

Notes for Sun Tzu's Art of War

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"Look upon your soldiers as you do infants and they willingly go into deep valleys with you. Look upon your soldiers as beloved children and they willingly die with you."

1. Strategic Assessments

- a. "Military action is important to the nation – it is the ground of death and life, the path of survival and destruction, so it is imperative to examine it."
- b. Assess yourself and your opponent at headquarters using these five categories. Do this before deciding to mobilize.
- c. Five Categories for Assessment of Strength

i. The Way

1. "Inducing the people to have the same aim as the leadership so they will share death and life without fear of danger."
2. I-Ching, "Joyful in difficulty, the people forget about their death."
3. Ask yourself: "Which political leadership has the Way?"

ii. The Weather

1. Wang Xi, "Don't go into another's territory at an unfavorable time."

iii. The Terrain

1. Assessed according to:
 - a. Distance
 - b. Difficulty or Ease of Travel
 - c. Dimension
 - d. Safety
2. Ask yourself: "Who has the better climate and terrain?"

iv. The Leadership

1. Intelligence – Ability to plan, how to change effectively.
 - a. Overreliance in intelligence results in rebelliousness.
2. Trustworthiness – Sure of punishments and rewards
 - a. Fixation on trust results in folly.
3. Humaneness – Love and compassion for people and knowing their toil.
 - a. Overreliance on humaneness alone results in weakness.
4. Courage – Seize opportunities to make certain of victory without vacillation.
 - a. Dependence on the strength of courage results in violence.

5. Sternness – To establish discipline in the ranks by strict punishments.
 - a. Excessive sternness of command results in cruelty.
 6. Ask yourself: "Which General has ability?"
 7. Ask yourself: "Whose system of rewards and punishments is clearer?"
- v. Discipline
1. Organization
 - a. Mei Yaochen, "Troops must be grouped and ordered in a regular manner."
 2. Chain of Command
 - a. Mei Yaochen, "There must be sufficient officers to lead."
 3. Logistics
 - a. Mei Yaochen, "Overseeing supplies."
 4. Ask yourself: "Whose discipline is effective?"
 5. Ask yourself: "Whose troops are the stronger?"
 6. Ask yourself: "Whose officers and soldiers are the better trained?"
- d. Concerning political leadership, ask yourself:
- i. "Who can establish the way?"
 - ii. "Who sets up rules that are consistent, punishing low and high alike?"
 - iii. "Whose orders are the most effective?"
 - iv. "Whose subordinates do not dare to disobey?"
 - v. "Whose rewards are not out of proportion and punishments are not arbitrary?"
- e. Deception
- i. "When competent appear incompetent."
 - ii. "When effective appear to be ineffective."
 - iii. Make it look like you are going far or near and do the opposite.
 - iv. "Use anger to throw them into disarray."
 - v. "Use humility to make them haughty."
 - vi. "Tire them by flight."
 - vii. "Cause division among them."
 1. Break alliances and accords.
 - viii. "Attack when they are unprepared. Make your move when they do not expect it."
 - ix. "The most effective of movements is the one that is unexpected. The best of plans is the one that is unknown."
- f. Observe their faults or strengths
- i. Greedy
 1. "Lure them in with the prospect of gain."
 - ii. Fulfilled

1. "Be prepared against them."
- iii. Strong
 1. "Avoid them."
 2. "Withdraw and wait for an opening when they relax."
- g. Doing Battle
 - i. Don't continue for a long time
 1. Du You, "Arms are the tools of ill omen to employ them for an extended period of time will bring about calamity. As it is said, 'those who like to fight and so exhaust their military inevitably perish.'"
 - ii. Transporting supplies to a distant place will impoverish the nation.
 1. "A wise general strives to feed off of the enemy. Each pound you take from the enemy is equivalent to twenty pounds you provide by yourself."
 - iii. "What kills the enemy is anger. What gets the enemy's goods is reward."
 - iv. Reward sparingly/competitively.
 1. "Offer a reward to one in order to encourage everyone."
 - v. "The important thing in a military operation is victory, not persistence."
- h. Planning a Siege
 - i. Better to keep a nation, army, division, battalion, unit intact than to destroy it.
 1. "This means that killing is not the important thing."
 - ii. "Those who win every battle are not really skillful. Those who render others helpless without fighting are the best of all."
 - iii. "The superior militarist strikes while schemes are being laid."
 - iv. "The next best is to attack alliances."
 - v. "The next best is to attack the army."
 - vi. "The lowest is to attack a city."
- i. Assessing Strength
 - i. "If you outnumber your enemy 10 to 1, surround them."
 - ii. "If you outnumber your enemy 5 to 1, then attack."
 - iii. "If you outnumber your enemy 2 to 1, divide."
 - iv. "If Equal, fight if you are able."
 - v. "If you are fewer, then keep away if you are able."
 - vi. "If you are not as good, then flee if you are able."
- j. Problems with Civil Leadership
 - i. "Tying up the armies" - When ignorant of the facts, tells the army to advance or retreat when it should not.
 - ii. "Confusion" - When the civil leadership is ignorant of military affairs, but shares in the government of the armies.
 - iii. "Hesitant" - When the civil leadership is ignorant of military maneuvers but shares in the command.

- iv. "Taking away victory by derangement of the military" – Once the armies are confused and hesitant, trouble comes from competitors.
 - k. Five ways to know who will win
 - i. Those who know when to fight and when not to fight
 - ii. Those who know when to use many or few troops
 - iii. Those whose upper and lower ranks have the same desire
 - iv. Those who face the unprepared with preparation
 - v. Those whose generals are able and are not constrained by their governments
 - l. Know yourself and know others
 - i. "Attack is a time for defense; defense is a strategy of attack. If you know this you not be in danger even if you fight 100 battles."
- 2. Formation
 - a. "In ancient times skillful warriors first made themselves invincible, and then watched for vulnerability in their opponents."
 - i. Invincibility is in oneself.
 - ii. Vulnerability is in the opponent.
 - iii. "Therefore, Skillful warriors are able to be invincible. But they cannot cause opponents to be vulnerable."
 - iv. "That is why it is said that victory can be discerned, but not manufactured."
 - v. "Those skilled in defense hide in the deepest depths of the earth. Those skilled in attack maneuver in the highest heights of the sky."
 - vi. "Good warriors take their stand on ground where they cannot lose, and do not overlook conditions that make an opponent prone to defeat."
 - b. 5 Rules of the Military
 - i. Measurement – The ground gives rise to measurement.
 - ii. Assessment – Measurement gives rise to assessment.
 - iii. Calculation – Assessment gives rise to calculation.
 - iv. Comparison – Calculation gives rise to Comparison.
 - v. Victory – Comparison gives rise to victories.
- 3. Force
 - a. "There are only five notes in the musical scale, but their variations are so many that they cannot all be heard. There are only five basic colors, but their variations are so many that they cannot all be seen. There are only five basic flavors, but their variations are so many that they cannot all be tasted. There are only two kinds of charge in a battle, the unorthodox surprise attack and the orthodox direct attack, but variations of the unorthodox and orthodox are endless. The unorthodox and the orthodox give rise to each other, like a beginningless circle – who could exhaust them?"
 - b. "When the speed of rushing water reaches the point where it can move boulders, this is the force of momentum. When the speed of a hawk is

such that it can strike and kill, this is precision. So it is with skillful warriors, their force is swift, their precision is close. Their force is like drawing a catapult, their precision is like releasing the trigger."

i. "Skillful warriors are able to allow momentum to seize victory for them without exerting their strength."

c. Assessing Force

i. Disorder arises from Order - Organization

ii. Cowardice arises from Courage – Momentum

1. Even a timid army will gain strength from momentum.

iii. Weakness arises from Strength – Formation

4. Emptiness and Fullness

a. Be first on the battle field

i. "Militarists avoid the full and strike the empty, so they must first be able to recognize emptiness and fullness in others and themselves."

b. "Good warriors cause others to come to them, and do not go to others."

c. Emptying the opponent

i. When they are at ease, it is possible to tire them

ii. When they are well fed, it is possible to starve them

iii. When they are at rest, it is possible to move them

d. "To unflinchingly take what you attack, attack where there is no defense. For unflinchingly secure defense, defend where there is no attack."

e. "Be extremely subtle, even to the point of formlessness."

f. "Strike few with many." Don't let your battle ground be known and they will divide up their company to guard against you.

g. Spies cannot learn from something that is formless.

h. "Military formation is like water. The form of water is to avoid the high and go to the low. The form of a military force is to avoid the full and attack the empty. The flow of water is determined by the earth. The victory of a military force is determined by the opponent."

i. "So, a military force has no constant formation. Water has no constant shape. The ability to gain victory by changing and adapting according to the opponent is called: genius."

5. Armed Struggle

a. Make long distances near, and problems into advantages.

b. Use local guides or professional scouts to get the advantages of the land.

c. "A military force is established by deception; mobilized by gain; and adapted by division and combination."

d. "Take away the energy of their armies and take away the heart of their generals."

e. "Do not follow a feigned retreat."

f. "Do not attack crack troops."

g. "Do not stop an army on its way home."

h. "A surrounded army must be given a way out."

i. "Do not press a desperate enemy."

6. Adaptation

- a. "There are routes not to be followed, armies not to be attacked, citadels not to be besieged, territory not to be fought over, orders of civilian government not to be obeyed."
 - i. Change according to events.
 - ii. "When a territory is of marginal benefit and is as easy to lose as it is to win, then don't fight over it."
- b. Generals must know how to adapt to take advantage of the ground or other advantages.
- c. Rely on preparation.
 - i. "If you can always remember danger when you are secure, and remember chaos in times of order; watch out for chaos and danger while they are still formless and prevent them before they happen."
- d. Five Traits that are Dangerous in Generals
 - i. Those who are ready to die, can be killed (excessive courage)
 - ii. Those who are intent on living, can be captured (fear of death)
 - iii. Those who are quick to anger, can be shamed (intemperate)
 - iv. Those who are puritanical, can be disgraced (proud)
 - v. Those who love people, can be troubled (excessive compassion)

7. Maneuvering Armies

- a. Care for physical health and stay near resources.
- b. "Those whose words are humble while they increase war preparations are going to advance."
- c. "Those whose words are strong and advance aggressively are going to retreat."
- d. "Those who come seeking peace without a treaty are plotting."
- e. "If half of their force advances and half retreats, they are trying to lure you."
- f. "When they see an advantage but do not advance on it, they are weary."
- g. "When there are murmurings, lapses in duties and extended conversations; the loyalty of the group has been lost."
- h. "When they give out numerous rewards, it means they are at an impasse."
- i. "When they give out numerous punishments, it means they are worn out."
- j. "Those who come in a conciliatory manner want to rest."
- k. "When forces angrily confront you but delay engagement but do not leave, it is imperative to watch them carefully."
- l. "The individualist without strategy who takes opponents lightly will inevitably become the captive of others."
- m. "If soldiers are punished before a personal attachment to the leadership is formed, they will not submit. And if they do not submit, they are hard to employ."
- n. "If punishments are not executed after personal attachment has been established with the soldiers, then they cannot be employed."

8. Terrain

- a. "The contour of the land is an aid to an army. Sizing up opponents to determine victory, assessing dangers and distances, is the proper course of action for military leaders. Those who do battle knowing these will win. Those who do battle without knowing these will lose."
- b. (title quotation)
- c. 9 Grounds
 - i. "Ground of Dissolutio"n – Where local interests fight among themselves on their own ground.
 - ii. "Light Ground" – When you enter other's land, but not deeply.
 - iii. "Ground of Contention" – Ground beneficial to either side if held.
 - iv. "Trafficked Ground" – Where you and others can come and go.
 - v. "Intersecting Ground" – Ground that is surrounded on three sides by competitors and whose people will gladly give the first to get it access to all of the people on the continent.
 - vi. "Heavy Ground" – When you enter deeply into another's territory.
 - vii. "Bad Ground" – When you cross any route difficult to travel.
 - viii. "Surrounded Ground" – When the way in is narrow and the way out circuitous, and a small force can strike you even though your numbers are greater.
 - ix. "Dying Ground" – Where you will survive only if you fight quickly.
- d. "So, let there be no battle on a ground of dissolution; let there be no stopping on light ground; let there be no attack on a ground of contention; let there be no cutting off of trafficked ground. On intersecting ground form communications; on heavy ground, plunder; on bad ground keep going; on surrounded ground, make plans; and on dying ground, fight."
- e. Habits of the General
 - i. "The business of the General is quiet and secret, fair and orderly."
 - ii. "He changes his actions and revises his plans, so that people will not recognize them. He changes his abode and goes by a circuitous route, so that people cannot anticipate him."
 - iii. "To assemble armies and put them into dangerous situations is the business of generals. Adaptations to different grounds, advantages of contraction and expansion, patterns of human feelings and conditions – these must be examined."
 - iv. Rules
 1. "Those who do not know the plans of competitors cannot prepare alliances."
 2. "Those who do not know the lay of the land cannot maneuver their forces."
 3. "Those who do not use local guides cannot take advantage of the ground. "

- f. "Employ the entire armed forces like employing a single person. Employ them with actual tasks, do not talk to them. Motivate them with benefits, do not tell them about harm."

9. Fire Attack

- a. "A government should not mobilize an army out of anger, military leaders should not provoke war out of wrath. Act when it is beneficial, desist if it not. Anger can revert to joy, wrath can revert to delight, but a nation destroyed cannot be restored to existence, and the dead cannot be restored to life."

10. The Use of Spies

- a. "Foreknowledge cannot be gotten from ghosts and spirits, cannot be had by analogy, cannot be found out by calculation. It must be obtained from people, people who know the conditions of the enemy."
- b. 5 Kinds of Spy
 - i. "Local Spy" – Hired from among the people.
 - ii. "Inside Spy" – Hired from enemy officials.
 - iii. "Reverse Spy" – Hired from among enemy spies.
 - iv. "Dead Spy" – Transmit false information to enemy spies.
 - v. "Living Spy" – Come back to report.
 - vi. Du Mu, "Among officials of the opposing regime, there are intelligent ones who have lost their jobs, there are those who are punished for excesses, there are also greedy favorites. There are those confined to the lower ranks, there are those who fail to get appointments, there are those who seek to take advantage of a collapse to extend their own wealth and power, and there are those who always act with deceit and duplicity. Any of them can be secretly approached and bribed so as to find out conditions in their country and discover any plans against you; they can also be used to create rifts and disharmony."
- c. "You must seek out enemy agents who have come to spy on you, bribe them and induce them to stay with you, so you can use them as reverse spies. By intelligence thus obtained, you can find local spied and inside spies to employ. By intelligence thus obtained, you can cause misinformation of dead spies to be conveyed to the enemy. By intelligence thus obtained, you can get living spies to work as planned."