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Strategy 6

Clamor in the East, Attack in the West

The spot where we intend to fight must not be made known, for then the enemy will have to prepare against a possible attack at different points and his forces will then be spread out too thin. For, if the enemy should strengthen his van, he will weaken his rear. Should he strengthen his rear, he will weaken his van.

Sun Zi, *The Art of War*

In any battle, the element of surprise can provide an overwhelming advantage. Even when face-to-face with an enemy, surprise can still be employed by attacking where he least expects it. To do this you must create an expectation in the enemy's mind through the use of a feint.

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

If you plan to attack on the right flank, you first maneuver your left, if you wish to invade, you first pretend to improve your defense, if you intend to hold your ground, make a display of packing up.

Three Kingdoms Period China

In A.D. 200 rival warlords, *Yuan Shao* and the infamous *Cao Cao* met at what would be the battle of *Guandu*. The numerically superior forces of Yuan Shao sent a division to attack the small city of *Baima* situated to the rear of Cao Cao's army. Yuan Shao hoped this maneuver would cut off his enemy's communications, supply lines, and avenue of escape, thus ending their long rivalry.

When reports came in that Baima was under siege, Cao Cao called together his advisors to plan a way out of their precarious situation.

They could not go directly to Baima since they would be vastly outnumbered, yet they could not allow Yuan Shao to occupy such a strategic position.

Then one advisor suggested a feint against Yuan Shao's old stronghold at the city of *Ye*. Cao Cao agreed to this plan and personally led the army towards Ye.

When Yuan Shao heard that Cao Cao had crossed the river and was heading towards Ye, he and half of his forces went with the intention of trapping Cao Cao between the Ye garrison in the front and his reinforcements from the rear.

Meanwhile, Cao Cao had reversed directions in the middle of the night and, through a forced march, arrived at Baima before dawn. There Yuan Shao's remaining troops were completely taken by surprise and annihilated using the very strategy Yuan Shao hoped to use at Ye.

When Yuan Shao reached Ye, he found no one had seen nor heard of any invading army. Realizing he had been tricked, Yuan Shao turned his army around to return to Baima. On the way back, Yuan Shao learned that his general had been killed and the siege lifted. Realizing he had lost the engagement, Yuan Shao returned to his old stronghold

of Ye to recoup his losses. However, in the end he would lose all to China's most notoriously cunning strategist, Cao Cao.

Song Dynasty China

Once there was an official who was transferred to the capital.

The front part of the inn where he stayed was a teahouse, and across the street was a shop that sold expensive dyed silks. Whenever he had nothing to do, he would sit at a table watching the people and activity on the street.

One day he noticed with surprise that several suspicious looking characters were walking back and forth observing the silk shop with great interest.

One of them came up to his table and whispered, *"We're in the robbery business and we're here to steal those fine silks. Since you noticed us, I came to ask you not to mention it."*

"That has nothing to do with me," the official replied. *"Why should I say anything about it?"*

The fellow thanked him and left.

The official thought to himself, *"The silk shop has its wares openly displayed on a busy street. In broad daylight, with a thousand eyes watching, if they have the skill to steal those silks, then they must be smart thieves indeed."* So he watched carefully to see how they would manage it.

But what he saw was only the same people walking back and forth in front of the silk shop. Sometimes they gathered on the left, sometimes on the right. The official sat watching until after sunset when everyone had gone and the shop had closed.

"Those fools," said the official to himself, *"They were putting one over on me."*

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When he returned to his room to order some food, he discovered that all his belongings were gone.

Yuan Dynasty China

In 1220, Genghis Khan and his general, *Subede*, were planning the conquest of the Muslim Empire of Shah Alaed-Din Mohammed.

After crossing the Pamir Mountains, Genghis entered the eastern edges of the Shah's empire in the Fergana Valley where he split his army into three divisions. Two divisions continued west to attack Kokan. When the Shah heard that two Mongol columns were marching towards Kokan, he rushed all remaining reserves to secure this area.

Meanwhile Genghis' own column quietly turned north and, in a legendary feat of endurance, crossed 300 miles through the reputedly impassable Kyzyl Kum Desert. Three months later, they emerged at Bokhara, deep in the heart of the empire and well behind enemy lines.

With no one to oppose them, Genghis' troops were able to cut the Shah's communications preventing him from calling in reserves and supplies from the western provinces. All three armies then converged on Samarkand.

Mohammed, cut off from his reinforcements, realized the situation was hopeless and escaped to the south with his remaining troops. He lived as a fugitive being hunted by the Mongol forces from town to town until he died one year later.

Summary

Where the enemy expects you to attack, he will reinforce. When he does so, a part of his army is thus neutralized, defending nothing. Then, with your full strength, attack his remaining forces.