



連環計

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Strategy 35 The Strategy Of Combining Tactics

Do not repeat tactics which gained you victory in the past, but let your tactics be molded by the infinite variety of circumstances.

Sun Zi, *The Art of War*

Appearance and intention inevitably ensnare people when artfully used, even if people sense that there is an ulterior intention behind the overt appearance.

When you set up ploys and opponents fall for them, then you win by letting them act on your ruse. As for those who do not fall for a ploy, when you see they won't fall into one trap, you have another set. Then even if opponents haven't fallen for your original ploy, in effect they actually have.

Yagyu Munenori, *Family Book On The Art Of War*

The Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China - S. H. Verstappen

In important matters, one should use several strategies applied simultaneously. Keep different plans operating in an overall scheme. In this manner if any one strategy fails you would still have several others to fall back on. Combining even weak strategies in unison has a greater effectiveness than applying them sequentially.

Warring States Period China

The heir of Chu, *Qing Xiong*, was a hostage at the court of Qi when news came of his father's death. He asked permission from the king of Qi to return home to attend the funeral.

The king replied, *"If we are given five hundred li of your eastern lands you will be allowed to return. If you refuse you will stay here."*

Qing Xiong agreed to cede the land for his freedom and was allowed to return to Chu and become its new king. Shortly thereafter, an envoy of fifty chariots arrived from Qi demanding to take possession of the territory. The king of Chu summoned his top three generals one after the other and asked each in turn for their recommendations.

The first general said, *"The king has no recourse but to give up the land. From a king must come only the truth. To have promised something and failed to give it would be a breach of faith. Thereafter no one will ever trust your promise."*

I submit that you give them the land to show your good faith, then attack Qi and fight to get it back, which would show your valor."

The second general was asked for his opinion and he said, *"You cannot give it back. What makes a country strong is the land. To give five hundred li is to lose almost half our country."*

I ask to be allowed to go out and defend the eastern border."

Then the third general was called in and he said, *"You cannot give them the land, yet we are not powerful enough to defend it alone. I beg permission to go west and seek aid from Qin."*

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After hearing the counsel of his three advisors, the king consulted his Minister *Shen Ci* asking which of the three strategies he should follow.

Shen Ci said, *"Use them all! Let each general carry out his own strategy unbeknownst to the others and we shall see which prevails."*

So the next day the king sent the first general to meet the envoy from Qi and surrender the territory. The day after that he commissioned the second general to defend the eastern border. On the third day, he sent the third general to Qin with a plea for aid.

The first general rode out to the eastern territory to rendezvous with the envoy from Qi who had come to take possession of the territory. The next day they were intercepted by the second general who told the envoy from Qi that he had mustered troops to defend the territory.

The envoy turned to the first general and asked, *"You have come to surrender the territory, but now we have another general to defend it. How can this be?"*

The first general replied, *"I was personally instructed by the king in this matter. This man is usurping his authority and he should be attacked."*

The Qi envoy sent for reinforcements and when they arrived a few days later, they were led by the king himself. Just as they were about to form battle lines the third general arrived with a relief force from Qin.

The Qin general called out to the king of Qi, *"To have detained the heir of Chu was wicked, and to rob him of five hundred li of his eastern lands is unjust. If you wish to withdraw your troops, you may. If not, then you must contend with us as well."*

The king of Qi was frightened by this unexpected turn of events and quietly retreated. The king of Chu thus saved both his territory and his reputation.

Warring States Period China

In 284 B.C., the state of Yan attacked and defeated Qi. The remaining Qi forces under the command of *Tian Dan* fled to the city of Jimo for a

final stand. The renowned Yan general *Yue Yi* had surrounded the city when the news came that the king of Yan had died and was succeeded by Prince Hui.

Years earlier, when the prince was still heir apparent, he and general Yue had numerous clashes and disagreements. When Tian Dan heard the news he sent secret agents to the new king to spread rumors that Yue Yi was planning to revolt because he feared being executed for past disagreements. When Prince Hui heard this rumor, he sent another general to replace Yue Yi who fled to another state.

The replacement general, *Qi Che*, was a brash and arrogant up-start who began reissuing orders and procedures which merely succeeded in causing confusion and dissension among the officers.

Next, Tian Dan had the womenfolk line the city walls and beg for a peaceful surrender while he sent gold and treasure collected from the city's wealthiest citizens to General Qi Che with a note asking that the women and children be spared in return for the peaceful surrender of the city.

These events convinced Qi Che that the city was truly about to capitulate, and he allowed his troops to relax their guard. After this careful preparation, Tian Dan felt the time was right to launch his counter attack.

First, he had the citizens of the city gather with drums and cooking pots and instructed them that on a signal they were to make as much noise as possible.

He then had breaches made along the city walls from the inside.

Next, a herd of cattle was painted in bizarre patterns and knives and sickles tied to their horns and torches tied to their tails.

Just before daylight three events occurred in rapid succession. The citizens within the city struck up a cacophony of noise that startled the sleeping Yan troops.

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Then the torches on the tails of the cattle were lit and they were released through the breaches in the wall.

The enraged animals ran madly about the Yen camp killing stunned troops with their horns and setting fire to tents with their tails.

Then Qi's crack troops rushed out from the gates to attack the now terrified and utterly confused troops. Tian Dan defeated the Yan army and went on to conquer more than seventy cities.

Heian Period Japan

In 1183 in what would be called the battle of Kurikara, Taira Koremori of the ruling Taira clan led a hundred thousand troops east to attack Minamoto Yoshinaka of the rebel Minamoto clan.

To enter the Minamoto territory the Taira would have to cross Japan's central mountain range at its northern end where the mountains were little more than large hills. There was only one pass that an army the size of the Taira could use - the Kurikara pass.

Traveling east through the pass one would see near the other side an open valley that appeared to cut through the mountain, but in fact the valley narrowed down into a box canyon. Seeking to take advantage of this unusual terrain, Yoshinaka devised the following strategies.

First, he needed to buy time¹ so he sent a detachment of troops to occupy a small hill downslope of the Taira advance. These troops carried extra flags, which they planted on the hill to make it appear that a large host was stationed there.

The next day the Minamoto stationed on the hill challenged the Taira to battle according to all the ancient samurai protocols, to which the Taira readily complied. First, there was an archery duel using humming bulb arrows, then sharp point arrows, then individual duels, and finally a skirmish of a hundred cavalry each.

While all this gentlemanly warfare was being fought, Yoshinaka had sent another detachment of troops through the forest to quietly set up

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positions to the rear of the Taira. By nightfall the Taira were about to retire when two events occurred.

First, the hidden Minamoto troops launched a sudden attack from the rear, while the troops on the hill charged down to join the first group.

This sudden attack caused the Taira to retreat down the pass, but at this point, the second event occurred.

Yoshinaka had earlier confiscated a herd of cattle and had torches tied to their horns. The torches were set on fire and the enraged animals were released so that they charged up through the pass towards the retreating Taira.

The bizarre spectacle of the enraged and fiery beasts charging through the pass caused complete panic among the Taira troops who saw their only avenue of escape to be down the side of the pass and into the valley.

In the darkness, the troops scrambled down the steep slopes and on through the valley, many being killed in falls. When the first of the fleeing soldiers reached the box end they attempted to turn back, but those in front were crushed by the weight of their own troops who kept piling in, not yet realizing they were trapped.

Yoshinaka then launched his final tactic and sent his main body of troops into the valley after the fleeing Taira. The slaughter was horrendous, with over seventy thousand Taira soldiers killed.

Summary

To insure victory one must know how to launch simultaneous attacks. Both from left, and from right; from the outside, and from within; from above, and from below. Advantage goes to those who can attack on several fronts; disadvantage to those who must defend against more than one.