

# **THE ART OF WAR**

**by Sun Tzu**

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## Chapter 1: Estimates

War is a matter of vital importance to the state; a matter of life or death, the road either to survival or to ruin. Hence, it is imperative that it be studied thoroughly.

Therefore, appraise it in terms of the five fundamental factors and make comparisons of the various conditions of the antagonistic sides in order to ascertain the results of a war. The first of these factors is politics; the second, weather; the third, terrain; the fourth, the commander; and the fifth, doctrine. Politics means the thing which causes the people to be in harmony with their ruler so that they will follow him in disregard of their lives and without fear of any danger. Weather signifies night and day, cold and heat, fine days and rain, and change of seasons. Terrain means distances, and refers to whether the ground is traversed with ease or difficulty and to whether it is open or constricted, and influences your chances of life or death. The commander stands for the general's qualities of wisdom, sincerity, benevolence, courage, and strictness. Doctrine is to be understood as the organization of the army, the gradations of rank among the officers, the regulations of supply routes, and the provision of military materials to the army.

These five fundamental factors are familiar to every general. Those who master them win; those who do not are defeated. Therefore, in laying plans, compare the following seven elements, appraising them with the utmost care.

Which ruler is wise and more able?

Which commander is more talented?

Which army obtains the advantages of nature and the terrain?

In which army are regulations and instructions better carried out?

Which troops are stronger?

Which army has the better-trained officers and men?

Which army administers rewards and punishments in a more enlightened and correct way?

By means of these seven elements, I shall be able to forecast which side will be victorious and which will be defeated.

The general who heeds my counsel is sure to win. Such a general should be retained in command. One who ignores my counsel is certain to be defeated. Such a one should be dismissed.

Having paid attention to my counsel and plans, the general must create a situation which will contribute to their accomplishment. By "situation" I mean he should take the field situation into consideration and act in accordance with what is advantageous.

All warfare is based on deception. Therefore, when capable of attacking, feign incapacity; when active in moving troops, feign inactivity. When near the enemy, make it seem that you are far away; when far away, make it seem that you are near. Hold out baits to lure the enemy. Strike the enemy when he is in disorder. Prepare against the enemy when he is secure at all points. Avoid the enemy for the time

being when he is stronger. If your opponent is of choleric temper, try to irritate him. If he is arrogant, try to encourage his egotism. If the enemy troops are well prepared after reorganization, try to wear them down. If they are united, try to sow dissension among them. Attack the enemy where he is unprepared, and appear where you are not expected. These are the keys to victory for a strategist. It is not possible to formulate them in detail beforehand.

Now, if the estimates made before a battle indicate victory, it is because careful calculations show that your conditions are more favorable than those of your enemy; if they indicate defeat, it is because careful calculations show that favorable conditions for a battle are fewer. With more careful calculations, one can win; with less, one cannot. How much less chance of victory has one who makes no calculations at all! By this means, one can foresee the outcome of a battle.

## **Chapter 2: Waging War**

In operations of war-when one thousand fast four-horse chariots one thousand heavy chariots, and one thousand mail-clad soldiers are required; when provisions are transported for a thousand li; when there are expenditures at home and at the front, and stipends for entertainment of envoys and advisers-the cost of materials such as glue and lacquer, and of chariots and armor, will amount to one thousand pieces of gold a day. One hundred thousand troops may be dispatched only when this money is in hand.

A speedy victory is the main object in war. If this is long in coming, weapons are blunted and morale depressed. If troops are attacking cities, their strength will be exhausted. When the army engages in protracted campaigns, the resources of the state will fall short. When your weapons are dulled and ardor dampened, your strength exhausted and treasure spent, the chieftains of the neighboring states will take advantage of your crisis to act. In that case, no man, however wise, will be able to avert the disastrous consequences that ensue. Thus, while we have heard of stupid haste in war, we have not yet seen a clever operation that was prolonged. For there has never been a protracted war which benefited a country. Therefore, those unable to understand the evils inherent in employing troops are equally unable to understand the advantageous ways of doing so.

Those adept in waging war do not require a second levy of conscripts or more than two provisioning. They carry military equipment from the homeland, but rely on the enemy for provisions. Thus, the army is plentifully provided with food.

When a country is impoverished by military operations, it is due to distant transportation; carrying supplies for great distances renders the people destitute. Where troops are gathered, prices go up. When prices rise, the wealth of the people is drained away. When wealth is drained away, the people will be afflicted with urgent and heavy exactions. With this loss of wealth and exhaustion of strength, the households in the country will be extremely poor and seven-tenths of their wealth dissipated. As to government expenditures, those due to broken-down chariots, worn-out horses, armor and helmets, bows and arrows, spears and shields, protective mantlets, draft oxen, and wagons will amount to 60 percent of the total.

Hence, a wise general sees to it that his troops feed on the enemy, for one zhong of the enemy's provisions is equivalent to twenty of one's own and one shi of the enemy's fodder to twenty shi of one's own.

In order to make the soldiers courageous in overcoming the enemy, they must be roused to anger. In order to capture more booty from the enemy, soldiers must have their rewards.

Therefore, in chariot fighting when more than ten chariots are captured, reward those who take the first. Replace the enemy's flags and banners with your own, mix the captured chariots with yours, and mount them. Treat the prisoners of war well, and care for them. This is called "winning a battle and becoming stronger."

Hence, what is valued in war is victory, not prolonged operations. And the general who understands how to employ troops is the minister of the people's fate and arbiter of the nation's destiny.

### **Chapter 3: Offensive Strategy**

Generally, in war the best policy is to take a state intact; to ruin it is inferior to this. To capture the enemy's entire army is better than to destroy it; to take intact a regiment, a company, or a squad is better than to destroy them. For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence.

Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy. Next best is to disrupt his alliances by diplomacy. The next best is to attack his army. And the worst policy is to attack cities. Attack cities only when there is no alternative because to prepare big shields and wagons and make ready the necessary arms and equipment require at least three months, and to pile up earthen ramps against the walls requires an additional three months. The general, unable to control his impatience, will order his troops to swarm up the wall like ants, with the result that one-third of them will be killed without taking the city. Such is the calamity of attacking cities.

Thus, those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle. They capture the enemy's cities without assaulting them and overthrow his state without protracted operations. Their aim is to take all under heaven intact by strategic considerations. Thus, their troops are not worn out and their gains will be complete. This is the art of offensive strategy.

Consequently, the art of using troops is this: When ten to the enemy's one, surround him. When five times his strength, attack him. If double his strength, divide him. If equally matched, you may engage him with some good plan. If weaker numerically, be capable of withdrawing. And if in all respects unequal, be capable of eluding him, for a small force is but booty for one more powerful if it fights recklessly.

Now, the general is the assistant to the sovereign of the state. If this assistance is all-embracing, the state will surely be strong; if defective, the state will certainly be weak.

Now, there are three ways in which a sovereign can bring misfortune upon his army:

When ignorant that the army should not advance, to order an advance; or when ignorant that it should not retire, to order a retirement. This is described as "hobbling the army."

When ignorant of military affairs, to interfere in their administration. This causes the officers to be perplexed.

When ignorant of command problems, to interfere with the direction of the fighting. This engenders doubts in the minds of the officers.

If the army is confused and suspicious, neighboring rulers will take advantage of this and cause trouble. This is what is meant by: "A confused army leads to another's victory."

Thus, there are five points in which victory may be predicted:

He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot will be victorious.

He who understands how to fight in accordance with the strength of antagonistic forces will be victorious.

He whose ranks are united in purpose will be victorious.

He who is well prepared and lies in wait for an enemy who is not well prepared will be victorious.

He whose generals are able and not interfered with by the sovereign will be victorious.

It is in these five matters that the way to victory is known.

Therefore, I say: Know your enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles, you will never be defeated. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are sure to be defeated in every battle.

#### **Chapter 4: Dispositions**

The skillful warriors in ancient times first made themselves invincible and then awaited the enemy's moment of vulnerability. Invincibility depends on oneself, but the enemy's vulnerability on himself. It follows that those skilled in war can make themselves invincible but cannot cause an enemy to be certainly vulnerable. Therefore, it can be said that, one may know how to win, but cannot necessarily do so.

Defend yourself when you cannot defeat the enemy, and attack the enemy when you can. One defends when his strength is inadequate; he attacks when it is abundant. Those who are skilled in defense hide

themselves as under the nine-fold earth; those in attack flash forth as from above the ninefold heavens. Thus, they are capable both of protecting themselves and of gaining a complete victory.

To foresee a victory which the ordinary man can foresee is not the acme of excellence. Neither is it if you triumph in battle and are universally acclaimed "expert," for to lift an autumn down requires no great strength, to distinguish between the sun and moon is no test of vision, to hear the thunderclap is no indication of acute hearing. In ancient times, those called skilled in war conquered an enemy easily conquered. And, therefore, the victories won by a master of war gain him neither reputation for wisdom nor merit for courage. For he wins his victories without erring. Without erring he establishes the certainty of his victory; he conquers an enemy already defeated. Therefore, the skillful commander takes up a position in which he cannot be defeated and misses no opportunity to overcome his enemy. Thus, a victorious army always seeks battle after his plans indicate that victory is possible under them, whereas an army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning but without any planning. Those skilled in war cultivate their policies and strictly adhere to the laws and regulations. Thus, it is in their power to control success.

Now, the elements of the art of war are first, the measurement of space; second, the estimation of quantities; third, calculations; fourth, comparisons; and fifth, chances of victory. Measurements of space are derived from the ground. Quantities, comparisons from figures, and victory from comparisons. Thus, a victorious army is as one yi balanced against a grain, and a defeated army is as a grain balanced against one yi.

It is because of disposition that a victorious general is able to make his soldiers fight with the effect of pent-up waters which, suddenly released, plunge into a bottomless abyss.

### **Chapter 5: Posture of Army**

Generally, management of a large force is the same as management of a few men. It is a matter of organization. And to direct a large force is the same as to direct a few men. This is a matter of formations and signals. That the army is certain to sustain the enemy's attack without suffering defeat is due to operations of the extraordinary and the normal forces. Troops thrown against the enemy as a grindstone against eggs is an example of a solid acting upon a void.

Generally, in battle, use the normal force to engage and use the extraordinary forces to win. Now, the resources of those skilled in the use of extraordinary forces are as infinite as the heavens and earth, as inexhaustible as the flow of the great rivers, for they end and recommence - cyclical, as are the movements of the sun and moon. They die away and are reborn - recurrent, as are the passing seasons. The musical notes are the passing seasons. The musical notes are only five in number, but their combinations are so infinite that one cannot visualize them all. The flavors are only five in number, but their blends are so various that one cannot taste them all. In battle, there are only the normal and extraordinary forces, but their combinations are limitless; none can comprehend them all. For these two forces are mutually reproductive. It is like moving in an endless circle. Who can exhaust the possibility of their combination?

When torrential water tosses boulders, it is because of its momentum; when the strike of a hawk breaks the body of its prey, it is because of timing. Thus, the momentum of one skilled in war is overwhelming, and his attack precisely timed. His potential is that of a fully drawn crossbow; his timing, that of the release of the trigger.

In tumult and uproar, the battle seems chaotic, but there must be no disorder in one's own troops. The battlefield may seem in confusion and chaos, but one's array must be in good order. That will be proof against defeat. Apparent confusion is a product of good order; apparent cowardice, of courage; apparent weakness, of strength. Order of disorder depends on organization and direction; courage or cowardice on circumstances; strength or weakness on tactical dispositions. Thus, one who is skilled at making the enemy move does so by creating a situation, according to which the enemy will act. He entices the enemy with something he is certain to want. He keeps the enemy on the move by holding out bait and then attacks him with picked troops.

Therefore, a skilled commander seeks victory from the situation and does not demand it of his subordinates. He selects suitable men and exploits the situation. He who utilizes the situation uses his men in fighting as one rolls logs or stones. Now, the nature of logs and stones is that on stable ground they are static; on a slope, they move. If square, they stop; if round, they roll. Thus, the energy of troops skillfully commanded in battle may be compared to the momentum of round boulders which roll down from a mountain thousands of feet in height.

## **Chapter 6: Void and Actuality**

Generally, he who occupies the field of battle first and awaits his enemy is at ease, and he who comes later to the scene and rushes into the fight is weary. And, therefore, those skilled in war bring the enemy to the field of battle and are not brought there by him. One able to make the enemy come of his own accord does so by offering him some advantage. And one able to stop him from coming does so by preventing him. Thus, when the enemy is at ease, be able to tire him, when well fed, to starve him, when at rest to make him move.

Appear at places which he is unable to rescue; move swiftly in a direction where you are least expected.

That you may march a thousand li without tiring yourself is because you travel where there is no enemy. To be certain to take what you attack is to attack a place the enemy does not or cannot protect. To be certain to hold what you defend is to defend a place the enemy dares not or is not able to attack. Therefore, against those skilled in attack, the enemy does not know where to defend, and against the experts in defense, the enemy does not know where to attack.

How subtle and insubstantial, that the expert leaves no trace. How divinely mysterious, that he is inaudible. Thus, he is master of his enemy's fate. His offensive will be irresistible if he makes for his

enemy's weak positions; he cannot be overtaken when he withdraws if he moves swiftly. When I wish to give battle, my enemy, even though protected by high walls and deep moats, cannot help but engage me, for I attack a position he must relieve. When I wish to avoid battle, I may defend myself simply by drawing a line on the ground; the enemy will be unable to attack me because I divert him from going where he wishes.

If I am able to determine the enemy's dispositions while, at the same time, I conceal my own, then I can concentrate my forces and his must be divided. And if I concentrate while he divides, I can use my entire strength to attack a fraction of his. Therefore, I will be numerically superior. Then, if I am able to use many to strike few at the selected point, those I deal with will fall into hopeless straits. The enemy must not know where I intend to give battle. For if he does not know where I intend to give battle, he must prepare in a great many places. And when he prepares in a great many places, those I have to fight in will be few. For if he prepares to the front, his rear will be weak, and if to the rear, his front will be fragile. If he strengthens his left, his right will be vulnerable, and if his right, there will be few troops on his left. And when he sends troops everywhere, he will be weak everywhere. Numerical weakness comes from having to guard against possible attacks; numerical strength from forcing the enemy to make these preparations against us.

If one knows where and when a battle will be fought, his troops can march a thousand li and meet on the field. But if one knows neither the battleground nor the day of battle, the left will be unable to aid the right and the right will be unable to aid the left, and the van will be unable to support the rear and the rear, the van. How much more is this so when separated by several tens of li or, indeed, be even a few! Although I estimate the troops of Yue as many, of what benefit is this superiority with respect to the outcome of war? Thus, I say that victory can be achieved. For even if the enemy is numerically stronger, I can prevent him from engaging.

Therefore, analyze the enemy's plans so that you will know his shortcomings as strong points. Agitate him in order to ascertain the pattern of his movement. Lure him out to reveal his dispositions and ascertain his position. Launch a probing attack in order to learn where his strength is abundant and where deficient. The ultimate in disposing one's troops is to conceal them without ascertainable shape. Then the most penetrating spies cannot pry nor can the wise lay plans against you. It is according to the situations that plans are laid for victory, but the multitude does not comprehend this. Although everyone can see the outward aspects, none understands how the victory is achieved. Therefore, when a victory is won, one's tactics are not repeated. One should always respond to circumstances in an infinite variety of ways.

Now, an army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army should avoid strength and strike weakness. And as water shapes its flow in accordance with the ground, so an army manages its victory in accordance with the situation of the enemy. And as water has no constant form, there are in warfare no constant conditions. Thus, one able to win the victory by modifying his tactics in accordance with the enemy situation may be said to be divine. Of the five elements [water, fire, metal, wood, and earth], none is always predominant; of the four seasons, none lasts forever; of the days, some are long and some short, and the moon waxes and wanes. That is also the law of employing troops.

## **Chapter 7: Maneuvering**

Normally, in war, the general receives his commands from the sovereign. During the process from assembling his troops and mobilizing the people to blending the army into a harmonious entity and encamping it, nothing is more difficult than the art of maneuvering for advantageous positions. What is difficult about it is to make the devious route the most direct route and divert the enemy by enticing him with a bait. So doing, you may set out after he does and arrive at the battlefield before him. One able to do this shows the knowledge of the artifice of diversion.

Therefore, both advantage and danger are inherent in maneuvering for an advantageous position. One who sets the entire army in motion with impediments to pursue an advantageous position will not attain it. If he abandons the camp and all the impediments to contend for advantage, the stores will be lost. Thus, if one orders his men to make forced marches without armor, stopping neither day nor night, covering double the usual distance at a stretch, and doing a hundred li to wrest an advantage, it is probable that the commanders will be captured. The stronger men will arrive first and the feeble ones will struggle along behind; so, if this method is used, only one-tenth of the army will reach its destination. In a forced march of fifty li, the commander of the van will probably fall, but half the army will arrive. In a forced march of thirty li, just two-thirds will arrive. It follows that an army which lacks heavy equipment, fodder, food, and stores will be lost.

One who is not acquainted with the designs of his neighbors should not enter into alliances with them. Those who do not know the conditions of mountains and forests, hazardous defiles, marshes and swamps, cannot conduct the march of an army. Those who do not use local guides are unable to obtain the advantages of the ground. Now, war is based on deception. Move when it is advantageous and create changes in the situation by dispersal and concentration of forces. When campaigning, be swift as the wind; in leisurely marching, majestic as the forest; in raiding and plundering, be fierce as fire; in standing, firm as the mountains. When hiding, be as unfathomable as things behind the clouds; when moving, fall like a thunderbolt. When you plunder the countryside, divide your forces. When you conquer territory, defend strategic points. Weigh the situation before you move. He who knows the artifice of diversion will be victorious. Such is the art of maneuvering.