

The Art of War

A pertinent summary by Eiri Sanada (2024-01 ver.)

— I —

Planning

When considering a situation, ask these seven:

1. Which side has a unified morale?
2. Which leaders have more ability?
3. Who has environmental advantage?
4. Which side has more discipline?
5. Which side is simply stronger?
6. Who has more trained people?
7. Who is more consistent in providing rewards and punishments?

With this, one may predict victory or defeat.

Deception is key. When taking an action, make them believe you are doing the opposite.

Be pragmatic and ready to alter plans. However, this does not mean make fewer plans.

You would lose if you do that.

— II —

How to Engage

The goal is to win - not to have a long battle.

A long battle will lead to fatigue, then failure - for this is where you will be taken advantage of.

However, this does not mean you should hurry.

Be resourceful. Bring your own supplies. but also take advantage of theirs, where possible.

— III —

Strategy

There are five essentials to victory:

1. Know when to fight and when not to.
2. Know how to handle both weak and strong groups.
3. Have consistent morale among all.
4. Be prepared, and go when they are not prepared.
5. Be able to fight, without meddling from superiors.

There are three ways to weaken your own army:

1. Tell them to move even though they cannot.
2. Managing them like a city, ignorant of their needs.
3. Choosing officers indiscriminately whilst ignoring the situation and not being adaptable to it.

If you know yourself and know the enemy:

— you need never fear a hundred fights.

If you only know yourself:

— your win and loss will be equal.

If you know neither:

— you will always lose.

— IV —

Tactics

Protection from defeat is only in our own hands.

The opportunity to win is only given by the enemy.

So even if you can't lose, you can't be sure of a win.

The clever fighter wins without effort: they make no mistakes, and don't miss the chance for victory.

Thus in war, the strategist fights only after victory is already assured. To fight first is to be defeated.

— V —

Energy

A large force is controlled with the same principles as a smaller force - it is simply a matter of division.

Commanding a large group is not different from a small one - it is largely a matter of communication.

To maintain strength, use both direct and indirect methods. The two will work off each other.

Being direct is how you fight.

Being indirect is how you win.

There are an infinite number of ways to be indirect.

Consider synergy:

It requires less work from the individual.

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Weak and Strong

Whoever is first has time to wait and be ready.

Whoever is second will hurry and be tired.

So, control your enemy's movement, and don't let yourself be controlled.

Make them move by showing them an advantage. Or, be somewhere they need to hurry to defend. Appear where they don't expect you to be.

If they're secure, you can force them out to fight by attacking something critical. You can avoid a fight by throwing something at them they don't expect.

However, do not repeat your tactics. Avoid the strong, attack the weak, and change tactics with the changing conditions.

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Movement

There is nothing more difficult than performing tactical movement. The difficulty comes from turning indirect into direct, and losses into gains.

If you are trying to force yourself into an advantage, you may be too late. Tiring yourself out to reach toward an advantage will result in capture.

Get local advice to gain a natural advantage.

Move swiftly like the wind,

But be together like a calm forest.

Attack like a raging fire,

But be as unmovable as a mountain.

Let your plans be unknown as the dark,

But strike like a bolt of lightning.

In battle, regular words cannot reach people, nor can they notice anything that looks ordinary.

This is why standard sounds and symbols exist.

— Don't push if the enemy is uphill.

— Don't stop them from coming down.

— Don't attack if they pretend to run away.

— Don't fight an eager soldier.

— Don't take bait.

— Don't interfere if they're going home.

— Don't fully surround them - leave an opening.

— Don't press the desperate ones.

— VIII —

Variables

Don't camp in a difficult, rugged area.

Don't linger in a dangerously isolated place.

When boxed in, be strategic. When desolate, fight.

The Art of War is about not relying on the chance they may not come. It is about being ready. It is not about preventing attack. It is about being unbeatable.

There are five flaws that can affect a leader:

1. Recklessness, resulting in destruction.
2. Cowardice, resulting in capture.
3. Short temper, resulting in easy provocation.
4. Sensitive honour, resulting in shame.
5. Great care for your soldiers, resulting in worry.

If there is a failure, the cause is surely one of these.

— IX —

The Roads being Marched

Avoid areas that slow you down and get out as soon as possible. Let the enemy cross them, but don't meet them halfway. Strike when they're in the middle.

In a thick, complicated place, check for ambushes.

Gentle words and preparation indicate an advance. Aggression indicates retreat. Requests for peace with no promises made indicates a plot.

If there is an obvious advantage not being taken, they are tired. If the leaders are angry, they are tired.

If there is self-destruction and lack of care, they are prepared to fight to the death.

Small whispers signify dissatisfaction.

Too many rewards indicate a severe shortage.

Too many punishments indicate high distress.

— X —

Terrain

There are six kinds of terrain:

1. Freely accessible:
— Protect your supply train.
2. Easy to leave, hard to take:
— Only go if they are unprepared.
3. Neither wins if they go first:
— Use bait, and don't take any of theirs.
4. A funneled path:
— If you're first, occupy. If not, wait for weakness.
5. High ground:
— If you're first, take it. If not, bait them down.
6. Both sides are far away:
— You'll be at a disadvantage if you fight.

There are six ways to court defeat:

1. If a force is far, far too big, the other will flee.
2. If the leaders are too weak and soldiers too strong, there will be disobedience.
3. If it is the other way around, there is collapse.
4. If the leaders are resentful and angry, there is ruin.
5. If the general is weak and vague, there is disorder.
6. If the general cannot estimate strength and sends a weak force without bolstering the front, there is retreat.

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Nine Scenarios

1. When fighting in your own space:

— Don't fight, and collect yourself early.

2. When not very far in enemy space:

— Don't stop, and stay connected.

3. When the space can give advantage to one:

— Don't attack, and hurry to bring up your rear.

4. When the space is fully open:

— Don't try to block them, and watch your defences.

5. When at a crossroads:

— Gather allies, and consolidate your forces.

6. When inside the heart of the enemy:

— Plunder away, and maintain your supply link.

7. When in difficult, rugged terrain:

— Keep moving, and stick to the road.

8. When in a funnelled path:

— Be strategic, and avoid retreat.

9. When there is no refuge nor any hope left:

— Fight. Fight for your life.

— XII —

Fighting with Fire

There are five ways to use fire (*self-spreading chaos*):
Burn the soldiers in the camp. Burn the storehouses.
Burn the supply trains. Burn the weapons.

Or, just drop it randomly amongst them.

You need fuel for fire: always keep it ready.

When attacking, there are five possible evolutions:

1. When it breaks out inside the enemy base:
— Attack at once.
2. When it breaks out but the soldiers are quiet about it:
— Bide your time, don't move to attack.
3. When the flames are at their peak:
— Follow it up with an attack, but only if practical.
4. If you can attack with fire from a distance:
— Send it at a favourable time.
5. When using fire:
— Always stay upwind. Don't attack alongside.

— XIII —

Intelligence and Spycraft

Staying ignorant while being frustrated at your escalating expenses is cruelty at its finest. Whoever does this is no leader, no help, nor victor.

The extraordinary is achieved with foreknowledge. But, you cannot intuit or deduce this. You must gain it from other people; it is the only way to obtain it.

There are five kinds of spies (*information sources*):
Locals you hire. Enemy leaders. Converted spies. Obvious spies (for misinformation). Survivors who come from the other side.

You cannot pick a spy without a certain intuition. You also need to be kind and straightforward.

Be subtle! Be subtle! Use spies for all your workings.

In the end, the goal is knowledge of the other side. It directly affects your ability to move.