

# 孫子兵法

*Dedicated to my father, Franklin (1918-1966),  
a survivor of the Bataan Death March,  
and all those who, like him, have fought and died for freedom*

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**Strategy against Terror**

Ancient Wisdom for Today's War



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# Strategy against Terror

Ancient Wisdom for Today's War

By Gary Gagliardi

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## Key Dates in Modern Islamic Terror

November 4, 1979: Khomeini takes over US embassy in Iran.  
April 18, 1983: US embassy in Beirut bombed, 17 killed.  
October 23, 1983: Marine HQ in Beirut bombed, 239 killed.  
December 12, 1983: US embassy in Kuwait bombed, 6 killed.  
September 20, 1984: US embassy in Beirut bombed, 14 killed.  
December 4, 1984: Kuwaiti Airbus hijacked, 2 Americans killed.  
June 14, 1985: TWA flight to Rome hijacked, 1 American killed.  
October 7, 1985: ship *Achille Lauro* hijacked, 1 American killed.  
November 23, 1985: Egyptian Boeing 737 hijacked, 57 killed.  
December 27, 1985: attacks on Rome and Vienna airports, 18 killed.  
April 2, 1986: TWA flight to Athens bombed, 4 killed.  
April 5, 1986: discotheque in West Berlin bombed, 1 killed.  
September 5, 1986, Pan Am 747 stormed in Karachi, 21 killed.  
September 6, 1986, synagogue in Istanbul attacked, 21 killed.  
April 5, 1988: Kuwaiti 747 hijacked to Algeria, 2 killed.  
December 21, 1988: Pan Am 747 bombed in Lockerbie, 259 killed.  
August 2, 1990–February 27, 1991: Kuwait invaded and America responds.  
February 26, 1993: NY World Trade Center bombed, 6 killed.  
October 4, 1993: in Mogadishu, Somalia, 17 Marines killed.  
December 24, 1994: French Airbus to Paris hijacked, 3 killed.  
July 25, 1995: Paris commuter train bombed, 4 killed.  
November 13, 1996: bombing in Riyadh, 6 Americans killed.  
April 4, 1996: Cairo hotel attacked, 18 Western tourists killed.  
June 25, 1996: Khobar Towers truck bombing, 19 Americans killed.  
February 23, 1997: Empire State Building shooting, 1 killed.  
September 18, 1997: Cairo tourist bus bombed, 10 tourists killed.  
November 17, 1997: attack on tourists in Luxor, Egypt, 70 killed.  
August 7, 1998: Kenya's and Tanzania's US embassies bombed, 270 killed.  
December 28, 1998: tourists kidnapped in Yemen, 4 killed.  
October 31, 1999: Egypt Air pilot suicides off NY, 217 killed.  
October 12, 2000: USS *Cole* bombed, 17 killed.  
December 31, 2000: five bombs explode in Manila, 14 killed.  
September 11, 2001: World Trade Center attacked, 2,700 killed.  
October 5, 2001: anthrax attacks in D.C., 5 killed.  
October 7, 2001–present: America counterattacks in Afghanistan and Iraq.  
March 11, 2004: Madrid trains bombed, 190 killed.

# Introduction

## Strategy and Terror

Sun Tzu developed the most powerful strategic system of all time. In this book, we apply his principles directly to winning the war against terrorism. In this introduction, we present Sun Tzu's key concepts and how they apply to fighting terror.

Sun Tzu wrote succinctly, offering his ideas in a very compact format. Like Euclid's *Geometry*, *The Art of War* offers a set of basic concepts that build one upon the other and have a wide variety of specific applications. In this book, we show Sun Tzu's words on the left-hand pages and apply them specifically to the challenge of defeating terrorism on the facing right-hand pages.

Our instinctual reaction to threat is the "flight or fight" reflex. Sun Tzu taught that both of these natural reactions—running away from challenges or getting into meaningless conflict—lead eventually to disaster. Instead, Sun Tzu taught the strategy of advancing our position into openings created by our opponents. Strong positions make us difficult to attack and, over time, convince others to join us.

Since Sun Tzu's work is about positioning, he organizes the work around the five concepts that define competitive positions. These five factors—philosophy, the ground, the climate, the leader, and methods—provide the framework of his system. In this introduction, we use these five factors to create an overview of using Sun Tzu's strategy against terror.

# 孫子兵法

This analysis begins by seeing war as a battle between philosophies. The War on Terror is a battle of the ideal of freedom against the ideal of moral totalitarianism. Contrary to what we hear in the media, terrorists are not driven by anti-American philosophy. Their philosophy is much older than the existence of the United States.

Sun Tzu admonishes us to learn from the history of war. Fundamentalist battles within the Islamic world are as old as the religion itself. In 657, the Kharijites became Islam's first dogmatic, fanatical sect fighting for power through dogmatism. The pattern of fundamentalist schism has been repeated many times throughout Islamic history. The Wahhabis started as puritanical reformers and rose to conquer Mecca in 1806, only to be later defeated by the Muslim Turks. The Ikhwan, the Wahhabi followers of Ibn Saud, reconquered Mecca in 1924, and Saudi Arabia, the country founded by Ibn Saud, is the main source of today's Wahhabi movement.

These fanatical movements were each resisted and eventually stopped by the mainstream Muslim community itself. From the Kharijites to the Ikhwan, fundamentalist Islamic sects viewed other Muslims as no different from infidels. Ali, the fourth caliph, defeated the Kharijites in 658 at Nahrawan. Similarly, Ibn Saud turned against the Ikhwan at the Battle of Sibilla in 1929.

Like these earlier sects, today's Islamic fanatics want to seize power forcibly on the basis of reforming their less dogmatic fellow Muslims. Only secondarily do they want to convert, conquer, or kill all those who are not Muslims. Fortunately, their numbers are too few to accomplish any of these goals. To succeed they must spread their philosophy and grow their organizations.

America represents a philosophy that is the polar opposite of this religious totalitarianism. We stand for freedom, which terrorists see as the freedom to sin. We stand for democracy, which represents the rule of the non-fundamentalist majority. We also represent the rise of the West and Christianity over Islam during

the last six hundred years. America, like Israel, is a useful target for terrorists. However, their historical mission has always been gaining acceptance in the Islamic world. By identifying America as the enemy, terrorists hope to rally and unite their fellow Muslims.

After philosophy, the next key factor we must understand is the ground. In Sun Tzu's system, the ground is what sustains the army and provides its resources. Sun Tzu teaches that wars depend on economics. Unless the ground supports an army, the army cannot fight. The ground is where we fight to win control of key resources. By this standard, what is the battleground for the terrorists? How do they get rewarded for winning control of this ground?

At this point, terrorists aren't fighting for physical ground. Most of the world's billion Muslims live in police states. The terrorists' goal is not to destroy these totalitarian societies but to control them. Though controlling these states is the long-term goal, these physical states are not the current battleground. First, the terrorists must build up their organizations and finances.

To build their organizations, they need recruits and donations. How does killing innocent people generate donations and recruits? Kidnapping and extortion can raise money directly, but terrorists have found that bombing or attacking public buildings and means of transportation works much better. How do these seemingly senseless deaths generate recruits and money? They get news coverage. This free publicity generates financial support and recruits. The murder of innocents is an advertising campaign that makes terrorists seem powerful and spreads their philosophy. Terrorists are fighting a media war. Their chosen battleground is the television screen and the newspaper front page.

This battleground is connected to what Sun Tzu calls "the climate." This is the next key factor in strategic analysis. The climate is the realm of uncontrollable change. It includes not only the weather, but social, cultural, and business changes as well. Climate shifts in

the battleground bring opposing philosophies into actual conflict. How has the climate in the media changed to bring terrorism to the fore? Isn't the media just reporting the news?

Until Vietnam, thugs like the terrorists were routinely savaged by the morally indignant—rather than morally neutral—media. Al Qaeda's philosophy of religious superiority is nearly identical to the racial superiority beliefs of the German Nazi party and American Ku Klux Klan. In the 1930s and 1940s, the American press universally condemned the Nazis. In the fifties and sixties, the media was just as consistent in condemning the Klan. Reporters applauded the brave sacrifices made to stop tyranny and oppression. Victories were celebrated. Fascists were portrayed as madmen that no sane person could support. The media had a moral compass. Unfortunately, this climate has changed.

Since Vietnam, the increasingly morally neutral, politically correct media claims that it doesn't take sides, but it reports from a standard script. That script is the story of David versus Goliath. The media casts America in the role of Goliath. It casts whoever opposes America as David. The press of today therefore doesn't condemn terrorists like the press once criticized the Nazis and the Klan. We don't see prime-time specials exposing the cruelty and viciousness of terrorist organizations. The news agency Reuters doesn't even use the word "terrorist" because it makes a moral judgment about those who make a practice of killing innocent people. This is the climate that makes the terrorist advertising program possible.

The media also uses its David-versus-Goliath script to characterize corporations as evil. Imagine if, instead of terrorists, a corporation were publicly murdering people to advertise its product. Would members of the press cooperate in the same way as they have with terrorism? After every murder, would they wait for the corporation's announcement claiming credit? Would the

media promote negotiations, tolerance, and understanding of that corporation's needs despite its methods? Of course not.

In the media war, terrorists are refining their message. Al Qaeda's founder, Abdullah Azzam, described his mission simply as "Jihad and the rifle alone: no negotiations, no conferences and no dialogues." Its goal was overthrowing "the godless regimes" in the Middle East, with no mention of America or the Palestinians. By 1998, bin Laden had added the media's David-versus-Goliath script, "the United States is occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of its territories, Arabia, plundering its riches, overwhelming its rulers, humiliating its people..." Bin Laden further strengthened this message in 2004 by adding the press's favorite evil corporation: "This war makes millions of dollars for big corporations, either weapons manufacturers or those working in the reconstruction [of Iraq], such as Halliburton and its sister companies..." Then, in his video released right before the U.S. presidential election, bin Laden echoed every charge in Michael Moore's propaganda film because it is typifying what the media wanted to hear.

By playing to the media's prejudices, terrorists have discovered that it can get virtually unlimited free non-judgmental advertising as long as it keeps up its killing and hostage-taking. Unfortunately, Sun Tzu teaches us that we cannot control a battleground's climate, especially the climate in the media. The climate changes naturally over time. We can, however, change the battleground. This is the role of leaders and methods, the last two key factors in strategy.

Sun Tzu teaches that methods must conform to the organization's core philosophy. These methods determine the shape of the organization. Terrorists are defined by their methods. They intentionally threaten innocent people to blackmail others into cooperation. Terrorists leverage the compassion of their enemies against them. While America may unavoidably kill civilians in going after terrorists, our actions are not terrorism because it is not our goal

to kill innocents. On the other hand, leaders like Saddam Hussein, Kim Jong Il, or the late Yassar Arafat do satisfy this definition of terrorism because they intentionally their own nations as hostage. Sun Tzu's framework can be used to analyze the weaknesses and strengths of terrorists' methods and their organizations.

Terrorist leaders such as bin Laden changed the rules when they discovered that by directing their threats and blackmail against non-Muslims—Jews, Americans, and Europeans—they could get broader support for fundamentalism from within the Muslim world. Sun Tzu teaches us that we must fight on our opponent's home ground rather than our own. By attacking innocent Jews and Westerners, terrorists are following this dictate.

An Al Qaeda training manual recently discovered in Manchester, England, explains the terrorists' organization and its methods in detail. The focus is primarily on growing the organization, recruiting new members, testing them, training them, organizing them, and so on. When the manual suggests acts of terror, it gives public places a higher priority than political or economic institutions. Why? They are less secure and generate better news coverage.

From the manual, we learn to see Al Qaeda as a secret brotherhood providing a sense of belonging for its members. Most of its methods—secret signs, setting up meetings, raising and handling donations—would be familiar to the Masons, Lions, and Rotary.

Why is a secret brotherhood so appealing to young Muslims? Most Muslims live in police states. While most people in the world put their efforts into economic competition, these states are often described as "kleptocracies" that extort tribute for any economic activity. The Heritage Foundation lists virtually every Muslim state in the "mostly unfree" or "repressed" categories in its *Index of Economic Freedom*. Al Qaeda appeals to frustrated young people with no productive outlet for their aspirations.

Al Qaeda's training manual teaches how to attract members

through coercion, greed, the offer of adventure and amusement, and fear. Al Qaeda doesn't solicit the most religious members of society. It rates smugglers as the best potential recruits.

There are over a billion Muslims. If only one Muslim out of ten thousand (one thousandth of 1 percent) joins Al Qaeda, that makes one hundred thousand members. This is the base (*al Qaeda* means "base") of a substantial pyramid. Out of this hundred thousand, only a few hundred become "commanders" who collect money, organize meetings, solicit new members, and so on. Like any pyramid scheme, local organizations channel funds up to the parent organization.

Lower in the pyramid, local Al Qaeda cells have limited abilities, but there are many of them. On average, they are relatively harmless no matter how bloody their intentions. Few cells get their hands on explosives or have the skill to plan a local bombing. A truly rare cell can plan an attack like the Madrid bombing. It is their numbers that make these cells dangerous. Out of this large network, a few talented individuals can rise and get the resources necessary to wreak havoc.

How can we create a workable method to fight this large network of independent cells? Sun Tzu's strategy doesn't suggest just one method to counter our enemies but a host of them. In adapting Sun Tzu's concepts to the War on Terror, we cover a wide variety of approaches through the course of this book.

To destroy Al Qaeda and similar terror organizations, we must undermine the pyramid on which it is based. Of course, we must never give into the blackmail and hostage-taking that is the basis of terrorism. Since Al Qaeda creates support through the media, we must address the message the potential recruits and donors hear through the press. By killing terrorists, we can fill the news media with stories of their defeat. As bin Laden himself said, "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature,

they will like the strong horse.” When it is clear that the terrorists’ strategy has brought nothing but more defeat to the Islamic world, Muslims will rethink investing sons and dollars in the effort.

Moving the physical battleground to the Middle East forces mainstream Muslims to confront the heritage of terror. After Afghanistan and Iraq, terrorists returned to attacking their fellow Muslims in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and even Uzbekistan. These states are increasing their activities against terror. This exposes much of Al Qaeda’s hidden structure. As war opponents predicted, we stirred up an anthill by moving into Iraq, but it is the ants and their hidden organizations that are suffering. They are less dangerous out in the open than they are building and burrowing underground. Even when terrorists move into Iraq to fight Americans, they are helping us. Unlike the media battle, fighting our army in the field is extremely costly. It pressures their limited financial resources and eliminates their most dedicated members.

As Sun Tzu says, when we go to war, we cannot know all the dangers of using arms, but we cannot know all the benefits either. Though the press continually reemphasizes how we didn’t find Saddam’s chemical or biological weapons, the biggest benefit of the war in Iraq was that it uncovered a secret plot to move nuclear weapons into the area from North Korea through Pakistan. This plot to spread nuclear weapons throughout the region was the single greatest danger to human life on earth. Though they get scant attention in the press, the nuclear weapons that we have uncovered in Libya and Iran are as dangerous to our safety as the weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that have gone missing.

Longer term, we must provide positive alternatives for the people of Islam. When people’s political and economic options are limited, they are tempted by terrorism as a “career path.” As long as the Muslim world lives under tyranny, poisonous secret organizations will continue to exist and command a sympathetic following.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, we have potentially carved out some free space within a world of tyranny. These areas can provide Muslims with a beacon of freedom. It may take years to realize this dream, but the examples of Iraq and Afghanistan are already having an impact on Libya, Syria, Iran, and other Islamic nations.

As America has been destined to fight against the tyrannies of monarchy, fascism, and communism, we must commit ourselves to a media war, a message war, against Islamic tyranny. This is a religious war—not of Christianity against Islam, but of those who support God’s gift of freedom against those who want to compel religious belief to justify their own rise to power.

The Islamic world has always been divided, not only by religious differences but by ancient clan and tribal conflicts. These groups have continually fought against one another for dominance. We must fight for the idea that constitutional democracy, in which the rights of minorities are protected, is the Creator’s ultimate political solution for the need for unity among the *umma*, the Islamic brotherhood.

Muslims must see that freedom, opportunity, democracy, and Islam are all gifts from God. During the Dark Ages in Europe, Muslims were the most tolerant, educated, and civilized people in the world. Jews moved to Muslim countries to *escape* persecution. Promoting the values of the Islamic golden age would be a powerful alternative to the failed policies of Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the other divisive forces of terrorism.

Over time, Sun Tzu says, the climate changes. Eventually, Islamic terrorism will seem as meaningless as fascism or devil worship. Until then, we must use all our strategic skills to stem the tide of terror. The purpose of this book is to spread an understanding of those skills.

