



Martin van Creveld. *More On War*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017.

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The title of Martin van Creveld's new book—*More On War*—is unusual but completely accurate. What the book offers is more on war. More than what, you might ask? More than what was given to us by the two greatest military theorists to date, Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz. Van Creveld identifies eleven topics that he believes were not properly addressed in either Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* or Clausewitz's *On War*. Each of these eleven topics provides the structure for a chapter of *More on War* (3-8).

For some topics—such as nuclear war (ch. IX), air war, space war, or cyberwar (ch. VIII)— it is obvious why von Clausewitz or Sun Tzu had nothing to say about them. Other topics could have been addressed by these two theorists but weren't for various reasons. Both men, for example, "tend to take the point of view of senior commanders" (4), and so tend to ignore the peculiar problems facing soldiers further down the chain of command (ch. III). Some topics are addressed by one or both theorists, but van Creveld deems their treatment inadequate or perfunctory. A good example of this would be the relationship between economics and war (ch. II), which is clearly but briefly addressed by Sun Tzu (4).

More On War, thus, in no way attempts to correct or to supersede either Clausewitz or Sun Tzu. Rather, it is intended as a useful supplement. "*More On War*," van Creveld announces,

will try to fill the gaps, both those that are self-imposed and those originating in the times and places in which the two men lived and wrote. It will expand on themes which, for one reason or another, they neglected or left untouched, and bring their works up to date wherever doing so seems feasible and worthwhile. All this, in deep admiration and gratitude for what they have accomplished (8).

Van Creveld is clearly positioning himself as standing on the shoulders of the two giants here.

Van Creveld has selected an interesting strategy for organizing his book. The idea of building on the work of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz makes a lot of sense. Moreover, all of the topics selected for coverage in this book are clearly relevant to modern military theory and deserve sustained attention. And van Creveld provides copious examples to illustrate his arguments, many of them drawn from the military experience of Israel. (This is not surprising, given that the book originated as an essay written for the Israel Defense Forces; see p. ix.) At the same time, these eleven topics have nothing in common except for the lack of attention given to them by the two masters. The individual chapters of the book thus never really build on one another, rendering the entire book rather disjointed. Perhaps if van Creveld had spent more time on Sun Tzu and Clausewitz themselves at the start, it could have provided more unity to the remainder of the book. Then again, van Creveld may have presumed that his target

audience—military officers—already knew all they needed to know about these two theorists.

The fact that the book was clearly written for a military audience might or might not have affected the structure of the book, but it definitely affected its contents. As van Creveld notes, “War is a practical business—so much so, some have claimed, as to discourage abstract thought about it” (2). Sun Tzu and Clausewitz may have done better in this regard than most, and van Creveld tries to follow their example. But van Creveld still approaches military theory in a very practical manner, and thus does not spend as much time theorizing as one might like.

Consider, for example, van Creveld’s definition of war. War is an overused term, according to van Creveld. People often speak of a “trade war” or a “war of words,” but these are not actually wars at all (45). True wars have seven critical features: 1) “there must be at least one opponent, or enemy, who fights back;” 2) “the primary instrument of war is physical violence;” 3) “war is not subject to rules in the same way games are;” 4) war “is, or should be, governed by politics;” 5) “the purpose of war is to bend the enemy to our will;” 6) “war and the violence it employs are legal, or at least enjoy the approbation of a considerable part of the society that wages it;” and 7) “war is not an individual enterprise by a collective one” (50-51).

Van Creveld’s definition certainly seems to square with everyday usage of the word “war.” But while he is keen to establish this definition, he makes very little use of it. Why exactly should it matter what counts as “war” and what does not? Why exactly should the expanded use of the term prove problematic? We can think of several possible reasons. War matters, for example, from a moral perspective. Many types of actions not normally permitted become acceptable, even valedictory, in a war. One need not accept Cicero’s claim that “*Silent enim lēgēs inter arma*” (the laws are silent in times of war) to understand that things are different in a war. But why exactly should this be? Why should these seven characteristics make such a big difference? Van Creveld does discuss just war theory in his chapter on “War and Law” (ch. X). There he suggests, following Cicero, that legal and moral constraints on the conduct of war are “meant to preserve our humanity” (172). (He provides several other reasons for obeying these constraints, but these are mostly prudential in nature.) But must people only face this need when engaging in an activity meeting van Creveld’s seven-part definition of war?

If not, why make such a big deal out of the definition? Perhaps the definition serves some other important purpose, but we unfortunately cannot see it.

More On War is aimed at soldiers, but anyone interested in military theory might enjoy reading it. But the reader definitely needs to be read *The Art of War* and *On War* alongside it. The reader also should expect an engaging but not particularly deep treatment of the various topics considered in this book.

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