

Strategy and *The Art of War*

Aaron Segal
Brown University

Overview

- Presentation
 - Background
- War Game
 - Discuss strategy with your fellow generals
 - Best strategists win fabulous prizes!

Background

- Sun Tzu
 - Lived 2000 – 2500 years ago in China
 - Literally means “Master Sun”
 - Traditional name: Sun Wu
 - General and philosopher from the kingdom of Wu, 544-496 BC (according to tradition)
 - Warring States period, 476-221 BC (according to scholars)



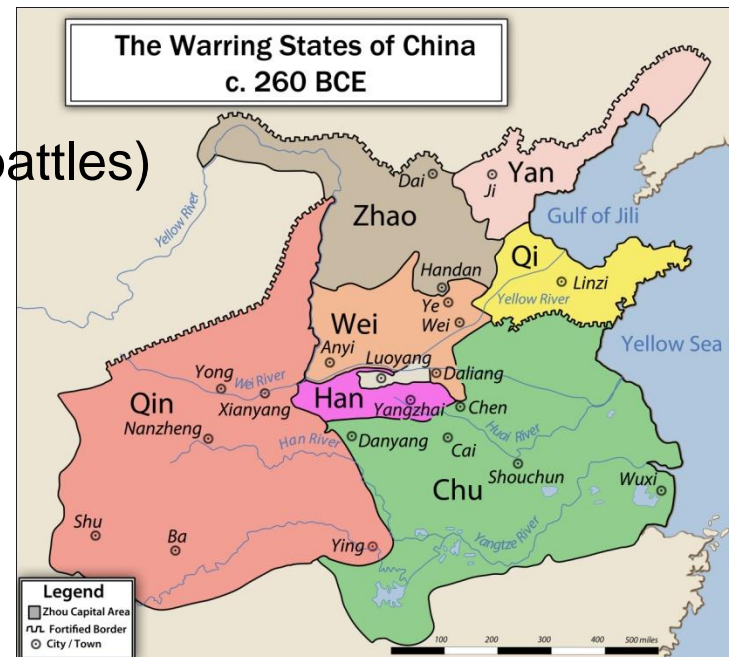
Background

- *The Art of War*
 - Chinese: 孫子兵法 (*Sūnzǐ Bīngfǎ*)
 - 13 chapters
 - One of the oldest books on strategy ever written
 - Popular with:
 - Generals from Douglas MacArthur to Napoleon to Mao Zedong
 - Required reading for intelligence personnel in the US Marine Corps
 - Corporate executives and managers
 - Wall Street traders (including Gordon Gecko)
 - Supposedly helps players win at Risk



Background

- Written as a manual for generals in ancient China, but very adaptable to other times, places, and leaders
- Discusses:
 - Strategy (how to win wars)
 - Very little tactics (how to win battles)
 - Managing the troops
 - When to fight
 - Using spies
- Very quotable



Background

- Does not teach you how to win a swordfight
- Not a “playbook” of specific formations and tactics
 - Sun Tzu would hate a book like that!
- Mostly doesn't have specifics
 - If it did, it would be out of date by now
- Does not cover ethics of war
- Does not say that war is good
 - *Those who render others' armies helpless without fighting are the best of all.*
- Written in Chinese
 - This translation is by Thomas Cleary

Main points

- The side that has the bravest soldiers, strongest fighters, and most determined warriors...
 - ...will lose to the side that planned ahead.
- By finding out everything you can about a situation, confusing your foes, and planning ahead, you can guarantee victory.
- The people who work for you must be disciplined and organized.
- Overall, it's better to fight as little as possible, and destroy as little as possible.

Part 1: Strategic Assessments

- Before the war even starts, you can recognize who the winners and losers will be.
- How?
- *Measure in terms of five things, use these assessments to make comparisons, and thus find out what the conditions are. The five things are:*
 - *the Way,*
 - *the weather,*
 - *the terrain,*
 - *the leadership,*
 - *and discipline.*



Part 1: Strategic Assessments

- *The five things are:*
 - *the Way,*
 - Is each side in harmony with itself?
 - How well is each side doing to start with?
 - *the weather,*
 - Are the conditions good for each side right now?
 - Is this the right time for war?
 - *the terrain,*
 - Are there natural obstacles to what each side wants to do?
 - Does one side have a natural advantage?
 - Are there easy paths to take?

Part 1: Strategic Assessments

- *the leadership,*
 - How good are each side's leaders?
 - *Leadership is a matter of intelligence, trustworthiness, humaneness, courage, and sternness.*
- *and discipline.*
 - Will each side's soldiers listen to their commanding officers?
 - Is each side well organized enough to send supplies to its soldiers?
- The more of these things a side has, the more likely it is to win.
- Plan your strategy according to your strengths and weaknesses.

Part 1: Strategic Assessments

- Another route: use spies.
- Spies bring back secret information that you can't get just by observing enemy troops.
- Spies also cost a lot of money, though less than running a war.

To fail to know the conditions of opponents because of reluctance to give rewards for intelligence is extremely inhumane, uncharacteristic of a true military leader, uncharacteristic of an assistant of the government, uncharacteristic of a victorious chief.

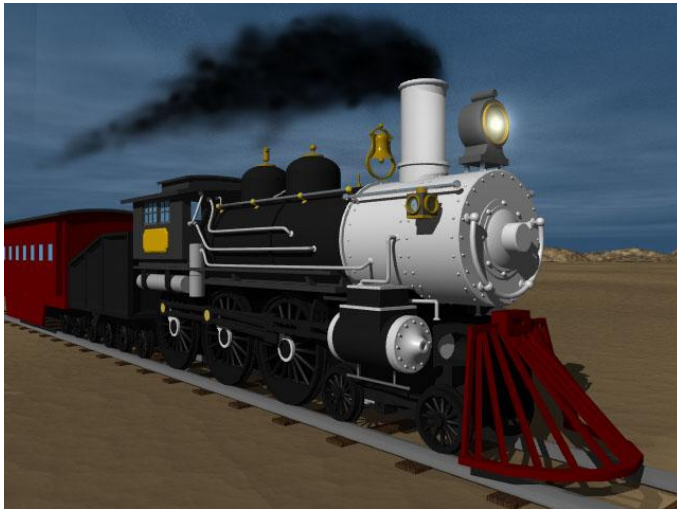


Part 1: Strategic Assessments

- What if you don't know how strong the enemy is?
- What if you don't know how strong you are?
- *If you know others and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles;*
- *if you do not know others but know yourself, you win one and lose one;*
- *if you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.*
 - Peril = danger
 - Imperiled = put in danger

Part 2: Making Plans

- If you know yourself perfectly well, then you can figure out all of your own weaknesses, and fix them.
 - Famous question: What would happen if an unstoppable force hit an immovable object?
 - Answer: It's impossible for both to exist at once.



Part 2: Making Plans

- *In ancient times skillful warriors first made themselves invincible, and then watched for vulnerability in their opponents.*
- *Defense is for times of insufficiency, attack is for times of surplus.*
- If you're going to do something risky (like sending your troops away from home to go to war),
 - First take care of necessities at home, and that you can afford to take the risk.
 - Then, make sure that the thing you're trying to do is possible, and know exactly how to do it.

Part 2: Making Plans

- If you know your enemy's weaknesses, and you know how to exploit them, then you can win easily.
- If your plan is to have the best weapons and the mightiest warriors, and then just "beat" the enemy, that's no plan at all.
- *A victorious army first wins and then seeks battle; a defeated army first battles and then seeks victory.*
- Who's the better general?
 - One who's famous for winning really tough battles, or
 - One who nobody has heard of, because he only fights easy battles?
 - The second general knows how to win every battle before it has begun, so he never has to get into a dangerous situation.
 - The first general just rushes in, so he gets into big battles that make him famous.

Part 2: Making Plans

- All else being equal, you can look to sheer numbers.
 - *The rule for use of the military is that:*
 - *if you outnumber the opponent ten to one, then surround them;*
 - *five to one, attack;*
 - (overrun them with superior numbers)
 - *two to one, divide.*
 - (attack them from two directions at once)
 - *If you are equal, then fight if you are able.*
 - *If you are fewer, then keep away if you are able.*
 - *If you are not as good, then flee if you are able.*
- If you're simply much weaker, then don't fight, making it impossible for you to lose.

Part 2: Making Plans

- If you're stronger, great!
- Don't let the other side know how strong you are.
 - Make yourself look weak and undisciplined
 - Don't let them know what you're up to
 - *Draw them in with the prospect of gain, take them by confusion.*
- That strength shouldn't mean you can afford to lose more battles. It should mean that you can win more battles.
 - That's why you should surround enemies, divide them, etc.

Part 2: Making Plans

- You never want to fight for a very long time. The longer things go, the smaller your chance of success will be.
 - Supporting an army for a long time costs your entire nation in blood and treasure.
 - The longer your army is away from home, the more it will get tired and disheartened.
- *Therefore I have heard of military operations that were clumsy but swift, but I have never seen one that was skillful and lasted a long time.*
- Wars of attrition are the worst way to win.
 - More on this later.

Part 2: Making Plans

- What if you're not stronger than your opponent?
- Try to trick the other side into making a mistake.
 - How?
 - *Use anger to throw them into disarray.*
 - *Use humility to make them haughty.*
 - *Tire them by flight.*
 - *Cause division among them.*
- If this doesn't work, or if they are much more powerful than you, then just don't fight.



Part 3: Leading Troops

- Once you have your strategy, you have to put it into effect. This means commanding an army.
- Which of the following statements do you agree with more?
 - “If the army as a whole is unified and strong, you don’t have to worry about individuals.”
 - “An army is only as strong as its weakest soldier.”
- *Once people are unified, the brave cannot proceed alone, the timid cannot retreat alone – this is the rule for employing a group.*

Part 3: Leading Troops

- When the whole army is working together, the weaknesses of individual soldiers don't matter.
- *Getting people to fight by letting the force of momentum work is like rolling logs and rocks.*
 - A unified army marching at once is like a round boulder rolling down a hill. No one can stop it.
 - But a disorganized army marching is like a bunch of pebbles. Most of the pebbles won't make it to the bottom, and the ones that do won't hurt anyone.



Part 3: Leading Troops

- *If you travel light, not stopping day or night, doubling your usual pace, struggling for an advantage a hundred miles away, your military leaders will be captured. Strong soldiers will get there first, the weary later on – as a rule, one in ten make it.*
 - Distance from US to Afghanistan: about 7000 miles.
- Does this mean anything at all to us today?
 - The US has bases in Afghanistan and nearby Pakistan, which are much closer!
- In modern days you can do send an army halfway across the world, but that doesn't mean you don't have to take care of the basic things, like food, medical care for the wounded, and “supplies.”

Part 3: Leading Troops

- In order to be able to lead your army, you must have the troops on your side.
- This means forming a personal connection with them. But don't let that stop you from maintaining discipline.
- It's important to punish soldiers who break the rules, and reward soldiers who do well.
 - Too many punishments make the soldiers hate you.
 - Too many rewards, and they won't take you seriously.
- *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.*
- *If you are so nice to them that you cannot employ them, so kind to them that you cannot command them, so casual with them that you cannot establish order, they are like spoiled children, useless.*

Part 3: Leading Troops

- In order for soldiers to trust you, you need to show consistency.
- Your system of rewards and penalties must be very clear and consistently applied.
- Both the soldiers and the officers who lead them must be well trained.
- Do not let cowardly, irrational, or ineffective people become officers, or nobody will listen to them, and your whole army will break down.

Part 3: Leading Troops

- *Nothing is harder than armed struggle.*
- Fight when your troops have a lot of energy, and your opponents' troops don't.
- If enemy troops come marching up to you, looking for a fight, they must have a lot of energy.
- How do we deal with this?
- Don't fight them off with your main army right away, but let them chase you for a bit. After they fight for a while, they will eventually want to go home – this is the time to strike back.



Part 3: Leading Troops

- Another, simple interpretation: Use intelligence when commanding an army.
- Specifically, don't fall for your opponent's tricks...
 - *Do not follow a feigned retreat.*
 - *Do not attack crack troops.*
 - *Do not eat food for their soldiers.*
- ...and avoid making enemies fight to the death.
 - *Do not stop an army on its way home.*
 - *A surrounded army must be given a way out.*
 - *Do not press a desperate enemy.*

Part 3: Leading Troops

- The civilian government is in charge of declaring war and deciding who to fight.
- What if they try to interfere with the running of the military?
 - Generals owe their loyalty to their country, not politicians, so they should not let themselves be tied down by politics.
 - *When the laws of war indicate certain victory it is surely appropriate to do battle, even if the government says there is to be no battle. If the laws of war do not indicate victory, it is appropriate not to do battle, even if the government orders war.*
- So, as a general, you should be able to pick the best commanders, and then let them do their job.

Part 4: Adapting and Formlessness

- Why is training an army different from training a dog?
 - You teach a dog to do the same thing every time you say “SIT!”
 - But a well-trained army must be able to adapt to all possible kinds of attack.
- If you use the same tactics over and over, your enemies will know what to expect.
 - Even if you use sneak attacks all the time, your foes will know to expect sneak attacks from you!
- With a well-trained army, you can combine the expected and the unexpected in countless ways. Then you can be truly formless, impossible to predict.

Part 4: Adapting and Formlessness

- Any general can manipulate his own troops, but a superior general can manipulate the enemy.
- *A military operation involves deception.*
- If you can trick your enemies into tiring themselves out, you can beat them using your own, well-rested troops.
- If you can make your opponent spread its forces thin, any battle you fight with them will be easier.
- If you can trick your opponent into revealing its battle plans, you can figure out how to overcome them.
- You can also make your opponents want to fight, or make them not want to fight.
- How can we do all this?

Part 4: Adapting and Formlessness

- *When the front is prepared, the rear is lacking, and when the rear is prepared the front is lacking. Preparedness on the left means lack on the right. Preparedness on the left means right on the left. Preparedness everywhere means lack everywhere.*
 - Launch small, hit-and-run strikes all across your opponent's territory, forcing them to spread out their forces in defense.
 - This also lets you find out what tactics they are using.

Part 4: Adapting and Formlessness

- *When you want to do battle, even if the opponent is deeply entrenched in a defensive position, he will be unable to avoid fighting if you attack where he will surely go to the rescue.*
- *When you do not want to do battle, even if you draw a line on the ground to hold, the opponent cannot fight with you because you set him off on the wrong track.*
 - Confuse your opponent by acting stronger than you are, or by making it look like you're setting up for an ambush.

Part 4: Adapting and Formlessness

- Your adversaries, if they're any good, will try to trick you too.
- There is no way to predict every trick, or to list every scenario in battle, so we're not going to bother.
- Know that you must adapt to the situation, and do not give in to routine or emotion. Then you can decide what is a trick and what isn't.
- *There are five traits that are dangerous in generals: Those who are ready to die can be killed; those who are intent on living can be captured; those who are quick to anger can be shamed; those who are puritanical can be disgraced; those who love people can be troubled.*

Part 4: Adapting and Formlessness

- Why do we care more about trickery and doing the unexpected than about having the strongest and best soldiers?
 - It's not a general's job to train the soldiers
 - Do you really think that your country just has stronger people than all the others?
 - The most reliable way to win is to do what the enemy least expects, and hasn't prepared for. Then they won't be able to put up a fight.
- *So in the case of those who are skilled in attack, their opponents do not know where to defend. In the case of those skilled in defense, their opponents do not know where to attack.*

Part 4: Adapting and Formlessness

- *Be extremely subtle, even to the point of formlessness. Be extremely mysterious, even to the point of soundlessness. Thereby you can be the director of the opponent's fate.*
- Ideally, make it absolutely impossible for anyone to know what you are doing.
- Then, your opponents have to spend time and energy preparing for everything, meaning that they can't prepare properly for the one strategy you're actually using.
- *So it is said that victory can be made.*

Part 5: War and Destruction



- Defenses in ancient times meant fortresses and walled cities.
- In order to break in, attackers have to make a *siege* of the city, using battering rams, catapults.
 - Or, just surround the city, don't let any food in, and fight until everyone inside starves.
- In either case, attacking a city involves a lot of time. The target faces destruction (or at least heavy damage), and the attacker has to keep up the attack in the face of constant counterattacks.

Part 5: War and Destruction

- *The general rule for use of the military is that it is better to keep a nation intact than to destroy it. It is better to keep an army intact than to destroy it, better to keep a division intact than to destroy it, better to keep a battalion intact than to destroy it, better to keep a unit intact than to destroy it.*
- *Those who win every battle are not really skillful – those who render others' armies helpless without fighting are the best of all.*
- Do you think Sun Tzu is going to recommend besieging a city?

Part 5: War and Destruction

- *Siege of a city is only done as a last resort.*
- Sun Tzu never actually talks about how to plan a siege, because if you were a really good general, you wouldn't need to besiege a city in the first place.
- Destructive fighting is bad for everybody.
- Even if you eventually win, you end up with a lot less than you would have if you got the other side to surrender, or even if you only attacked their army.

Part 5: War and Destruction



- Still, destructive fighting cannot be avoided.
- In particular, setting fires to or near enemy bases creates chaos that you can take advantage of.
 - Fire is a very specific tool that must be used carefully.
- If you're going to set fire near (or to) the enemy's base, you have to attack it quickly to take advantage of the chaos.
 - If they don't panic, and control the fire quickly, then don't bother attacking.
 - Don't attack when there is nothing to gain, and don't set fires unless you have a really good reason.
- *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.*

Part 5: War and Destruction

- You can minimize destruction and maximize your own chances of victory by:
 - Making alliances so that others don't attack you
 - Scaring off an enemy rather than fighting it
 - When you cripple an army's supplies rather than destroying it utterly
 - When you capture important bases and cities, without having to fight an enemy army first
- *To unfailingly take what you attack, attack where there is no defense. For unfailingly secure defense, defend where there is no attack.*

Conclusion

- The best generals win wars easily and quickly.
- To do this, use information.
- First, protect yourself by covering your weaknesses and keeping away enemies.
- Then, switch your methods of attack over and over again, refusing to adopt any one style.
- In order for this to be possible, your troops must be well-trained and disciplined.
- By being formless and knowing your enemy's weaknesses, you can win the war before you even start fighting.