

If a state goes for war, it is fighting for its actual survival. Therefore, all attempts must be done to know the art of war, and, in the incident of war, that understanding must be utilized to make strategies.

The general who makes careful plans before the fight will defeat the general who doesn't make any plan. So, you need to plan regularly and think before the fight. By comparing the rival armies on seven thoughts, you can predict a win or loss:

1. Which of the two rulers of the states at war instructs full accord and obedience from his people for them to support him even to their deaths?
2. Which of the two generals is more competent?
3. Which part has edges of heaven and earth, the meaning of conditions such as the weather, distances to be reached and the nature of the terrain?
4. Which part imposes the discipline of its men more intensely?
5. Which part has the stronger army?
6. Which part has the better-skilled officers and men?
7. Which part has more consistency in providing compensations and punishments to impose discipline?

Thoroughly compare the army of your opponent to your own army in order for you to determine where he is strong and where he is weak. Then strategize according to the conditions. If you understand both your opponent as well as yourself, you will be winning all the time.

Planning, calculating and comparing armies causes win.

Chapter 1 - Defend yourself against loss, and wait for a chance for a win.

Successful strategists just go into the fights they are sure they will win, while unsuccessful strategists go into battles and only then start to reason on how they can win.

A clever fighter evades fight he may be defeated; therefore, making sure he is never conquered. However, even the very brilliant general cannot say precisely when victory will arise because he needs to wait for the opponent to make a mistake and offer him the chance for victory.

A successful general recognizes that to get a victory, there are five key guidelines:

1. You need to know when to go into battle and when not to go into battle.
2. You need to understand how to handle forces both inferior and superior to your own.
3. Your army needs to possess a strong, same fighting spirit and discipline all through its ranks.
4. You need to fight so that you are ready and the opponent is not ready.
5. You need to have the military capacity and liberty to control your troops without hindrance from a sovereign.

Be alert. Fight only when you have an edge. Evade your opponent where he is strong and fight him where he is weak.

Evade the opponent's army when its spirit is strong, its supports and banners are in good shape order or when it has a more edge position like higher terrain.

Never enter battle simply out of anger; there must always be something to be won. Your anger will eventually fade, but a kingdom once destroyed can never be brought back to life.

Evade the traps your opponent will attempt to draw you into. Do not direct your army into regions where your supplies won't be enough or where you do not really know the terrain or your allies.

Chapter 2 - Warfare is merely successful when sovereigns and generals do not initiate their own downfall.

An army is instructed by a general in war; however, a general is instructed by a sovereign. Therefore, by his instructions, a sovereign can hinder his army. The most terrible means he can do this are by instructing them to progress or withdraw when such action isn't possible, by trying to rule the army as negligent as he does his state or by assigning officers in unsuitable duties.

These mistakes shake the confidence of soldiers and can lead to a loss.

Also, a general can display dangerous mistakes. He can be irresponsible and direct his army to downfall, or he can be a coward and be taken; he can also be choleric or proud that he is triggered by insults and slander from the opponent, or he can be really worried about the ease of his own men and allow that kind of thoughts impede military strategies.

Also, the general is accountable if any of these six disasters happen to his army:

1. If he hurls his army against a force ten times more than its size, leading his soldiers to run away.
2. If his soldiers are really strong in relation to the officers, leading to insubordination.
3. If the soldiers are really weak, causing them to be weakened by officers and failing.
4. If the higher officers are annoyed and undisciplined, causing them to fight their own accord and lead to the destruction of the army.
5. If the general is weak and unsure, leading to a weak, disorganized army.
6. If the general is incapable to determine an enemy's strength and hurls an inferior force against a superior one, causing an overwhelming loss.

Chapter 3 - Keep your resources by using stratagems, foraging, and espionage.

Sustaining an army is costly: a host of 100,000 men can be a price of 1,000 ounces of silver per day for provisions such as food, chariots, spears, arrows, armor, and oxen.

Lengthy warfare can finish the resources of any state, making it weak and vulnerable.

Therefore, target fast and decisive wins, not lengthy campaigns.

Evade sieging walled cities, because this normally needs a month of planning, and a lot of impatient generals will waste their men in useless fights.

The best means to reduce the cost of warfare is to seize the opponent's country, city or army completely and whole instead of to damage it through an expensive fight. In order to achieve this, you will require a very larger force than that of your opponent's.

An experienced general will conquer his opponents without any battle, which forms the final victory. This is called the attacking by stratagem. Great fighters succeed not just at winning but at winning easily.

Another method to keep the state's resources is to get them from your opponent by foraging close by and boosting your own strength with the opponent's weapons, armor, and men. This minimizes the cost of providing your army from home and saves your peasants the stress of keeping your army.

As one fights can end wars, you need to engage spies: they give decisive detail about the opponent's settlement and take back incorrect secrets back to him.

Keep close relations with your spies and compensate them very well. The price is really small compared to the long war they can assist evade.

If you create a stratagem around a secret that a spy has mentioned you, kill him and any other people he mentioned the secret to, in order for your stratagem not to lose its strength.

Chapter 4 - Mislead your opponent and force your will on him.

The art of war is founded on deceit. You need to disguise strength with weakness, courage with cowardice and order with the disorder. Distract your opponent and allow him to grow careless.

Make your army pretend disorder when in fact they are very disciplined. When you move close to your opponent, make it look as if you are far away. When you are able to strike, make it look as if you are unable.

Play with your opponent just as how a cat plays with a mouse. If he has a temper, annoy him. If he is comfortable, annoy him; if well supplied, make sure you starve him; if quietly set up camp, enforce him to change. If you want the opponent to progress, offer him a bait; and if you want him to withdraw, cause harm on him.

A smart combatant takes advantage and imposes his will on the opponent.

Invalidate the opponent in poorly secured positions that he would need to rush to defend. Force him to disclose himself in order for you to find out his weaknesses.

Make your enemy figure out where you will invade, forcing him to shiver and spread out his forces: numerical weakness arises not just from absolute numbers but from also needing to plan for invasions on different fronts.

Chapter 5 - Notice the terrain and your opponent, then adjust accordingly.

A good general understands that there are usually spots that cannot be held, roads that shouldn't be passed through by instructions from the sovereign that needs to be disobeyed.

Just like how water shapes its course according to the ground it flows over; that have you as well should adjust to the circumstances, to the terrain, as well as the enemy's disposition.

Notice the terrain to exploit its natural advantages and evade its disadvantages. For you to fight, do not climb heights, you have to go upstream or travel far from water and shelter.

Evoke spots that have precipitous cliffs, restricted places or quagmires where a little force can damage a whole army. Find frightened birds or beasts; they show you there's a forthcoming ambush.

You have to notice the foe as well. When his soldiers rest on their spears when standing, they are weak from starvation. When the soldiers he tells to get water starts drinking it themselves, they are thirsty.

And when they begin to consume their own cattle, fail to hang their cooking pots on the campfires, and behave as if they will not go back to their tents, understand that they are ready to fight to the death.

Adjust your strategies as required to these situations and take advantage of the chances as they arise.

Chapter 6 - In order to successfully wage war, handle your troops strictly, make them doubt and allow them to fight to the death.

Handling and directing a large army is similar to handling a small one: you need to just divide your army into smaller groups and make use of signals like gongs, drums, banners, and signal fires to direct your forces.

They will move as one, and the coward ones will try not to withdraw neither will the brave be left to do the duty alone. An experienced general directs his army like he would if was leading a single man by the hand.

Treat your soldiers as you would treat your favorite sons and they will support you even to their deaths. If, on the other hand, you are unable to direct them with authority, they will be just as worthless as spoilt children.

Strong discipline among your soldiers is a certain path to success. However, in order for the discipline to be effective, your soldiers need to grow fond of you. Therefore, you need to treat them compassionately at the same time while also having them under control with discipline and punishments.

You need to be secretive as a general. Make your soldiers unaware and amend your plans often to make both your soldiers and the enemy guessing.

Change camps and use long indirect paths instead of the straight paths. You can only disclose your intention when you're really in a hostile country.

When the condition seems bright, inform your soldiers about it; however, when the condition is poor, keep this information to yourself.

The more you enter into a hostile country, the more your soldiers will feel a sense of unity.

Put them into desperate circumstances where there is no way of escaping, and they will drop their whole sense of fear and fight with extreme strength, even to their deaths.

The Art of War by Sun Tzu Book Review

Warfare is a situation of life and death for the state, and therefore, careful planning and guessing needs to go into the conduct of war. An experienced general decided to fight just when he is aware that win is certain; so, he is never beaten. He is alert, resourceful and flexible. He enforces his will on the opponent, misleading and frustrating him to push him to make a terrible mistake.

How can you defend against conquest and guarantee win?

- Planning, calculating and comparing armies causes win.
- Defend yourself against conquest, and wait for a chance for a win.
- Warfare is simply successful if sovereigns and generals do not bring about their own downfall.

How can you accomplish edges over your opponent?

- Keep your resources through stratagems, foraging, and espionage.
- Mislead your opponent and impose your will on him.
- Notice the terrain and your opponent, then adjust accordingly.

How can you handle your troops?

- In order to successfully wage war, handle your troops strictly, keep them in doubt and make them fight to the death.

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