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The Art of Waging War—Stratagem and Tactics



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Introduction

In an attempt to decipher the *Art of War* by Sun Tzu by quoting examples from military history, the first article titled “The Art of War—Laying Plans for Calculations”¹ was well received by the readers, hence this second article on the subject will take the research deeper to the Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the book which focus on Waging war, Stratagem and Tactical dispositions of the Army. Due credit of course is being given once again to the translation of the book by Ashley Giles and the Sonshi group of Atlanta which is dedicated to the writings of Sun Tzu, through quotes from the book.

On Waging War

Chapter 3 of the book explains how to understand the economy of warfare and how success requires winning decisive engagements quickly. This section advises that successful military campaigns require limiting the cost of competition and conflict. All modern Armies of the day are right sizing and becoming technologically superior to limit the costs of competition and conflict.

Key Points

1. Chapter 3 of the *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu explains how success requires winning decisive engagements quickly.
2. Successful military campaigns require limiting the cost of competition and conflict.
3. Many modern powers have resorted to hybrid warfare and proxy war in order to reduce the cost on their resources to fight a prolonged conventional war.
4. The Cold start concept of proactive warfighting and now the experiment with Integrated Battle Groups could become a game changer in the backdrop of the above.
5. Chapter 4 defines the source of strength as unity, not size, and discusses the five factors that are needed to succeed in any war: Attack, Strategy, Alliances, Army and Cities.
6. Strategy for employment for the recently initiated Mountain strike corps in the Indian context could take a leaf from this book.
7. Importance of the indirect approach in warfare is overbearing.
8. Chapter 5 of the Book explains the importance of defending existing positions until a commander is capable of advancing from those positions in safety.
9. This concept is being effectively utilised by China by securing the first chain of islands in the South and East China seas, thereby securing its underbelly.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an independent think-tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional and sub-conventional conflict and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

The Art of Waging War ...

Sun Tzu said that in the operations of war, where a large army is fielded, with logistics sustenance, the expenditure at home and at the front, will reach the total of a thousand ounces of silver per day. When you engage in actual fighting, if victory is long in coming, then men's weapons will grow dull and their ardour will be dampened. If you lay siege to a town, you will exhaust your strength. Again, if the campaign is protracted, the resources of the State will not be equal to the strain. When your weapons are dulled, your ardour dampened, your strength exhausted and your treasure spent, other chieftains will spring up to take advantage of your extremity. Then no man, however wise, will be able to avert the consequences that must ensue. Thus, though we have heard of stupid haste in war, cleverness has never been seen associated with long delays. There has been no instance when a country has benefited from prolonged warfare. It is only one who is thoroughly acquainted with the evils of war, who can thoroughly understand the profitable way of carrying it on. History would have been different in case after a series of blitzkrieg manoeuvre warfare operations in Europe, the Germans had not waited for their protracted air campaign in the "Battle of Britain" to succeed before launching an air-land operation to capture Britain.

"The skillful soldier does not raise a second levy, neither are his supply-wagons loaded more than twice. Bring war material with you from home, but forage on the enemy. Thus, the army will have food enough for its needs." Shivaji, the warrior, utilised this dictum to the fullest through guerilla warfare on the supply lines of his adversaries.²

"Poverty of the State exchequer causes an army to be maintained by contributions, and that causes the people to be impoverished. On the other hand, the proximity of an army causes prices to go up; and high prices cause the people's substance to be drained away. With this loss of substance and exhaustion of strength, the homes of the people will be stripped bare, and three-tenths of their income

will be dissipated; while government expenses for broken chariots, worn-out horses, breast-plates and helmets, bows and arrows, spears and shields, protective mantles, draught-oxen and heavy wagons, will amount to four-tenths of its total revenue. Hence a wise general makes a point of foraging on the enemy. One cartload of the enemy's provisions is equivalent to twenty of one's own, and likewise a single picul of his fodder is equivalent to twenty from one's own store."³ Many modern powers have resorted to hybrid warfare and proxy war in order to reduce the cost on their resources to fight a prolonged conventional war, whereas and at the same time, increase the cost for the adversary.

On the issue of awards/rewards, Sun Tzu acknowledges that in order to kill the enemy, our men must be roused to anger; that there may be advantage from defeating the enemy, the troops must have their rewards. Therefore, in chariot fighting, when ten or more chariots have been taken, those should be rewarded who took the first. It was a well-established norm till the nineteenth century, that troops assaulting a fortress were given the right to retain the bounty collected after capture and sacking of the fortress. This tradition was later modified to medals, recognition and purses by the sovereigns or the governments of the day. Such recognitions, purses and assurance by the state that it will look after the soldier's interests in life or death motivate the soldiers to fight fearlessly in the face of heavy odds.

"Our own flags should be substituted for those of the enemy, and the chariots mingled and used in conjunction with ours." On a shoestring budget, Rommel utilised this tactic to the best effect in the North African Campaign, so much so that his own armoured personnel carrier was a captured British one. The captured soldiers should be kindly treated and kept. This is called using the conquered foe to augment one's own strength. Even if in modern warfare the captured soldiers cannot be forced to fight or support the cause of war, winning them over

mentally would ensure a Just victory and will affect the generations to come psychologically in favour of the Victor.

“In war, then, let your great object be victory, not lengthy campaigns. Thus, it may be known that the leader of armies is the arbiter of the people’s fate, the man on whom it depends whether the nation shall be in peace or in peril.” The Cold start concept of proactive warfighting and now the experiment with Integrated Battle Groups in the form of Reinforced Brigade Groups could become a game changer in the back drop of the above.

Attack by Stratagem/Plan of Attack

Chapter 4 of the book defines the source of strength as unity, not size, and discusses the five factors that are needed to succeed in any war. In order of importance, these critical factors are: Attack, Strategy, Alliances, Army and Cities. In the practical “art of war,” the best thing of all is to take the enemy’s country whole and intact; to shatter and destroy it is not so good. So, too, it is better to recapture an army entire than to destroy it, to capture a regiment, a detachment or a company entire than to destroy them. The 1971 war for the liberation of Bangladesh is a classic example of the above dictum by Sun Tzu, wherein, through manoeuvre and brilliant hooks the enemy was forced to surrender en masse.

Hence Sun Tzu writes that to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting. Thus, the highest form of generalship is to balk the enemy’s plans; the next best is to prevent the junction of the enemy’s forces; the next in order is to attack the enemy’s army in the field; and the worst policy of all is to besiege walled cities. The rule is, not to besiege walled cities if it can possibly be avoided. The preparation of mantlets, movable shelters, and various implements of war, will take up three whole months; and the piling up of mounds over against the walls will take three months more. The general, unable to control his irritation, will launch his men to the assault like swarming ants, with the result that one-third of his

men are slain, while the town still remains untaken. Such are the disastrous effects of a siege. Strategy for employment for the recently initiated Mountain strike corps in the Indian context could take a leaf from this book.

“Therefore, the skilful leader subdues the enemy’s troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them. With his forces intact, he will ensure the mastery of the Empire, and thus, without losing a man, his triumph will be complete.” Importance of the indirect approach in warfare is overbearing.

It is the rule in war that, if our forces are ten to the enemy’s one, to surround him; if five to one, to attack him; if twice as numerous, to divide our army into two. If equally matched, we can offer battle; if slightly inferior in numbers, we can avoid the enemy; if quite unequal in every way, we can flee from him to fight another day. Hence, though an obstinate fight may be made by a small force, in the end it must be captured by the larger force.⁴ Many a heroic delaying action of the likes of the Allies withdrawal at Dunkirk in the Second World War, saved the Army which was launched to liberate Europe later.

“Now the general is the bulwark of the State; if the bulwark is complete at all points; the State will be strong; if the bulwark is defective, the State will be weak. There are three ways in which a ruler can bring misfortune upon his army:

- By commanding the army to advance or to retreat, being ignorant of the fact that it cannot obey. This is called hobbling the army.
- By attempting to govern an army in the same way as he administers a kingdom, being ignorant of the conditions which obtain in an army. This causes restlessness in the soldier’s minds.
- By employing the officers of his army without discrimination, through ignorance of the military principle of adaptation to circumstances. This shakes the confidence of the soldiers.”

But when the army is restless and distrustful, trouble is sure to come from the other feudal princes. This is simply bringing anarchy into the army, and flinging victory away.

There are five essentials for victory:⁵

- He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.
- He will win who knows how to handle both superior and inferior forces. (The reason why all the best training institutes of the world even today emphasise in imparting knowledge for appointments two up and one down for all leaders.)
- He will win whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks (the importance of Morale).
- He will win who, prepared himself, waits to take the enemy unprepared (the element of surprise and military capability building).
- He will win who has military capacity and is not interfered with by the sovereign (the bread versus guns debate as well as non-interference in military matters).

Tactical Dispositions

Chapter 5 of the book explains the importance of defending existing positions until a commander is capable of advancing from those positions in safety. It teaches commanders the importance of recognising strategic opportunities, and teaches not to create opportunities for the enemy. Good fighters of old first put themselves beyond the possibility of defeat, and then waited for an opportunity of defeating the enemy. To secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself. Thus, the good fighter is able to secure himself against defeat, but cannot make certain of defeating the enemy. Hence the saying: One may know how to conquer without being able to do it. This concept is being effectively being utilised by

China by securing the first chain of islands in the South and East China Seas, thereby securing its underbelly.

Security against defeat implies defensive tactics; ability to defeat the enemy means taking the offensive. Standing on the defensive indicates insufficient strength; attacking, a superabundance of strength. The general who is skilled in defence hides in the most secret recesses of the earth; he who is skilled in attack flashes forth from the topmost heights of heaven. Thus, on the one hand we have ability to protect ourselves; on the other, a victory that is complete.⁶ The “Hammer and Anvil” tactics of modern manoeuvre warfare is a fallout of this tactics.

“To see victory only when it is within the knowledge of the common herd is not the acme of excellence. Neither is it the acme of excellence, if you fight and conquer and the whole Empire says, ‘Well done!’ To lift an autumn hair is no sign of great strength; to see the sun and moon is no sign of sharp sight; to hear the noise of thunder is no sign of a quick ear. What the ancients called a clever fighter is one who not only wins, but excels in winning with ease. Hence his victories bring him neither reputation for wisdom nor credit for courage.”

Conclusion

Sun Tzu writes that the successful General wins his battles by making no mistakes. Making no mistakes is what establishes the certainty of victory, for it means conquering an enemy that is already defeated. Hence the skilful fighter puts himself into a position which makes defeat impossible, and does not miss the moment for defeating the enemy. Thus, it is that in war the victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won, whereas he who is destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory. Detailed staff work, which includes an appreciation through Measurement, estimation of quantity, detailed calculations for generating options and balancing of chances by analysis of these options, has been the difference between the Victor and the Vanquished from time immemorial.

... Stratagem and Tactics

Notes

1. <http://www.claws.in/1942/the-art-of-war-and-laying-plans-for-calculations-col-as-chonker-vsm.html>, accessed on October 21, 2018.
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3. http://changingminds.org/disciplines/warfare/art_war/sun_tzu_2-3.html, accessed on October 21, 2018.
4. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jessicahagy/2013/10/08/sun-tzus-the-art-of-war-illustrated-chapter-3/>, accessed on October 21, 2018.
5. <https://artofwarlol.wordpress.com/2012/03/19/the-five-essentials-for-victory-part-1-when-to-fight/>, accessed on October 21, 2018.
6. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jessicahagy/2013/10/10/sun-tzus-the-art-of-war-illustrated-chapter-4/>, accessed on October 21, 2018.

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