

**AN EVALUATION OF THE U.S. INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN
IN THE CONTEXT OF SUN TZU'S ART OF WAR**

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ABSTRACT

The 9/11 attacks have created a share for the United States of America (U.S.) involving in the Wars of Afghanistan from 2001 to 2013. President George W. Bush launched military operation pre-emptively by adopting the “hard power” approach which deployed advanced-technology ammunitions, whereas President Barrack Obama opted for the “smart power” approach which combines rewards and punishments to its alliances and enemies. However, “total victory” achieved in the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan is somehow still illusive in comparison to Sun Tzu’s Art of War due to high degree of resistance. By using Sun Tzu’s maxims as a framework, the study examines the current U.S. military policies in Afghanistan Wars and hence evaluates U.S. military campaigns in Afghanistan. Finally, the contingency of the U.S. and coalitions in resolving the Afghanistan crisis is summarized. The study adopts a secondary research method based on Sun Tzu’s Art of War as the main source of reference, whilst other information is collected from newspapers, academic journals and news magazines from libraries, online data base as well as the Internet. The findings and results were generated accordingly. After a comprehensive study, comparison made to the principle of Sun Tzu revealed that U.S. is fighting a losing battle in the military engagement in Afghan soil because of increasing weaknesses which have emerged than strengths. These weaknesses including U.S. ignorance of human and financial factors from both Afghanistan and America, geo-political elements, underestimate of enemy, heavy reliance on coalition forces with Pakistan, conflict of interests and insufficient of U.S. human intelligence. In short, Sun Tzu emphasized the vital importance of war to the state, the life and death for the army because the results of a war might determine the destiny of state. Therefore, the issue of war deserves thorough and comprehensive study.

ABSTRAK

Serangan 9/11 membuka tirai sejarah ketenteraan Amerika Syarikat (AS) campurtangan dalam Peperangan Afghanistan 2001 hingga 2013. Presiden George W. Bush mengambil kesempatan untuk melancarkan operasi ketenteraan secara “*pre-emptive*” dengan mengamplikasikan pendekatan “*hard power*” yang berpandukan senjata berteknologi canggih. Manakala President Barrack Obama pula memilih pendekatan “*smart power*” yang mengutamakan ganjaran dan hukuman kepada negara-negara bersekutu dan musuhnya. Walau bagaimanapun, “*total victory*” yang merupakan sasaran operasi ketenteraan AS di Afghanistan masih tidak tercapai, mengikut *Sun Tzu’s Art of War*, kerana wujudnya faktor penolakan. Oleh itu, objektif am tesis ini adalah untuk menganalisa polisi-polisi ketenteraan AS dalam Peperangan Afghanistan yang sedia ada berlandaskan *Sun Tzu’s Art of War*, mengenalpasti pencapaian operasi ketenteraan AS di Afghanistan. Akhir sekali, kontingensi AS dan negara-negara bersekutunya dalam penyelesaian krisis Afghanistan akan dianalisa. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan sekunder di mana *Sun Tzu’s Art of War* merupakan bahan rujukan utama, manakala bahan-bahan media massa bercetak dan elektronik seperti artikel akhbar, jurnal akademik, dan majalah samada dari perpustakaan dan laman web turut dirujuk. Setelah menyelami bahan-bahan rujukan yang ditemui, didapati bahawa *Sun Tzu’s Art of War* mempertikaikan tindakan AS memandangkan negara maju tersebut mengalami kegagalan dalam operasi ketenteraannya di Perangan Afghanistan sekiranya dibandingkan dengan prinsip-prinsip peperangan Sun Tzu. termasuklah pihak AS mengabaikan faktor manusia dan kewangan yang terlibat, elemen geo-politik, memandang rendah pada musuh (iaitu pejuang al-Qaeda), terlalu bergantung pada negara-negara bersekutunya, persefahaman yang rendah serta kekurangan perisikan berdasarkan manusia. Pendek kata, Sun Tzu mengemukakan nasihat kepada pihak ketenteraan AS supaya menyelesaikan krisis Afghanistan dengan aman dengan harapan meminimumkan kecederaan dan kematian rakyat dan tentera, mahupun Afghanistan atau AS. Sepertimana yang tersurat dalam *Sun Tzu’s Art of War* bahawa peperangan memainkan peranan penting kepada nusantara, serta hidup dan mati sesebuah tentera kerana peperangan dapat menentukan nasib sesebuah negara. Oleh yang demikian, segala isu berkaitan dengan peperangan harus ditelitikan.

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For any errors or inadequacies that may remain in this work, of course, the responsibility is entirely my own.

APPROVAL

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Af-Pak	Afghanistan-Pakistan
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
CCST	Collective Security Treaty
CENTCOM	The US Central Command
CERP	Commanders Emergency Response Program
CIA	The Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CJTF	Coalition Joint Task Force
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COMINT	Communications Intelligence
DOD	The US Department of Defence
EA	The Eastern Alliance
ELINT	electronics intelligence
FATA	Federally Administrative Tribal Areas
FBI	the Federal Bureau of Investigation
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HUMINT	human sources
ICRC	the International Committee of the Red Cross
IEDs	Improvised Explosive Device
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence Pakistan
JDAMS	Joint Direct Attack Munitions
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
JUI	Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Islami
JUIP	Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Islami-Pakistan
MAGTF	Marine Air Ground Task Force
MANPADS	man-portable air defence system
NA	The Northern Alliance
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSA	the National Security Agency
NSS	National Security Strategy
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
ONE	Operation Noble Eagle
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PHOTINT	photography intelligence
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team

RCs	Regional Commands
US Navy SEALs	The United States Navy's Sea, Air, Land Teams
SIGINT	signals intelligence
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TELINT	telemetry intelligence
UAVs	unmanned aerial vehicles
UN	The United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
U.S.	The United State of America
USGS	The US Geological Survey
WMDs	weapons of mass destruction

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

On 11 September 2001, an American Airlines Boeing 767 slammed into the north tower of the prestigious World Trade Centre marked the beginning of al-Qaeda's carnage. Two hours later over 3,000 people were dead, the twin towers vanished, and parts of the Pentagon and Pennsylvania were left smouldered with the wreckage of vengeance, religious extremism and terrorism (Lindley-French, 2007).

The U.S. and the coalition forces began precision air strikes against The Taliban regime in Afghanistan on October 2001, as the U.S. military's Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was launched in response to the attacks and after the Taliban rejected to turn in bin Laden, whom they described as "a guest". The aim of the air strikes was to suppress them, to destroy al-Qaeda's terrorist infrastructure as well as to capture Osama bin Laden. The former U.S. president George W. Bush described this was as a war against the "international terrorists" and stated that "the conflict will not be short." For him, those who declared war against the U.S. have chosen their own destruction (Rashid, 2002).

In the context of partnership, the U.S. military forces and the Northern Alliance (NA) launched attacks against the Taliban regime. The U.S. had wanted to open up a second front in the south and east of the country and had sought support from the Pashtuns. However, the Pashtun warlords considered the NA as an enemy and were wary of siding with the U.S. who was simultaneously bombing their strongholds in Kandahar and Jalalabad.

In the meanwhile, the Kabul province was captured by the U.S. led-International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition forces in November 2001. There was a deadly standoff between Taliban prisoners and their captors from the NA at a prison in Kunduz on 25 November. Five hundred soldiers led by General Dostum, with support from U.S. commando units and air power, surrounded the prison, where most of the prisoners were killed in the ensuing battle. That same day, several hundred U.S. marines landed near Kandahar to bolster efforts to remove the Taliban from their last remaining stronghold. By early December, the Taliban lost Kandahar. Then, on December 5, at an UN-sponsored conference in Bonn, Germany, representatives from four Afghan factions agreed to establish a broad-based interim government with Pashtun royalist and U.S.-favourite Hamid Karzai as its head (he was inaugurated on December 22) and to hold elections in 2004. Also, in December, after several rounds of talks in which as many as 16 countries, including Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Jordan, and Malaysia, among them, participated, ISAF was assisted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and dispatched to help

the Afghan Transitional Authority and the UN and to maintain security in and around Kabul. However, Malaysian troops did not participate in combat operations. They were medical personnel or the Malaysian Medical Teams (MALMEOTIMs) involved in providing healthcare to the Afghan public.

Furthermore, U.S. air force continued its bombing missions over Tora-Bora (where bin Laden was thought to be hiding) and Kandahar. In June 2002, the *loya jirga* (Grand Council) officially elected Karzai as interim head of state while a second *loya jirga*, meeting in January 2004, approved a new constitution. Although the Taliban were overthrown by November 2001, nevertheless their leader Mullah Muhammad Omar was never captured. Since then, however, the insurgents and warlords have resurfaced, attacking coalition forces and election officials. Many aid workers sacrificed, and the kidnapping of foreigners became a routine. By July 2004, some 3,485 Afghan civilians and 8,587 Afghan soldiers had been killed and more than 30,000 Afghans injured. The actual number of casualties is estimated to be much higher. The upsurge of violence forced the postponement of elections until October 2004 and a change in U.S. strategy from a narrow military focus to more emphasis on counter-insurgency and reconstruction efforts. In midst of the voting, all 15 opposition candidates declared a boycott, alleging massive fraud. They were persuaded to rescind their decision, pending outcome of an independent commission's report on any irregularities. Karzai won an easy victory. Currently, there are 167,000 U.S. soldiers stationed in

Afghanistan, with 8,000 NATO troops and an Afghan army with 26,000 U.S.-trained soldiers (expected to increase to 70,000 by 2007).

On 23 May 2005, U.S. and Afghanistan signed a Memorandum of Agreement (pre-approved by the *loya jirga*) during President Karzai's visit to Washington "to strengthen U.S.-Afghan ties in ensuring Afghanistan's long term security, democracy and prosperity." Parliamentary elections on 18 September 2005, resulted in a legislature over 50 percent pro-Karzai, and opposition remained strong in Afghanistan's lower house (the 249-member House of the People) into 2006. Subsequently, anti-foreigner riots occurred in Kabul as anger grew over civilian deaths in the U.S.-led war against the extremist regimes.

Hence, conditional changes in the U.S military policies and campaigns against the extremist regimes in Afghanistan soil is reflected by the Sun Tzu's maxim as,

"The laws of military operations are like water, which flows from higher to lower ground... Water changes its course according to the contours of the land. Tactics change according to the specific circumstances of the enemy."



Figure 1: Map of Afghanistan

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The crisis of 9/11 produced an opportunity for President Bush to launch air strikes against the Taliban-harboured al-Qaeda regime as part of Global War on Terror (GWOT) efforts. Meanwhile, President Obama’s administration deployed a “surge” troop of additional 30,000 to Afghanistan making the U.S. troop level increase to almost 100,000 immediately as he assumed presidency in 2009. U.S. had also been working with coalition forces such as NATO-led ISAF and local Afghan military forces to curb the crisis. Moreover, advanced-technology ammunition and Special Forces are stationed in the rough configuration of

Afghanistan. In reference to all of these, the Sun Tzu's Art of War suggested that U.S. is a superior power as it does not only possess advantages in human resources and financial strength, but it is also able to analyse the enemy (which is the Taliban-harboured al-Qaeda in Afghanistan) and plan proper military strategies to restrain these groups of religious extremists, be it using conventional or unconventional tactics.

Nonetheless, America has its fair share of military deterioration side by side with their success stories. The U.S. existence has accelerated hatred and resistance from the Afghan people, especially the aggressive religious extremist groups (namely al-Qaeda and the Taliban) and annihilated many innocent lives. To make situation worse, statistics have shown that the total of Afghan casualties has increased from 4,278 in the year 2007 and reached the peak in their amount of 10,751 in 2010 (Chesser, 2012). Additionally, Sun Tzu's theory also recognizes Afghanistan's difficulty in configuration terrain and insurgent forces' guerrilla tactics which have put the U.S. military intervention in a straitened situation. Although only the most significant cases are reviewed, the principle holds. Sun Tzu's Art of War encourages the use of minimum forces unlike U.S., whereby the emphasis is on maximum force deployment or the decisive battle in Afghanistan to which will be examined later in this thesis.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research areas of this thesis will mainly explore and comparatively state the extent of the implementation of Sun Tzu's Art of War by the U.S. forces in the Afghanistan War. Thus, this paper will attempt to answer the following questions: Why is peace elusive in Afghanistan? What are the current policies of the U.S.? What are the problems faced by the U.S. military in Afghanistan? At the end of the thesis several questions will be answered, including: Has the "softer approach" strategy shift employed by the U.S. and NATO from the military fire power proven to be effective in solving the problems? And, are the U.S. and its coalition able to disentangle from the Afghanistan conflicts?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the research are to identify the actions taken by the U.S. in the conduct of war in Afghanistan; to verify the current policies of the U.S. in the Afghanistan War; to analyse Sun Tzu's Art of War and the principles of War that it expounds in solving the conflicts; to discuss the success and failure of the U.S. actions in Afghanistan by making a comparative analysis according to the principles as proposed by Sun Tzu's Art of War; and to examine the contingency of the U.S. and coalitions in resolving the Afghanistan crisis.

1.5 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature review is the primary information that is contained in publication, whereby it is digested, sifted, classified, simplified, and synthesized (Cooper, Hedges & Valentine, 2009). Definition of literature review is the selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed (Hart, 1998). Publications are referred upon completion of this study and are quoted correspondingly in every chapters of this writing. All the references that were gained from books, journals, articles and Internet access are also listed as shown in the Bibliography.

Generally, the literature review of this paper is arranged according to three major categories which are important to substantiate the thesis. These three categories are the original text and various interpretations of Sun Tzu's Art of War, history and argument of Afghanistan War as well as U.S. military campaigns in Afghanistan.

1.5.1 Sun Tzu's Art of War

Sun Tzu (also universally known as Master Sun or *Sunzi*) was the primary author of the oldest military treatise *Sun Tzu's art of war* written in the fifth century BC. In classical Chinese, the term "*bingfa*" (the art of war) resembles "grand strategy, transcends the strict confines of the purely military, and moves into the realm of statecraft" (Foster, 2000). Sun Tzu argued that knowledge, wisdom, information and related processing capability were vital for the development of strategic planning as well as rational analysis. Therefore, he advised that a commander should know the enemy and his own troop and victory will be assured.

Moreover, he also emphasized that a good commander should stay focused when implementing strategies and to avoid being distracted by nuances and intricacies. He advocated that a commander should be opportunistic and flexible when adapting tactics to uncertain condition of battle field. Besides that, discipline, preparation before launching attacks and competent management of troops is crucial to enable prudent resource utilization. He encouraged the use of deception in stratagems by condition that the commander should take precautionary steps in order to avoid being deceived. However, the application of the high ranking strategist's military treatise is still applicable to many other fields in these modern days. In the context of this paper, Sun Tzu's Art of War is critical to evaluate the U.S. military campaigns that have been imposed in Afghanistan since 2001.

There were two scholars writing about Sun Tzu's Art of War, including Lionel Giles and Samuel B. Griffith. *Giles* (2005) translated the ancient military treaties into English version, *Sun Tzu on the art of war: the oldest military treaties in the world*. His translation too consisted of 13 chapters as in Sun Tzu's Art of War, with additional comments and explanations. In the first chapter of laying plans, Giles wrote that the moral law, heaven, earth, the commander as well as method and discipline were essential when seeking to determine the conditions obtaining in the battle field. Here, he clarified that Sun Tzu means by "moral law" was a principle of harmony.

Griffith (2005) was another prestigious scholar who translated and commented on Sun Tzu's Art of War. In his book, *Sun Tzu the art of war: the new illustrated edition*, he wrote that the "first martial classics" highlighted war was a matter of vital importance to the state and conscientious analysis was demanded. Therefore, a great ruler or commander was the first who attempted to develop a rational basis for the planning and conduct of military operations.

According to Griffith, these criteria served Sun Tzu's purpose of developing a systematic treatise to guide rulers and commanders towards a successful war because Sun Tzu advocated peace and believed that skilful strategist should be able to subdue the enemy's army without engaging it, to take his cities without laying siege to them, and to overthrow his state without bloodying swords.

He also praised Sun Tzu for he was well aware that combat involved a great deal more than collision of armed. The moral, intellectual, as well as circumstantial elements of war were more important and leaders advised not to rely on sheer military power alone. Careful planning based on sound information of the enemy would contribute to a speedy military decision.

On the other hand, he appreciated the effect of war on the economy and was undoubtedly the first to observe that the inflated prices were on inevitable accompaniment to military operations, as he quoted, “No country has ever benefited from a protracted war”. He appreciated the decisive influence of supply on the conduct of operations, and among other factors discussed the relationship of the sovereign to his appointed commander; the moral, emotional, and intellectual qualities of the good general; organization, manoeuvre, control, terrain, and water.

1.5.2 The Wars of Afghanistan

Besides reading the ancient military treaty, the history of Afghanistan is also vital in contributing background information to this study. Stephen Tanner, Neamatollah Nojumi, Seth G. Jones, and Mohammad Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou have expressed their precious views on the history of Afghanistan.

In order to gain better understanding of the Afghans, the most experienced fighters in the Islamic world, *Afghanistan: a military history from Alexander the Great to the fall of the Taliban* authored by military historian *Stephen Tanner* (2009) was a comprehensive guide to Afghanistan history. He agreed that the Afghani tribal warlords were influenced by the ancient emperors, such as Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan for their bravery. Among them, dark-eyed with heavy beards Pashtun fighters were great lovers of individual freedoms.

He identified three factors that make Afghanistan unique. The first was remote terrain facilitated the ability for Afghans tribes to participate in collective defence. Second, the country was isolated from main currents of global commerce and foreign armies, and the third was that Afghan warriors remained a martial ethnic who were entirely willing to fight among themselves. During the Soviet invasion, they realized that the Afghan tribesmen's innate strength always remained attached to individual freedom and defiant of foreign powers.

Tanner expressed his apprehension on Afghanistan's suffering and creations of a new society after withdrawal of the Red Army in 1989. The inefficiency of the *Mujahideen* administration caused civil war outburst in the nation and thus provoked the rise of the Taliban. Here, Osama bin Laden devoted himself to the development of his al-Qaeda organization that was dedicated to global jihad.