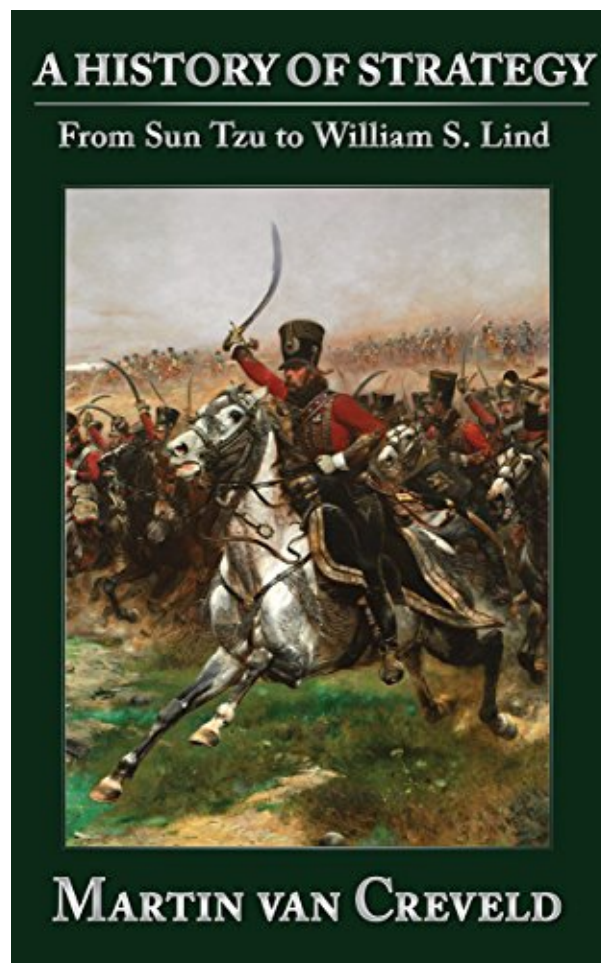


A HISTORY OF STRATEGY: FROM SUN TZU TO WILLIAM S. LIND BY MARTIN VAN CREVELD



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About the Author

Martin van Creveld was born in the Netherlands in 1946 and has lived in Israel from 1950. Having studied in Jerusalem and London, since 1971 he has been on the faculty of the History Department, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. A specialist in military history and strategy, he is the author of 20 books, including "The Land of Blood and Honey" and "Defending Israel", and has appeared regularly on CBS, CNN and the BBC.

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"Martin van Creveld ranks high among military historians, and given the changes in technology since Napoleonic Times, his work is a necessary supplement to Clausewitz." - Jerry Pournelle

The Art of War by Sun Tzu and On War by Carl von Clausewitz are known to everyone who studies war. But in the approximately 2,327 years that separated Man's two most famous works of military tactics and strategy, a considerable number of less well-known works were published. Some, such as those written by Vauban and Douhet, were focused on specific aspects of war, while others like Onasander and Jomini wrote works that were more general in nature. But all of them were written with the objective of permitting generals and other leaders of men to wage war more effectively.

There are few better suited to write the history of strategy and military thought than Dr. Martin van Creveld, who has himself been a significant contributor to the literature of war. A Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Dr. van Creveld is one of the world's leading writers on military history and strategy, with a special interest in the future of war. He is fluent in Hebrew, German, Dutch, and English, and has authored more than twenty books, including the influential *Technology and War: 2000 BC to the Present* (1988), *The Transformation of War* (1991), and *The Culture of War* (2010). He is known for his development of the concept of "nontrinitarian" warfare as well as contributing two books to the 4GW canon.

Featuring a foreword by Dr. Jerry Pournelle, *A History of Strategy: From Sun Tzu to William S. Lind* begins with the Chinese military literature, then reviews the Greek, Roman and Byzantine works before proceeding to the Middle Ages. From Machiavelli and Montecuccoli to Guibert and Frederick the Great, van Creveld chronicles the gradual transition from medieval to Napoleonic warfare. Subsequent chapters delve into the literature of naval warfare, including Mahan and Corbett, then examine the works of the leading strategists of the early 20th century, including Moltke, Liddell Hart, and Ludendorff. The final chapter considers the modern strategists behind such concepts as Mutually Assured Destruction, terrorism, insurgency, and 4th Generation War.

This brief, but wide-ranging history is an effective education in military thought. It is an excellent introduction to the various strategic works for the neophyte, and an illuminating summary of them for armchair and professional experts alike. Van Creveld not only describes each thinker and his most important contributions, but explains how one conceptual advancement led to another, and in doing so, makes it eminently clear why Sun Tzu and Clausewitz are so universally well-regarded by theoreticians and practitioners of war alike.

- Sales Rank: #168508 in eBooks
- Published on: 2015-03-25
- Released on: 2015-03-25
- Format: Kindle eBook

About the Author

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Most helpful customer reviews

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Solid introduction to the history of military strategic theory

By maniac

One might first ask how a History of Strategy is less than 1000 pages long, and how one will ever find the time to read it; fortunately, this volume is an introduction and overview of the field. It's very helpful for interested amateurs like me. I'm familiar with strategy in general and I have a layman's knowledge of military strategy in particular- but the history of it? The epistemology? The ideas that were popular, changed the world, and then were discredited and thrown on the dustheap of history? No clue. So, once I realized what I was reading, I was interested.

This book is almost like syllabus, or a suggested reading list. It focuses mostly on the theory of strategy over time: the historical writings of theoreticians throughout history, including Sun Tzu and Clausewitz, and lesser known stars like Jomini. It discusses what their ideas were, how they influenced each other, and what impact if any they had on the world. Martin van Creveld is clearly an expert on his material, and that's what makes it so valuable. If he says it's important, it's important, and so this gives the reader context and a jumping off point for further reading.

There's nothing in this book that will be over your head. At the same time, I think that some parts toward the end would be more revelatory if you already knew what he was talking about. When he explains how certain concepts like Cohesion developed, I find it interesting, but a true student of military strategy might say "OH WOW THAT'S AMAZING!" Or maybe not. I must also admit I was a little disappointed that it wasn't several hundred pages examining the strategy of every age in minute detail... Well, now I know where to start.

To summarize... the history of military strategy is a vast field of inquiry, and this is a mere introduction, but it is extremely solid material and easy to understand.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

A History of Strategy: Small But Content-Rich And Readable

By Amazon Customer

A History of Strategy: From Sun Tzu to William S. Lind earned five stars from me for being so readable and packed with content, despite being so brief. This is the first book of Martin van Creveld's I have read and I look forward to delving into his catalog.

In addition to being a good read, Martin van Creveld's svelte _A History of Strategy: From Sun Tzu to William S. Lind_ is a wonderful way for those not well read in military strategy to begin their self-directed study. Martin van Creveld discusses all the notable war theoretician authors more or less in accord with their significance as well as some of the war artisan authors. Creveld also provides a "Further Readings" section to aid those so inclined. Given the limitations imposed on him (low page count) Creveld does a fine job covering the material.

Of use before reading Creveld's work is an understanding of what Creveld and most those of a military mind

mean by the term "strategy." The United States Armed Forces doctrine documents refer to three levels of warfare: strategic, operational, and tactical. Tactical refers to small unit or crew actions up through battles. Operational refers to campaigns and major operations consisting of multiple battles. Strategic can refer to multiple operations within a theater up through national policy. These levels are all a bit ambiguous and somewhat arbitrary, but serve to orient a reader or thinker. National-level policy can also be referred to as grand strategy or high strategy. A great many of the authors mentioned in the book never rise to the strategic level. This is no fault of Creveld's, but a part of the development of strategic writing and theory.

Perhaps a more accurate title for this book would be *_A History of Military Theoretician Authors._* Creveld gives short shrift to the practitioners of war, both those who wrote of their exploits and those of whom their exploits much has been written. In effect, the artisans of the art of war are outshined by the theoreticians of the art of war in *_A History of Strategy_*. This is understandable to some extent, given the length of the book. On the other hand, it leaves some rather large holes in the record when we discount what is implied by some of the greatest war artisans simply because they did not make their thoughts on it explicit.

The two giants in *_A History of Strategy_* are Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz. No one else is in their league. Sun Tzu and Clausewitz both look at war from the strategic perspective as an instrument of (or calamity to) the state and state policy. In this respect the quality of their strategic writings is superior to all others. They also attempt to jam their writings in a philosophical jacket, which can (at times) seem ill-fitting. Sun Tzu tailors his writings to fit the cut of Taoism while Clausewitz tailors his to Hegel. As one might expect, Sun Tzu and Clausewitz also differ in their writings. Sun Tzu (in accord with his Taoist framework) sees war as a disturbance in the way things ought to be, while Clausewitz sees war as a natural social phenomenon. Also, Clausewitz's work is much larger and allows for greater depth and breadth. Creveld also surveys strategic theoretical writers from ancient times (Thucydides, Vegetius) to today (Kissinger, Lind). Some were mere tacticians with contemporaneous impact, but no intellectual heirs, while others paved the way to Clausewitz. Creveld also includes a chapter on war at sea and a chapter on war after 1945, which focuses on the effects of nuclear arms and guerrilla warfare.

The first step beyond Creveld's survey ought not be for contemporary authors looking at today's problems, but to Sun Tzu. Sun Tzu's *_The Art of War_* is, despite being over 2000 years old and non-Western in origin, probably the easiest book on strategy to read and understand. *_The Shambhala Pocket Classic The Art of War_* (ISBN13: 9780877735373) is unencumbered by the (seemingly) never-ending notes and commentaries found in other editions. The translation also reads well. For a sampling of post-medieval Western strategic thought, *_Makers of Modern Strategy_* from the Princeton University Press is quite a lot of content between two covers. Only after that ought one approach Clausewitz. To get a handle on contemporary non-state warfare, Mao Tse-Tung's *_On Guerrilla Warfare_* is an easy read with much contemporary relevance. Mao takes his lead more from Sun Tzu than he does from Clausewitz, as one would expect. This is true in Mao's theory and brevity/readability.

To those who ask, "Of what use is a knowledge of military strategy and/or history?" I would answer that those who live under consensual governments are obligated to have such knowledge. In such knowledge resides the continuing life of the apparatus of government and (more importantly) the nation itself. War has a tendency to destroy both bureaucracies and peoples even when they would rather not think of the possibility. If we have not heard much talk from our ruling classes on the topic of strategy and national war policy, perhaps we have elected people incompetent to speak on the topic.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

to the great Generals of the 20th century

By Andrew Urban

In *A History of Strategy*, Martin van Creveld does not provide his reader with a comprehensive review of military strategy, but rather with the evolution of documenting and synthesizing war strategy into a systematic theory. It is fascinating that such an idea, to reduce war to a system, has been the goal of every major military theorist from the ancient Chinese, to medieval warring conquerors, to the great Generals of the 20th century, and yet proved to be, thus far, elusive. As van Creveld writes, even Carl von Clausewitz himself came close to saying that “since each period made war in a manner corresponding to its social and political characteristics, a single theory of war applicable to all times and places might not be possible at all.” The distinction, for example, from Sun Tzu and his quest for Chinese "dao" vs. Erich Ludendorff and his German idea of "total" war, which implied the full mobilization of a nation (including its democracy, freedoms, and capital), is remarkable that it shows the grand disparity of perspective that each approached the same subject - war.

It is also interesting to note the divide of those who focused war strategy on the material (terrain, communications, fire power, weapons systems, and technology) and those who still emphasized the immaterial (discipline, creativity, cohesion, courage, morale, and belief).

With each monumental change in tactics (see Lind's 4 generations of modern war), and monumental change in technology (sword, pike, bow, cannon, musket, machine gun, rifle, battleship, airplane, aircraft carrier, missile, satellite, nuclear bomb) a new wrinkle was added to military strategy; and each successive war planner had to deal with seemingly unprecedented obstacles in waging war.

A good read. While slower at first, van Creveld quickly picks up steam in laying the foundation for the next generation of war strategists in their attempts to systemize dealing with the art and horrors of war.

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