Second, if we decide it is necessary to put combat troops into a given situation, we should do so wholeheartedly, and with the clear intention of winning. If we are unwilling to commit the forces or resources necessary to achieve our objectives, we should not commit them at all. . . .

Third, if we do decide to commit forces to combat overseas, we should have clearly defined political and military objectives. And we should know precisely how our forces can accomplish those clearly defined objectives. And we should have and send the forces needed to do just that. . . .

Fourth, the relationship between our objectives and the forces we have committed – their size, composition, and disposition – must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary. Conditions and objectives invariably change during the course of a conflict. When they do change, then so must our combat requirements. . . .

Fifth, before the US commits combat forces abroad, there must be some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress. . . . We cannot fight a battle with the Congress at home while asking our troops to win a war overseas, or, as in the case of Vietnam, in effect asking our troops not to win, but just to be there.

Finally, the commitment of US forces to combat should be a last resort.

Sun Tzu's perspective can coarsely be summarized as follows: (1) satisfying the moral law insures domestic support; (2) war must be swift; (3) resources should be sufficient for a short campaign that does not require reinforcement or significant additional provisions from home; and (4) distributing private goods is essential to motivate soldiers to fight. Sun Tzu says that if the army initially raised proves insufficient or if new supplies are required more than once, then the command lacks sufficient skill to carry the day, implying that perhaps the fight is best given up rather than risk exhausting the state's treasure and giving additional advantages to rival chieftains. Indeed, his advice is rather specific. "If equally matched, we can offer battle; if slightly inferior in numbers, we can avoid the enemy; if quite unequal in every way, we can flee from him" (Sun Tzu, p. 16).

Weinberger's fifth point agrees with Sun Tzu's emphasis on the moral law, but for the rest, there are important differences.² Weinberger's doctrine does not emphasize swift victory, but rather a willingness to spend however much victory requires. He contends that if the United States is not prepared to commit resources sufficient to win, then the United States should not get involved at all. Here he argues for great selectivity in choosing when to risk war. At the same time he recognizes that once committed, victory may take a long time and that, therefore, there

² "The Moral Law causes the people to be in complete accord with their ruler, so that they will follow him regardless of their lives, undismayed by any danger," Sun Tzu p. 9.

must be regular reassessment of objectives in light of evolving circumstances. He endorses a preparedness to raise a larger army and to spend more treasure if warranted by subsequent developments.

Sun Tzu emphasizes the benefits of spoils to motivate combatants (“when you capture spoils from the enemy, they must be used as rewards, so that all your men may have a keen desire to fight, each on his own account”). Weinberger emphasizes the public good of protecting vital national interests. For Sun Tzu, the interest soldiers have in the political objectives behind a fight or their concern for the common good is of no consequence in determining their motivation to wage war. That is why he emphasizes that soldiers fight, “each on his own account.”

Sun Tzu’s attentiveness to private rewards and Weinberger’s concentration on the national interest represent part of the great divide between small coalition and large coalition regimes. This chapter elaborates on that difference in the context of war. It also shows, within the context of the selectorate theory, that Weinberger’s emphasis on committing however many resources victory requires or else not fighting are logical consequences of dependence on a large coalition. Sun Tzu’s emphasis on an initial levy and then, if circumstances indicate this is insufficient, cutting losses, is the effort level that follows as a logical consequence of dependence on a small coalition. The remainder of this chapter is concerned to establish that these and other principles that distinguish the war-fighting behavior of large coalition and small coalition systems follow logically from the selectorate theory.

The Democratic Peace

There are few widely accepted generalizations about politics. One such generalization, sometimes even asserted to be a law (Levy 1988), is that democracies do not fight wars with one another. The empirical evidence for this claim is, in fact, quite strong (Maoz and Abdolali 1989; Bremer 1992; Oneal and Russett 1997; Ray 1995). Recent efforts to cast this empirical observation in doubt notwithstanding (Layne 1994; Spiro 1994; Farber and Gowa 1995; Schwartz and Skinner 1997), extensive, rigorous statistical tests all show a significant propensity for democracies to have been virtually immune from wars with one another (Maoz and Russett 1993; Russett 1995; Maoz 1998). Associated with this observation of what has come to be termed the “democratic peace” are six additional empirical regularities that relate war-proneness and democracy. These are the data-based observations that democracies are not at all immune from fighting wars with non-democracies (Maoz and Abdolali 1989)³; democracies tend to win a disproportionate share of the wars they fight (Lake 1992; Reiter and Stam 1998a); when disputes do emerge, democratic dyads choose more peaceful processes of dispute settlement than other pairings of states (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1998; Dixon 1994; Mousseau 1998; Raymond 1994); in wars they initiate, democracies pay fewer costs in terms of human life and fight shorter wars than nondemocratic states (Bennett and Stam 1996; Siverson 1995); transitional democracies appear to fight one another (Mansfield and Snyder 1995; Ward and Gleditsch 1998); and larger democracies seem more constrained to avoid war than are smaller democracies (Morgan and Campbell 1991).

³ Some studies suggests that democracies are, on the whole, more pacific than autocracies (Benoit 1996; Ray 1995). Yet, such general war avoidance can not account for the relative propensity to fight with different regime types.