

Befriend A Distant Enemy To Attack One Nearby



遠交近攻

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Strategy 23

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Let us proceed with caution, concentrating our strength, and add to it daily by winning over to our side those barons who are vassals of the enemy. Then, when the enemy stands alone, like a tree shorn of its leaves and branches, we will attack and destroy the root.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi

It is known that nations that border each other become enemies while nations separated by distance and obstacles make better allies. When you are the strongest in one field, your greatest threat is from the second strongest in your field, not the strongest from another field.

Spring And Autumn Period China

In 628 B.C. the states of Jin and Qin joined forces to attack the state of Zheng. They laid siege to the capital, trapping the king in the city. Vastly outnumbered, the king of Zheng could not hope to win militarily.

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His prime minister said, *"The state is in imminent peril. If you summon your old advisor, Chu Zhiwu, and send him to Qin I'm sure he can convince them to depart."*

The king agreed and summoned the old advisor to explain his mission. That night Chu was lowered from the walls on a rope and he secretly made his way into the Qin camp.

Meeting with the earl of Qin he said, *"With Jin and Qin both besieging its capital, Zheng knows that it must perish. If the ruin of Zheng were to be of benefit to you I would not dare to speak to you. But you know what difficulties could arise in trying to maintain such a distant border from your capital. It would be constantly threatened by other states. Of what advantage is it to you to destroy Zheng to benefit your neighbor?"*

His advantage will be your disadvantage. And moreover, previously you helped the duke of Jin to attain his position and he promised you two cities as a reward. But as soon as he was in his own state again he built defenses around the two cities.

Surely you can see that he is greedy. If you help him to annex Zheng to his domains, who will be next to lose territory to his insatiable hunger?

Furthermore, if you agree to depart, the king of Zheng will give you provisions for your army and gifts for yourself. Surely this is no injury.

But I leave it up to you to decide whether to diminish Zheng in order to advantage Jin.

The next morning the Qin army left the field. When the duke of Jin saw them returning he also withdrew and Zheng was spared.

Warring States Period China

The king of Wei was attacking the capital of Zhao and demanded troops from Song. The ruler of Song secretly sent an envoy to the king of Zhao to say, *"The forces of Wei are vigorous and their power is great. Presently they are demanding troops from Song to use against you."*

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My lord is afraid that if he does not comply it will mean the end of his country. But if Wei should attack Zhao and truly harm her, my lord could not bear it."

The king of Zhao replied, "*What can I do to help you?*"

"I shall request from you a border town which we will attack slowly. We will spend many days trying to take the town until the time is right for you to send down your officers and reclaim the place again."

"Excellent!" said the king of Zhao.

The Song forces marched out and laid siege to the border town. The king of Wei was happy and said, "*The Song forces are aiding my attack.*" The king of Zhao was also happy and said, "*The Song forces will not go any further.*"

A few months later Song's troops were retired, the crisis avoided, Wei was grateful, and Zhao suspected nothing.

Han Dynasty China

In A.D.110, the province of Henan had suffered through droughts and floods, the harvests were poor and the people starving. The corrupt government only made matters worse, and soon the whole province was in chaos. Any hope of bringing in outside relief was thwarted by the numerous bands of bandits and robbers that roamed the countryside pillaging and terrorizing the population.

A provincial official by the name of *Yu Hu* was appointed full powers to try to restore some order to the province. When he arrived at the district capital, he issued a notice that he was going to organize a military force and that he was looking for recruits.

First, he promised a pardon for past crimes and immunity for anyone who joined up. Then he announced that he was looking for men for three classes of troops. The first class of troops were to consist of men who had committed robbery and murder. They would be the commanders and receive the highest salaries.

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The second class would consist of men who had committed mere thievery. They would receive the next highest salaries.

The third class would consist of men who had joined the robber bands simply because they were lazy and wished to avoid real labor. They would be paid the lowest salaries.

Within a couple of weeks, Yu Hu had over three hundred new recruits.

When they had been issued uniforms and weapons he had them paraded before him and said to them, *"Your past deeds are now forgiven and you are free from prosecution. But you must still atone for the crimes you have committed against society. To do this you must now go out and hunt down all your past colleagues who have not answered my call."*

This they did and within a year the fraternity of bandits was extinct and the countryside made safe.

Summary

It is well known that a friend of your enemy becomes your enemy while an enemy of your enemy becomes your friend. Every powerful person, organization, or state will automatically create people, groups, and organizations that stand in opposition to it. To attack any objective, one can enlist the aid of those institutions that are the antithesis of your opponent's.

