

A Progressive Art of War

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Based on Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*

Published by Progressive Way LLC, 2019.

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First edition. July 9, 2019.

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ISBN: 978-0578539942

Written by Eric Hensal.

For my son, Nicolas.



A Progressive Art of Politics



There is more to Sun Tzu's 2,500-year-old *The Art of War* than a progressive might think, and much that is relevant to our world today. For instance:

“There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare.” (Chapter 2)

“... a kingdom that has once been destroyed can never come again into being; nor can the dead ever be brought back to life. Hence the enlightened ruler is heedful, and the good general full of caution. This is the way to keep a country at peace and an army intact.” (Chapter 12)

This is not a book about war for its own sake. Sun Tzu does not glorify war, nor advocate destruction.

The Art of War was the first book I ever studied with a pen in my hand. It was the James Clavell edition I found in high school, with the same Lionel Giles translation used here. Re-reading frequently over several decades, I came to understand it in a different sense from the boots-on-the-ground tactical way it is typically presented and used.

Substitute the word “politics” for “war.” We fight over words and ideas; seek to shape public perception of issues. In democracies, we wage campaigns to move voters, both electors at the ballot and electeds in government, to act the way we see as best. *The Art of War* is useful here. It speaks to more than tactics — to issues such as solidarity, resources, strategy, and risk. Its discussions of battle can be applied to today's elections and advocacy campaigns.

Sun Tzu's legend is built on the story of how he took the smaller army of Wu through a series of engagements over time to defeat the much-larger kingdom of Yueh. Similarly, Progressives always face superior forces. Seeking social change means opposition from Privilege in the current system and resistance from peo-

ple who are simply unfamiliar or uncomfortable with change. *The Art of War* is for insurgents.

This is no scholarly discussion of Sun Tzu, but a sharing of how his work frames my understanding of campaigns. It is also not a textbook that transforms *The Art of War* into a how-to manual. My edition aims to connect modern concerns to the classic text and demonstrate its application to a different kind of battlefield, so its insights are more clearly visible to — and usable by — Progressives. It is an opportunity to consider the challenges faced when entering into a political struggle from an ancient, enduring perspective.

This piece will be laid out, as is traditional, with inline commentary, in hopes of strengthening its connection and relevance to the modern democratic world.

Mapping

In *The Art of War*, the characters are Sovereign, General, Officers, Soldiers, and Spies. You engage in a war to achieve victory through a series of campaigns consisting of battles. Progressive work is much less-organized, and precise mapping of current terms against it is needlessly confusing. For our purposes, the sovereign and general blend into Leadership. Soldiers are Activists. Enemies are Opponents. Our war is a Movement composed of Campaigns with Conflicts that lead to victory. The We, Us, Ours is the progressive community we share.



Laying Plans



Sun Tzu says: The art of war is of vital importance to the State. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. It is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected.

The art of war, then, is governed by five constant factors that must be taken into account in deliberations when seeking to determine the conditions obtaining in the field. These are: the Moral Law, Heaven, Earth, Commander, Method and Discipline.

The Moral Law causes the people to be in complete accord with their ruler, so they will follow regardless of their lives, undismayed by any danger.

Heaven signifies night and day, cold and heat, times and seasons.

Earth comprises distances, great and small; danger and security; open ground and narrow passes; the chances of life and death.

The Commander stands for the virtues of wisdom, sincerely, benevolence, courage, and strictness.

Method and Discipline are to be understood as the marshaling of the army in its proper subdivisions, the gradations of rank among the officers, the maintenance of roads by which supplies may reach the army, and the control of military expenditure.

These five heads should be familiar to every general: those who know them will be victorious; those who know them not will fail.

The Moral Law is legitimacy. Is a movement and its leadership credible, believable, deemed worthy by people of support and action?

Heaven is what changes. Economic cycles. Natural disasters. Public opinion. It is the weather of politics, the unexpected event, issues that arise independent of any campaign. Heaven is the condition we are all under during a campaign.

Earth is the stable and fixed we move through in campaigns such as: government structures, social class, geography, ethnicities, culture, and history.

Commanders are movement leaders.

In a political campaign, concerns about the Moral Law would fall on the candidate. Otherwise, such concerns are bound to a given progressive organization.

Therefore, in your deliberations, when seeking to determine the military conditions, let them be made on the basis of a comparison, in this wise:

Which of the two sovereigns is imbued with the Moral Law? Which of the two Generals has most ability? With whom lies the advantages derived from Heaven and Earth? On which side is discipline most rigorously enforced? Which army is stronger? On which side are officers and soldiers more highly trained? In which army is there the greater constancy both in reward and punishment?

By means of these seven considerations I can forecast victory or defeat.

This list is a calculus to compare sides in a political contest. Who has the structural advantage in social class? Who has an advantage related to current events? Which sides' actors are more focused and consistent in their work? Discipline here is the lack of in-fighting. Which side is there greater unity?

The general that hearkens to my counsel and acts upon it, will conquer: let such a one be retained in command! The general that hearkens not to my counsel nor acts upon it, will suffer defeat — let such a one be dismissed! While heeding the profit of my counsel, avail yourself also of any helpful circumstances over and beyond the ordinary rules. According as circumstances are favorable, one should modify one's plans.

All warfare is based on deception.

Progressives have ethics that compel an honesty our opponents simply lack and deception comes much more easily to them. But these following passages are a call to study our opponents while not shar-

ing information about our plans. To use the weaknesses inherent in opponents against them. We must use misdirection to obscure our plans. There is a difference between deceiving an opponent and telling a public lie.

When able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must appear near. Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder, and crush. If secure at all points, be prepared. If superior strength, evade. If your opponent is of choleric temper, seek to irritate. Pretend to be weak, so the opponent grows arrogant. If taking ease, allow for no rest. If opposition forces are united, separate them. Attack where your opponent is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.

These military devices, leading to victory, must not be divulged beforehand.

Progressives are earnest and think straight ahead, believing evidence and logic alone will convince people. Evidence and logic are needed, but we also must reckon with opponents also contending to frame issues to their advantage. We need to differentiate between our active opponents and our audience. We deceive and misdirect opponents while being honest with our public.

Use unexpected means and methods. Reach for unanticipated audiences. Use language that speaks to people, not just to ourselves.

Now the general who wins a battle makes many calculations in the temple before the battle is fought. The general who loses a battle makes but few calculations beforehand. Thus do many calculations lead to victory, and few calculations to defeat: how much more no calculation at all! It is by attention to this point that I can foresee who is likely to win or lose.

Chess is not a true test of strategic skill because each side has perfect knowledge of opponents' pieces. Progressives think in terms of chess; seeing the visible, assuming actors will move in expected ways. But we contend in a field where pieces are hidden and move without rules.

If we do not consider how our opponents may deceive us, how their forces are aligned against us beyond what is visible, we lose. If we do not conceal our plans give opponents a perfect view of our forces, we put ourselves in great jeopardy.



Waging War



In the operations of war, where there are in the field 1,000 swift chariots, as many heavy chariots, and 100,000 mail-clad soldiers, with provisions enough to carry them over 300 miles, the expenditure at home and at the front, including entertainment of guests, small items such as glue and paint, and sums spent on chariots and armor, will reach the total of 1,000 ounces of silver per day. Such is the cost of raising an army of 100,000 soldiers.

When you engage in actual fighting, if victory is long in coming, then soldiers' weapons will grow dull and their ardor will be damped. 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. Now, when your weapons are dulled, your ardor damped, your strength exhausted, and your treasure spent, other chieftains will spring up to take advantage of your extremity. Then no one, 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 is no instance of a country having 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.

There is a cost to conflict. Our hard-earned resources and activists' support are put at risk with every action. For Sun Tzu, this is a call to consider the costs of war to a nation. For us, this urges leadership to build thoughtful campaigns that honor the resources we are about to expend, given to us by so many over time.

The skillful do not raise a second levy of troops; neither are 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. Poverty of the

state exchequer causes an army to be maintained by contributions from a distance, and this 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. When their substance is drained away, the peasantry will be afflicted by heavy exactions.

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 pound of the enemy's provender is equivalent to twenty from one's own store.

Fight only when needed, because there are costs to struggle. Our activists will lose ardor over time. Our resources will be depleted. If we are not thoughtful, we will be outmatched by our opponent's resources over time.

Now in order to kill the enemy, our soldiers must be roused to anger; that there may be advantage from defeating the enemy, they must have their rewards. Therefore, in chariot fighting, when ten or more chariots have been taken, those should be rewarded who took the first. Our own flags should be substituted for those of the enemy, and their chariots mingled and used in conjunction with ours. The captured soldiers should be kindly treated and kept. This is called using the conquered foe to augment one's own strength.

Activists need recognition. We are asking people to engage in a conflict. Success must be shared through recognition to encourage continuing participation. We must not vilify opposing activists, only opposing leadership.

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 one on whom it depends whether the nation shall be in peace or in peril.



Attack by Stratagem



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 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. 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.

Any progressive campaign must prevent problems from arising as much as fighting when struggle is required. We must not be firefighters, only responding to challenges and emergencies. We must understand how opponents act and work to disrupt them before they move against us.

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 against the walls will take three months more. The general, unable to control irritation, will launch soldiers to the assault like swarming ants, with the result that one-third are slain, while the town still remains untaken. Such are the disastrous effects of a siege.

Progressives often cling stubbornly to a single forward attack. Our collective weakness is believing we can win simply by saying how correct we are often and loudly enough.

Orthodoxy in approach, such as repetitive marches on Washington for every issue, is analogous to laying siege.

Therefore skillful leaders subdue the enemy's troops without any fighting; capture cities without laying siege to them; they overthrow kingdoms without lengthy operations in the field. With forces intact, they will dispute the mastery of the Empire, and thus, without losing a soldier, triumph will be complete. This is the method of attacking by stratagem.

Act before opponents move against you. Reaction must be avoided. Prevent opponents' allies from joining forces. Indirect activity to interfere with opponents' capacities is preferred. The goal is not to engage in a protracted political struggle. First, avoid one. Failing that, win with the least struggle possible by impairing opponents' ability to act.

It is the rule in war if our forces are ten to the enemy's one, surround; if five to one, attack; if twice as numerous, 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.

Though an obstinate fight may be made by a small force, in the end, it must be captured by the larger force.

For progressive struggles, this means is not allowing opponents to mass forces. Keep opponents divided. Do not give them a focus where they can attack us en masse. A small force may always be captured by a larger one, but the opposition may be barred from massing the larger force. Then smaller forces over time may prevail by attrition.

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 the 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 administering a kingdom, being ignorant of the conditions which obtain in an army. This causes restlessness in the soldiers' minds.

By employing army officers 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.

If Leadership — those supposed to inspire and support activists — do not understand them or fail to engage their talents properly, then the organization is hobbled and activists will fall away.

Thus, we may know that there are five essentials for victory: Know when to fight and when not to fight. Know how to handle both superior and inferior forces. Whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks? Who, once prepared, waits to take the enemy unprepared? Who has military capacity and is not interfered with by the sovereign?

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

Knowing the opposition — what it cares about, what motivates it, its leadership and structure — is just as important as understanding what you believe and understand. If Progressives stop at just calling the opposition wrong or deficient, then Progressives are in a weaker position.

Also, often Progressives do not interrogate our own beliefs. Why is it good to provide universal health care, for example? We believe it is the right thing to do, but without a depth of understanding about what makes it necessary, we are vulnerable to opponents' attacks on issues, because we lack conceptual tools to defend ourselves. And we

fail to grow our own activist numbers because we are not searching for new ways to connect with more people.



Tactical Dispositions



The 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. Thus, good fighters of old are able to secure themselves 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.

The fundamental progressive error is acting without considering how others will hear what we say. We speak to our base without considering how our words can be turned against us by opponents. This is not a plea to be moderate or centrist, but for us to consider how radical and unfamiliar notions can be twisted by our opponents and used against our efforts if not soundly framed. Whatever we say, it must not be easily turned against us.

So, pleas to abolish Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sound good to some, but reads like chaos to most. ICE jurisdiction does cover some useful functions — it is best to keep actual convicted violent criminals out of a country or find smuggled antiquities. We need to melt ICE. Remove its toxic masculine acronym and attendant cruelty. Remake it into an Immigration and Customs Service so its workers are tasked to facilitate immigration and not condemn it. Opening with “abolish,” though, makes attacking the underlying idea all too easy.

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

defense hides in the most-secret recesses of the earth. The general skilled in attack flashes forth from the topmost heights of heaven. Thus, on the one hand, we have an ability to protect ourselves; on the other, a victory that is complete.

Defense cannot win conflict, but you cannot win while being defeated for its lack. Victory is never gained by losing rhetorical ground. Strength is multiplied by not having to defend poorly constructed positions while moving forward against opponents.

To see victory only when it is within the ken 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 clever fighters not only win, but excel in winning with ease. Hence, victories bring them neither reputation for wisdom nor credit for courage. They win 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.

Skillful fighters put themselves into a position which makes defeat impossible, and do 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 one who is destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory.

A strong defense affords time to choose the best moment to move against opponents. If unmired in difficulties of our own making, we can press our campaign when it is to our advantage to do so.



Energy



The control of a large force relies on the same principle as the control of a few soldiers: It is merely a question of dividing up their numbers. Fighting with a large army under your command is nowise different from fighting with a small one: Success is merely a question of instituting signs and signals.

To ensure that your whole host may withstand the brunt of the enemy's attack and remain unshaken — this is effected by maneuvers direct and indirect. That the impact of your army may be like a grindstone dashed against an egg — this is effected by the science of weak points and strong. In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory.

Indirect tactics, efficiently applied, are as inexhaustible as Heaven and Earth, unending as the flow of rivers and streams; like the sun and moon, they end but to begin anew; like the four seasons, they pass away to return once more.

Indirect attacks are actions against our opponents' ability to take direct action against us. Attacks on opponents' resources and work to disrupt opponents' coalitions are indirect. For instance, challenging advertisers to drop support of conservative talk show hosts is an indirect attack, as is turning an interest group against a conservative political candidate.

Most work should be done through indirect attack.

There are not more than five musical notes, yet the combinations of these five give rise to more melodies than can ever be heard. There are not more than five primary colors (blue, yellow, red, white, and black), yet in combination, they produce more hues than can ever been seen. There are not more than five cardinal tastes (sour, acrid, salt, sweet, bitter), yet combinations of them yield more fla-

vors than can ever be tasted. In battle, there are not more than two methods of attack — the direct and the indirect — yet these two in combination give rise to an endless series of maneuvers.

We want to fight where we want to fight. We want direct attacks to be on our terms. Indirect attacks control a conflict's conceptual space, setting obstacles and barriers for opponents and driving them in unfavorable directions. Indirect attacks deny opponents the support and resources they need to move against us.

Considering attacks as direct and indirect expands ones thinking on how to deal with opponents. We can greatly interfere with an opponents' ability to campaign without ever taking direct action against them.

The direct and the indirect lead to each other in turn. It is like moving in a circle — you never come to an end. Who can exhaust the possibilities of their combination?

The onset of troops is like the rush of a torrent that will even roll stones along in its course. The quality of decision is like the well-timed swoop of a falcon, which enables it to strike and destroy its victim. Therefore, the good fighter will be terrible in onset and prompt in decision.

Energy may be likened to the bending of a crossbow; decision, to the releasing of a trigger.

Amid the turmoil and tumult of battle, there may be seeming disorder and yet no real disorder at all; amid confusion and chaos, your array may be without head or tail, yet it will be proof against defeat. Simulated disorder postulates perfect discipline; simulated fear postulates courage; simulated weakness postulates strength. Hiding order beneath the cloak of disorder is simply a question of subdivision; concealing courage under a show of timidity presupposes a fund of latent energy; masking strength with weakness is to be effected by tactical dispositions.

Those skillful at keeping the enemy on the move maintain deceitful appearances, according to which the enemy will act. They sacrifice something so the en-

emy may snatch at it. By holding out baits, they keep enemies on the march; then, with a body of picked soldiers, lie in wait to attack.

Our opposition is laced with authoritarian personalities who quickly follow guidance from above. Their attacks have speed and move on many fronts. Our opponents lack qualms about deception and often hold out baits to get us to take positions before we lay a groundwork for our defense.

Progressives shy away from deception, but consider who is being deceived. We must never lie about our efforts to the public; however, we do not need to broadcast our entire strategy to anyone. We can mount indirect attacks that are not immediately obvious to opponents. We can hold out baits that expose the true nature of our opponents' intent.

Clever combatants look to the effect of combined energy, and do not require too much from individuals. They have an ability to pick the right soldiers and use combined energy, so soldiers become like rolling logs or stones — it is the nature of a log or stone to remain motionless on level ground, and to move when on a slope; if four-cornered, to come to a standstill, but if round-shaped, to go rolling down. Thus the energy developed by good fighting soldiers is as the momentum of a round stone rolled down a mountain thousands of feet in height. So much on the subject of energy.

Match activists well to required tasks. Do not overtax them. Educate activists and consider how they work together. Energy comes from the combination of individual effort. There are ideal combinations that will maximize energy.



Weak Points and Strong



Whoever is first in the field and awaits the coming of the enemy will be fresh for the fight; whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to battle will arrive exhausted. Therefore, clever combatants impose their will on the enemy, but do not allow the enemy's will to be imposed on them.

For political contests, reaching the field first means securing the definition of the situation. "Definition of the situation" is a sociological term referring to the accepted frame for social interactions. If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. The heart of every political struggle lies in defining the situation.

Simply put, people expect football in a football stadium. Play baseball in front of them in that space and there will be difficulties. We want to choose the stadium to play a game that favors us. If we set the debate first, the opposition can be controlled.

By holding out advantages, clever combatants can cause the enemy to approach; or, by inflicting damage, they can make it impossible for the enemy to draw near. If the enemy is taking ease, they can harass; if well-supplied with food, they can starve enemies out; if quietly encamped, they can force movement. Appear at points that the enemy must hasten to defend; march swiftly to places where you are not expected.

The first task of any strategy is to define the situation to our advantage. Using our position, we can control opponents, much like well-positioned tennis players can send opponents from corner to corner on a baseline.

An army may march great distances without distress, if it marches through country where the enemy is not. You can be sure of succeeding in your attacks if you only attack places that are undefended. You can ensure the safety of your defense if you only hold positions that cannot be attacked. Hence, that general is skillful in attack whose opponent does not know what to defend and skillful in defense whose opponent does not know what to attack.

O, divine art of subtlety and secrecy! Through you, we learn to be invisible, through you, inaudible; and we can hold the enemy's fate in our hands. You may advance and be absolutely irresistible, if you make for the enemy's weak points; you may retire and be safe from pursuit if your movements are more rapid than those of the enemy. If we wish to fight, the enemy can be forced to an engagement even though sheltered behind a high rampart and a deep ditch. All we need do is attack some other place that the enemy will be obliged to relieve.

If we do not wish to fight, we can prevent the enemy from engaging us even though the lines of our encampment be merely traced out on the ground. All we need do is to throw something odd and unaccountable in the way.

By discovering the enemy's dispositions and remaining invisible ourselves, we can keep our forces concentrated, while the enemy's must be divided. We can form a single united body, while the enemy must split up into fractions. There will be a whole pitted against separate parts of a whole, which means that we shall be many to the enemy's few. And if we are able thus to attack an inferior force with a superior one, our opponents will be in dire straits.

A weakness of Progressives is a tendency to headlong confrontation. Our opponents are skilled at holding out baits to get us to move or splintering us into factions or barring us from natural allies.

Prevent opponents from seeing our tactics until it is too late for them to recover. A larger force can be beaten only in stages, by sections. The opposing coalition must be harried and set against themselves whenever possible.

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 several different points. With

their forces being thus distributed in many directions, the numbers we shall have to face at any given point will be proportionately few.

For should the enemy strengthen the vanguard, it will weaken the rear; strengthen the rear, it will weaken the van; strengthening the left will weaken the right; strengthening the right will weaken the left. Send reinforcements everywhere, and the enemy will everywhere be weak.

Numerical weakness comes from having to prepare against possible attacks; numerical strength, from compelling our adversary to make these preparations against us. Knowing the place and the time of the coming battle, we may concentrate from the greatest distances in order to fight. But if neither time nor place be known, then the left wing will be impotent to succor the right, the right equally impotent to succor the left, the front unable to relieve the rear, or the rear to support the front.

Though according to my estimate the soldiers of our enemy exceed our own in number, that shall advantage them nothing in the matter of victory. I say then that victory can be achieved.

This is a reference to Sun Tzu's own legend, as the commander of the smaller Kingdom of Wu army against the larger Kingdom of Yueh. His success derived from forcing portions of the opposing army to move. His smaller force prevailed in multiple conflicts against these portions, leaving Sun Tzu with an advantage over time as Yueh lost strength.

Though the enemy be stronger in numbers, we may prevent fighting. Scheme so you can discover plans and the likelihood of their success. Rouse enemies, and learn the principle of their activity or inactivity. Force opponents to reveal themselves, so you may find vulnerable spots. Carefully compare the opposing army with your own, so you may know where strength is superabundant and where it is deficient.

We must identify our opponents' disposition as well as our own. Sometimes we need to feint to check opponents' reactions. Take small actions with minimal risk to see how opponents respond.

In making tactical dispositions, the highest pitch you can attain is to conceal them; conceal your dispositions, and you will be safe from the prying of the subtlest spies, from the machinations of the wisest brains.

While Progressives eschew concealment and deception, we must consider how and when we engage in conflict, and what information we share. It is not deception to move against opponents without warning. There is no obligation to announce all plans and then move. Misdirecting opponents' attention is vital.

How victory may be produced for them out of the enemy's own tactics — that is what the multitude cannot comprehend. All can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.

Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances.

This is the colloquial "fighting the last war." Every conflict is different. Progressives are often quite ossified in approach. Marches on Washington are an example. Even though it was a meaningful part of the civil rights strategy at that time, revisiting it in different conflicts is a waste of resources.

Military tactics are like unto water; for water in its natural course runs away from high places and hastens downward. So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak. Water shapes its course according to the nature of the ground over which it flows; the soldier works out victory in relation to the foe faced. Therefore, just as water retains no constant shape, so in warfare there are no constant conditions. Those who can modify tactics in relation to opponents, and thereby succeed in winning, may be called heaven-born captains.

Act against opponents on today's ground, not one that is remembered from the past. Adapt tactics to your opponent to use their weaknesses against them. Conceal your strategies so opponents cannot do the same to you. Putting yourself beyond the possibility of defeat means first not letting opponents learn your strategy and the disposition of your forces.



Maneuvering



In war, the general receives commands from the sovereign. Having collected an army and concentrated forces, the general must blend and harmonize the different elements before pitching camp.

After that comes tactical maneuvering, and there is nothing more difficult. The difficulty of tactical maneuvering consists in turning the devious into the direct, and misfortune into gain. Thus, to take a long and circuitous route, after enticing the enemy out of the way, and though starting behind, to contrive to reach the goal first shows knowledge of the artifice of deviation.

Maneuvering is deploying resources and activists to set the definition of the situation.

Maneuvering with an army is advantageous; with an undisciplined multitude, most dangerous. If you set a fully equipped army in march to snatch an advantage, the chances are that you will be too late. On the other hand, to detach a flying column for the purpose involves the sacrifice of its baggage and stores.

Thus, if you order soldiers to roll up their buff-coats and make forced marches without halting day or night, covering double the usual distance at a stretch, moving 30 miles to wrest an advantage, the leaders of all your three divisions will fall into the hands of the enemy. The stronger soldiers will be in front, the jaded ones will fall behind, and on this plan, only one-tenth of your army will reach its destination. If you march 15 miles to outmaneuver the enemy, you will lose the leader of your first division, and only half your force will reach the goal. If you march 10 miles with the same object, two-thirds of your army will arrive. We may take it then that an army without its baggage-train is lost; without provisions, it is lost; without bases of supply, it is lost.

There are limits to resources. What can we expect from activists? How quickly can our forces be deployed? Pressing activists hard means they fall away, in number and effectiveness. The greatest stress comes from responding to opponents. Set the definition of the situation and our activists conserve energy while the opposition is forced to move.

We cannot enter into alliances until we are acquainted with the designs of our neighbors. We are not fit to lead an army on the march unless we are familiar with the face of the country — its mountains and forests, its pitfalls and precipices, its marshes and swamps. We shall be unable to turn natural advantage to account unless we make use of local guides.

Leadership removed from the grassroots will not know enough of a faraway ground to lead effectively. All conflict is local and requires activists at the grassroots level for leadership to understand the ground and maneuver successfully.

In war, practice dissimulation, and you will succeed. Whether to concentrate or to divide your troops must be decided by circumstances. Let your rapidity be that of the wind, your compactness that of the forest. In raiding and plundering, be like fire; in immovability, like a mountain.

Let your plans be impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt. When you plunder a countryside, let the spoil be divided amongst your soldiers; when you capture new territory, cut it up into allotments for the benefit of the soldiery.

Prepare for conflict without attracting opponents' attention. Act rapidly once the best time is reached. Plunder means sharing the glory of success with all involved — leadership and activists. Everyone who contributes has to feel recognized and appreciated.

Ponder and deliberate before you make a move. A general will conquer who has learnt the artifice of deviation. Such is the art of maneuvering.

The Book of Army Management says: On the field of battle, the spoken word does not carry far enough; hence, the institution of gongs and drums. Nor can or-

dinary objects be seen clearly enough; hence, the institution of banners and flags. Gongs and drums, banners and flags, are means whereby the ears and eyes of the host may be focused on one particular point. The host thus forming a single united body, it is impossible either for the brave to advance alone, or the cowardly to retreat alone.

This is the art of handling large masses.

In night-fighting, then, make much use of signal-fires and drums, and in fighting by day, of flags and banners, as a means of influencing the ears and eyes of your army.

A whole army may be robbed of its spirit; a commander-in-chief may be robbed of presence of mind.

Effective campaigning requires everyone involved to move in the correct time and direction. Clarity is necessary to move activists. If a miscue moves some one way and the rest another, strength is diminished and advantage lost. Broken communications dispirit activists and deprive leadership of the ability to maneuver.

Now a soldier's spirit is keenest in the morning; by noonday, it has begun to flag; and in the evening, their minds are bent only on returning to camp. The clever general, therefore, avoids an army when its spirit is keen, but attacks when it is sluggish and inclined to return to camp. This is the art of studying moods. Disciplined and calm, to await the appearance of disorder and hubbub amongst the enemy — this is the art of retaining self-possession.

To be near the goal while the enemy is still far from it, to wait at ease while the enemy is toiling and struggling, to be well-fed while the enemy is famished — this is the art of husbanding your strength. To refrain from intercepting an enemy whose banners are in perfect order, to refrain from attacking an army drawn up in calm and confident array — this is the art of studying circumstances.

Understand the state of your activists and your opponents. Our activists have limited time and strength. Use them wisely. Opponents have similar cycles. Use those to our advantage as well.

It is a military axiom not to advance uphill against the enemy, nor to oppose on a downhill. Do not pursue an enemy who simulates flight; do not attack soldiers whose temper is keen. Do not swallow bait offered by the enemy. Do not interfere with an army that is returning home. When you surround an army, leave an outlet free. Do not press a desperate foe too hard.

Such is the art of warfare.

Avoid direct conflict with opponents while they have an advantage in the definition of the situation. Understand your opponents to avoid moving into disadvantage based on their tricks. Do not press losing opponents too hard because they may turn and fight with great anger and fear.



Variation in Tactics



When in difficult country, do not encamp. In country where high roads intersect, join hands with your allies. Do not linger in dangerously isolated positions. In hemmed-in situations, you must resort to stratagem. In a desperate position, you must fight.

Be realistic, not optimistic, in appraising the situation. When you can find allies, join them. When the definition of the situation is unfavorable, avoid conflict and strengthen your defense. Tactics must vary according to where you are, not where you hoped to be.

There are roads which must not be followed, armies which must be not attacked, towns which must not be besieged, positions which must not be contested, commands of the sovereign which must not be obeyed.

Never move into disadvantaged positions, no matter the prize. For Progressives, this is a difficult discipline to follow. Our base can be adamant about doing something crowd-pleasing today that may well put us out of position to win a greater victory tomorrow.

The general who thoroughly understands the advantages that accompany variation of tactics knows how to handle troops. The general who does not understand these may be well-acquainted with the configuration of the country, yet will not be able to turn knowledge to practical account.

So, the student of war who is unversed in the art of war of varying plans, even though acquainted with the Five Advantages, will fail to make the best use of soldiers.

Difficult country; high roads intersecting; isolated, hemmed in, and desperate positions are advantages or disadvantages, depending on

respective positions. While we want to avoid difficult country, we must understand when opponents are there and use it to our advantage. If our opponents may find potential allies, we must disrupt their position.

In the wise leader's plans, considerations of advantage and of disadvantage will be blended together. If our expectation of advantage be tempered in this way, we may succeed in accomplishing the essential part of our schemes. If, on the other hand, we are always ready to seize an advantage in the midst of difficulties, we may extricate ourselves from misfortune.

Reduce the hostile chiefs by inflicting damage on them; make trouble for them, and keep them constantly engaged; hold out specious allurements, and make them rush to any given point.

Move opponents toward our definition of the situation. Put them into difficult country. Prevent them from joining allies. Campaigns must be dynamic and adaptable, not static and inflexible.

The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy's not coming, but on our own readiness to receive; not on the chance of not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable.

If we have advantage, we are ready for opponents. Strategy cannot rely on opponents choosing not to attack us. If we have the definition of the situation, we are ready for any move because our opponents are mired in disadvantages.

There are five dangerous faults that may affect a general: recklessness, which leads to destruction; cowardice, which leads to capture; a hasty temper, which can be provoked by insults; a delicacy of honor, which is sensitive to shame; and over-solicitude for soldiers, which exposes them to worry and trouble.

Do not be led by ego, impulse, or the outrage of others. Progressives must temper their response to a given injustice — not to accept wrongs, but to wage effective campaigns against them all.

No effort will please everyone. Over-solicitude for Progressives means accommodating so many different opinions from ever-finer interest group divisions that no effective action can be formed and executed.

These are the five besetting sins of a general that are ruinous to the conduct of war. When an army is overthrown and its leader slain, the cause will surely be found among these five dangerous faults. Let them be a subject of meditation.



The Army on the March



We come now to the question of encamping the army and observing signs of the enemy. Pass quickly over mountains, and keep in the neighborhood of valleys.

Camp in high places, facing the sun. Do not climb heights in order to fight.

After crossing a river, get far away from it. When an invading force crosses a river in its onward march, do not advance to meet it in mid-stream — it will be best to let half the army get across, and then deliver your attack. If you are anxious to fight, you should not go to meet invaders near a river that they have to cross. Moor your craft higher up than the enemy, and facing the sun. Do not move upstream to meet the enemy.

In crossing salt-marshes, your sole concern should be to get over them quickly, without any delay. If forced to fight in a salt-marsh, you should have water and grass near you, and get your back to a clump of trees.

In dry, level country, take up an easily accessible position with rising ground to your right and on your rear, so the danger may be in front, and safety lie behind.

All armies prefer high ground to low and sunny places to dark. If you are careful and camp on hard ground, your army will be free from disease of every kind, and this will spell victory.

When you come to a hill or a bank, occupy the sunny side, with the slope on your right rear. Thus, you will both act for the benefit of your soldiers and use the natural advantages of the ground.

We face structures and circumstances that are outside our campaigns and affect how we deploy tactics. Crossing a river quickly means getting away from the danger of a difficult retreat. Rising ground on your right means you control where conflict occurs and egress to safe-

ty. Minimize risk while taking actions through understanding the field.

When, in consequence of heavy rains upcountry, a river that you wish to ford is swollen and flecked with foam, you must wait until it subsides. Country in which there are precipitous cliffs with torrents running between, deep natural hollows, confined places, tangled thickets, quagmires, and crevasses should be left with all possible speed and not approached. While we keep away from such places, we should get the enemy to approach them; while we face them, we should let the enemy have them on their rear.

Stay away from ground that has no advantage for us and always work to move opponents into disadvantage.

If in the neighborhood of your camp there should be any hilly country, ponds surrounded by aquatic grass, hollow basins filled with reeds, or woods with thick undergrowth, these must be carefully routed out and searched, for these are places where soldiers in ambush or insidious spies are likely to be lurking.

When the enemy is close at hand and remains quiet, they are relying on the natural strength of their position. When they keep aloof and try to provoke a battle, they are anxious for the other side to advance. If their place of encampment is easy of access, it is a bait.

Movement amongst the trees of a forest shows that the enemy is advancing. The appearance of a number of screens in the midst of thick grass means that the enemy wants to make us suspicious.

The rising of birds in their flight is the sign of an ambush. Startled beasts indicate that a sudden attack is coming.

When there is dust rising in a high column, it is the sign of chariots advancing; when the dust is low, but spread over a wide area, it betokens the approach of infantry. When it branches out in different directions, it shows that parties have been sent to collect firewood. A few clouds of dust moving to and fro signify that the army is encamping.

Look for signs of movement in opponents and ask why it is happening. Opponents must take up positions to act against us. This work

often starts in the political margins, small audiences, select group meetings, online forums, and other such spaces. We need to be vigilant for early signs of opponents' work to change the definition of the situation.

In politics, what is said is not nearly as important as why it is said. Why opponents are talking at a moment is as much a sign of intention as anything they say.

Humble words and increased preparations are signs that the enemy is about to advance. Violent language and driving forward as if to the attack are signs that they will retreat. When the light chariots come out first and take up a position on the wings, it is a sign that the enemy is forming for battle.

Peace proposals unaccompanied by a sworn covenant indicate a plot. When there is much running about and the soldiers fall into rank, it means that the critical moment has come. When some are seen advancing and some retreating, it is a lure.

When the soldiers stand leaning on their spears, they are faint from want of food. If those who are sent to draw water begin by drinking themselves, the army is suffering from thirst. If the enemy sees an advantage to be gained and makes no effort to secure it, the soldiers are exhausted.

If birds gather on any spot, it is unoccupied.

Clamor by night betokens nervousness. If there is disturbance in the camp, the general's authority is weak. If the banners and flags are shifted about, sedition is afoot. If the officers are angry, it means that the soldiers are weary.

When an army feeds its horses with grain and kills its cattle for food, and when the soldiers do not hang their cooking-pots over the campfires, showing that they will not return to their tents, you may know that they are determined to fight to the death.

The sight of soldiers whispering together in small knots or speaking in subdued tones points to disaffection amongst the rank and file. Too-frequent rewards signify that the enemy is at the end of its resources; too many punishments betray a condition of dire distress.

Observe your opposition closely. Why are opponents' activists in motion? How are they acting? What they do illuminates opponent strategy and indicates activist and coalition strength. What their activists and leaders do — even seeming inconsequential things — betrays the state of their affairs.

To begin by bluster, but afterward to take fright at the enemy's numbers, shows a supreme lack of intelligence.

When envoys are sent with compliments in their mouths, it is a sign that the enemy wishes for a truce.

If the enemy's troops march up angrily and remain facing ours for a long time without either joining battle or taking themselves off again, the situation demands great vigilance and circumspection.

If our troops are no more in number than the enemy, that is amply sufficient; it only means that no direct attack can be made. What we can do is simply to concentrate all our available strength, keep a close watch on the enemy, and obtain reinforcements.

Those who exercise no forethought but make light of opponents are sure to be captured by them.



Terrain



We may distinguish six kinds of terrain: accessible, entangling, temporizing, narrow passes, precipitous heights, positions at a great distance from the enemy.

Terrain connects to Earth — the stable, fixed aspects campaigns move through. Government structures. Social class. Geography. Ethnicity. History. Urbanization. This also encompasses culture. What persistent political beliefs, religion, level of authoritarianism are in a population? Culture can change over time, but at any moment, it is a stable feature to contend with.

Terrain that can be freely traversed by both sides is called accessible. With regard to terrain of this nature, occupy the raised and sunny spots before the enemy, and carefully guard your line of supplies. Then you will be able to fight with advantage.

Terrain that can be abandoned but is hard to re-occupy is called entangling. From a position of this sort, if the enemy is unprepared, you may sally forth and prevail. But if the enemy is prepared for your coming and you fail, return is impossible and disaster will ensue.

When the terrain is such that neither side will gain by making the first move, it is called temporizing. In a position of this sort, even though the enemy should offer us an attractive bait, it will be advisable not to stir forth, but rather to retreat, thus enticing the enemy in turn; then, when part of the enemy army has come out, we may deliver our attack with advantage.

If you can occupy narrow passes first, let them be strongly garrisoned and await the advent of the enemy. Should the army forestall you in occupying a pass, do not pursue if the pass is fully garrisoned, but only if it is weakly garrisoned.

With regard to precipitous heights, if you are beforehand with your adversary, you should occupy the raised and sunny spots, and there wait for the enemy to come up. If the enemy has occupied them before you, do not follow, but retreat and try to entice the enemy away.

If you are situated at a great distance from the enemy and the strength of the two armies is equal, it is not easy to provoke a battle, and fighting will be to your disadvantage.

These six are the principles connected with Earth. The general who has attained a responsible post must be careful to study them.

These terrains do not map neatly onto social conflicts, but are useful exemplars to evaluate and manage advantages and disadvantages that terrain presents. Define the situation quickly when you can. Do not put yourself in assailable positions. Use terrain features against opponents.

Risk must be accounted for in strategy. Every terrain is different and its risk must be assessed. Continually adapt plans to terrain.

Now an army is exposed to six calamities, not arising from natural causes, but from faults for which the general is responsible. These are: flight, insubordination, collapse, ruin, disorganization, and rout.

Other conditions being equal, if one force is hurled against another ten times its size, the result will be the flight of the former.

When the common soldiers are too strong and their officers too weak, the result is insubordination. When the officers are too strong and the common soldiers too weak, the result is collapse.

This is the activist-organization relationship, with either activists unwilling to follow common strategy or leaders unwilling to constructively engage activists.

When the higher officers are angry and insubordinate, and on meeting the enemy give battle on their own account from a feeling of resentment, before the commander-in-chief can tell whether they are in a position to fight, the result is ruin. When the general is weak and without authority; when orders are not clear

and distinct; when no fixed duties are assigned to officers and soldiers, and the ranks are formed in a slovenly haphazard manner, the result is utter disorganization.

When intermediate organization leaders act against strategy, it is out of either contempt for the organization's principal leaders or from a failure to communicate plans clearly. Either way, intermediate leaders act on their own assessments, unconnected to a wider campaign. This dissipates strength because concerted action is lost.

When a general is unable to estimate the enemy's strength and allows an inferior force to engage a larger one, or hurls a weak detachment against a powerful one and neglects to place picked soldiers in the front rank, the result must be rout.

Ignorance of the opponent and negligent management will lead to a lost campaign every time.

These are six ways of courting defeat, which must be carefully noted by the general who has attained a responsible post.

The natural formation of the country is the soldier's best ally, but a power of estimating the adversary; of controlling the forces of victory; and of shrewdly calculating difficulties, dangers, and distances, constitutes the test of a great general.

Those who know these things, and in fighting put this knowledge into practice, will win battles. Know them not, nor practice them, and surely be defeated.

If fighting is sure to result in victory, then you must fight, even though the ruler forbid it; if fighting will not result in victory, then you must not fight even at the ruler's bidding.

The general who advances without coveting fame and retreats without fearing disgrace — whose only thought is to protect the country and do good service for the sovereign — is the jewel of the kingdom.

People and resources are best deployed with respect and conservation. Careful consideration of where and when to enter conflict, without personal consideration of pride or shame, must be the hallmark of progressive leadership.

Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look upon them as your own beloved, and they will stand by you even unto death.

If, however, you are indulgent, but unable to make your authority felt; kind-hearted, but unable to enforce your commands; and incapable, moreover, of quelling disorder, then your soldiers must be likened to spoilt children; they are useless for any practical purpose.

Activists must be appreciated, respected, and challenged. All who support a cause must be engaged and called to some action. If activists only talk to each other or are never called on to act, they are ineffective.

If we know that our own soldiers are in a condition to attack, but are unaware that the enemy is not open to attack, we have gone only halfway toward victory. If we know that the enemy is open to attack, but are unaware that our own soldiers are not in a condition to attack, we have gone only halfway toward victory. If we know that the enemy is open to attack, and also know that our soldiers are in a condition to attack, but are unaware that the nature of the ground makes fighting impracticable, we have still gone only halfway toward victory.

Experienced soldiers, once in motion, are never bewildered; once they have broken camp, they are never at a loss. If you know the enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt; if you know Heaven and know Earth, you may make your victory complete.

Progressives believe in a world that the privileged will oppose. We want changes that make the uninitiated anxious, creating more opposition — and the balance of the world will need convincing. It is not enough to have a righteous cause. We must understand opponents, be fully aware of ourselves, and study the terrain we are struggling within.



The Nine Grounds



The art of war recognizes nine varieties of ground: dispersive, facile, contentious, open, intersecting highways, serious, difficult, hemmed-in, and desperate.

Ground is a broader term here that encompasses Earth, which is stable, and Heaven, which is the changeable — economic cycles, natural disasters, public opinion, the unexpected event, issues that arise independent of any campaign. We move through Earth under Heaven. Terrain advantages change under different circumstances over time.

When chieftains fight in their own territories, it is dispersive ground.

When soldiers are close to home, they are likely to leave the battlefield if they face adversity. For us, activists weakly connected to a cause are easily lost to other concerns if little progress is made.

When an army has penetrated into hostile territory, but to no great distance, it is facile ground.

Ground that gives great advantage to either side once possessed is contentious.

Ground on which each side has liberty of movement is open.

Ground that forms the key to three contiguous states, so those who occupy it first have most of the Empire at their command, is a ground of intersecting highways.

When an army has penetrated into the heart of a hostile country, leaving a number of fortified cities in its rear, it is serious ground.

Mountain forests, rugged steeps, marshes and fens — all country that is hard to traverse — is difficult ground.

Ground that is reached through narrow gorges, and from which we can only retire by tortuous paths, so a small number of the enemy would suffice to crush a large body, is hemmed-in.

Ground on which we can only be saved from destruction by fighting without delay is desperate.

On dispersive ground, therefore, fight not. On facile ground, halt not. On contentious ground, attack not.

On open ground, do not try to block the enemy's way. On the ground of intersecting highways, join hands with your allies.

On serious ground, gather in plunder. In difficult ground, keep steadily on the march.

On hemmed-in ground, resort to stratagem. On desperate ground, fight.

Strategy must be in harmony with the ground. Progressives need to see the world as it is to act within it.

When you have lightly engaged activists, sensitive to reversals, do not engage in much action, but concentrate on education and incremental victories.

Once progress has been made, press on campaigning and engaging activists on facile ground.

When you have no advantage, do not press headlong against the opposition on open or contentious ground. Use indirect attacks to move opponents toward more-favorable terrain.

On serious ground, our plunder is the addition of more activists and newly acquired resources from gained allies.

Ground of intersecting highways means we are well-connected with allies and can control much more terrain to secure the definition of the situation more effectively.

Do not campaign on difficult ground. Get out of the hemmed-in.

Only fight full on against the opposition on desperate ground. There are injustices that must be acted against without delay.

Pay close attention to where you are and adjust when difficulties appear in the distance, not when trouble is in front of you.

Those who were called skillful leaders of old knew how to drive a wedge between the enemy's front and rear; to prevent co-operation between its large and small divisions; to hinder the good troops from rescuing the bad, the officers from rallying their soldiers. When the enemy's soldiers were united, these leaders managed to keep them in disorder. When it was to their advantage, these leaders made a forward move; when otherwise, they stopped still.

If asked how to cope with a great host of the enemy in orderly array and on the point of marching to the attack, I would say: "Begin by seizing something which your opponents hold dear; then they will be amenable to your will."

Rapidity is the essence of war: Take advantage of the enemy's unreadiness, make your way by unexpected routes, and attack unguarded spots.

A campaign is more than convincing people of our cause's righteousness. It is preventing opponents from convincing people that our cause is dangerous and wrong. Progressives too often believe that the "correctness" of our positions will win over people if our points are only heard clearly.

But for our voice to be heard clearly, we must quiet the voices of opponents who work against our aims. We need to break through long-standing definitions of the situation that cloud the judgments of others. Making our voice heard means interfering with opponents as well as reaching the unconverted.

These are the principles that an invading force should observe: The further you penetrate into a country, the greater will be the solidarity of your troops, and thus the defenders will not prevail against you. Make forays in fertile country to supply your army with food.

Carefully study the well-being of your soldiers, and do not overtax them. Concentrate your energy and hoard your strength. Keep your army continually on the move, and devise unfathomable plans.

Throw your soldiers into positions whence there is no escape, and they will prefer death to flight. If they will face death, there is nothing they may not achieve. Officers and soldiers alike will put forth their uttermost strength.

Soldiers in desperate straits lose the sense of fear. If there is no place of refuge, they will stand firm. If they are in hostile country, they will show a stubborn front. If there is no help for it, they will fight hard. Thus, without waiting to be marshaled, soldiers will be constantly on the alert; without waiting to be asked, they will do your will; without restrictions, they will be faithful; without giving orders, they can be trusted.

Prohibit the taking of omens, and do away with superstitious doubts. Then, until death itself comes, no calamity need be feared.

Resist conversations about polling and the opinions of media pundits. These either dishearten activists or create over-confidence. Only follow the strategy, not the opinions of others.

If our soldiers are not overburdened with money, it is not because they have a distaste for riches; if their lives are not unduly long, it is not because they are disinclined to longevity. On the day they are ordered out to battle, your soldiers may weep, those sitting up bedewing their garments, and those lying down letting the tears run down their cheeks. But let them once be brought to bay, and they will display great courage.

Understand your activists relative to their connection to the cause and the ground you are on. Have you built a strong relationship with them? Are they educated enough to act in the position where you have placed them? Develop a strong connection. Bring them through escalating challenges that they can overcome. Committed, experienced activists are formidable. Their solidarity with a movement is a priceless resource.

The skillful tactician may be likened to the *shuai-jan*, a snake that is found in the Chung mountains. Strike at its head, and you will be attacked by its tail; strike at its tail, and you will be attacked by its head; strike at its middle, and you will be attacked by head and tail both.

Asked if an army can be made to imitate the *shuai-jan*, I should answer, yes. For the soldiers of Wu and Yueh are enemies; yet, if they are crossing a river in the same boat and are caught by a storm, they will come to each other's assistance just as the left hand helps the right.

It is not enough to put one's trust in tethering horses and burying chariot wheels in the ground.

The principle on which to manage an army is to set up one standard of courage that all must reach.

How to make the best of both strong and weak is a question involving the proper use of ground.

Thus, skillful generals conduct the army just as though they were leading a single person, willy-nilly, by the hand.

Empower every activist as much as possible to support a campaign and challenge them to act. Relying solely on commands, not fully investing activists with the strength of knowledge and voice, is a weakness.

It is the business of generals to be quiet and thus ensure secrecy; upright and just, and thus maintain order. They must be able to mystify their officers and soldiers by false reports and appearances, and thus keep them in total ignorance. By altering arrangements and changing plans, they keep the enemy without definite knowledge. By shifting camp and taking circuitous routes, they prevent the enemy from anticipating purpose. At the critical moment, the leader of an army acts like one who has climbed up a height and then kicks away the ladder behind. They carry soldiers deep into hostile territory before they show their hand. They burn boats and break cooking pots; like a shepherd driving a flock of sheep, they drive soldiers this way and that, and no one knows the destination.

To muster a host and bring it into danger may be termed the business of the general.

While collaboration and inclusiveness are hallmarks of progressive efforts, it is important to obscure intentions until a campaign can be fully engaged. Invested activists will understand and commit once a plan is underway.

The different measures suited to the nine varieties of ground; the expediency of aggressive or defensive tactics; and the fundamental laws of human nature — these are things that must most certainly be studied.

When invading hostile territory, the general principle is that penetrating deeply brings cohesion; penetrating but a short way means dispersion.

When you leave your own country behind and take your army across neighborhood territory, you find yourself on critical ground. When there are means of communication on all four sides, the ground is one of intersecting highways. When you penetrate deeply into a country, it is serious ground. When you penetrate but a little way, it is facile ground. When you have the enemy's strongholds on your rear, and narrow passes in front, it is hemmed-in ground. When there is no place of refuge at all, it is desperate ground.

Therefore, on dispersive ground, inspire your soldiers with unity of purpose. On facile ground, see that there is close connection between all parts of your army.

On contentious ground, hurry up my rear.

On open ground, keep a vigilant eye on my defenses. On ground of intersecting highways, consolidate alliances.

On serious ground, try to ensure a continuous stream of supplies. On difficult ground, keep pushing on along the road.

On hemmed-in ground, block any way of retreat. On desperate ground, proclaim to your soldiers the hopelessness of saving their lives.

For it is soldiers' disposition to offer an obstinate resistance when surrounded, to fight hard when they cannot help themselves, and to obey promptly when in danger.

Managing activists and engaging the opposition is connected to the ground and strategy must adapt. There is no clear single path to success. Rather, there is continual adaptation to changing situations as a sailboat moves through changing wind while holding one course.

We cannot enter into alliance with neighboring principalities until we are acquainted with their designs. We are not fit to lead an army on the march unless we are familiar with the face of the country — its mountains and forests, its pitfalls and precipices, its marshes and swamps. We shall be unable to turn natural advantages to account unless we make use of local guides.

To ignore any one of the following four or five principles does not befit a war-like leader.

When such leaders attack a powerful state, their generalship shows itself in preventing the concentration of the enemy's forces. They overawe opponents, and their allies are prevented from joining.

Such leaders do not strive to ally with all and sundry, nor foster the power of other states. They carry out their own secret designs, keeping antagonists in awe. Thus they are able to capture opponents' cities and overthrow their kingdoms.

Bestow rewards without regard to rule, issue orders without regard to previous arrangements, and you will be able to handle a whole army as though you had to do with but a single man.

Confront your soldiers with the deed itself; never let them know your design. When the outlook is bright, bring it before their eyes, but tell them nothing when the situation is gloomy. Place your army in deadly peril, and it will survive; plunge it into desperate straits, and it will come off in safety, for it is precisely when a force has fallen into harm's way that is capable of striking a blow for victory.

Success in warfare is gained by carefully accommodating ourselves to the enemy's purpose.

Leadership must study the situation, which determines how to manage activists. Activists need clear goals and motivation to act. Leadership also must disrupt old approaches when reaching activists and engaging in conflict.



The Attack by Fire



There are five ways of attacking with fire. The first is to burn soldiers in their camp; the second is to burn stores; the third is to burn baggage trains; the fourth is to burn arsenals and magazines; and the fifth is to hurl dropping fire amongst the enemy.

Fire is analogous to acts that cannot be fully controlled after launch, such as occur in social media.

To carry out an attack, we must have means available. The material for raising fire should always be kept in readiness.

There is a proper season for making attacks with fire, and special days for starting a conflagration. The proper season is when the weather is very dry; the special days are those when the moon is in the constellations of the Sieve, the Wall, the Wing, or the Cross-bar; these four are all days of rising wind.

In attacking with fire, one should be prepared to meet five possible developments. When fire breaks out inside to enemy's camp, respond at once with an attack from without. If there is an outbreak of fire, but the enemy's soldiers remain quiet, bide your time and do not attack. When the force of the flames has reached its height, follow it up with an attack, if that is practicable; if not, stay where you are. If it is possible to make an assault with fire from without, do not wait for it to break out within, but deliver your attack at a favorable moment.

When you start a fire, be upwind of it — do not attack from downwind. Wind that rises in the daytime lasts long, but a night breeze soon falls.

In every army, the five developments connected with fire must be known, the movements of the stars calculated, and a watch kept for the proper days.

Hence those who use fire as an aid to the attack show intelligence; those who use water as an aid to the attack gain an accession of strength. By means of water, an enemy may be intercepted, but not robbed of all belongings.

Fire and water respond to the environment with no regard for its origins. Launching such attacks takes skill, preparation, and timing because they cannot be controlled once made.

Unhappy is the fate of one who tries to win battles and succeed in attacks without cultivating the spirit of enterprise, for the result is waste of time and general stagnation. Hence the saying: The enlightened ruler lays plans well ahead; the good general cultivates resources.

Move not unless you see an advantage; use not your troops unless there is something to be gained; fight not unless the position is critical. No ruler should put troops into the field merely to gratify their spleen; no general should fight a battle simply out of pique. If it is to your advantage, make a forward move; if not, stay where you are. Anger may, in time, change to gladness; vexation may be succeeded by content. But a kingdom that has once been destroyed can never come again into being, nor can the dead ever be brought back to life.

The enlightened ruler is heedful, and the good general full of caution. This is the way to keep a country at peace and an army intact.

Move with purpose, not reaction. Move with calculation, not emotion. Resources are scarce. People have limited time and energy. Failed campaigns are like destroyed cities that take years to rebuild. Discouraged activists are lost and may never return.

Progressives often act against injustice in ways that only reach our own community to display our righteousness. Our weakness is to voice our righteousness in grand expressions we believe will persuade rather than find a path to end an injustice over time.



The Use of Spies



Raising a host of 100,000 soldiers and marching them great distances entails heavy loss on the people and a drain on the resources of the State. The daily expenditure will amount to a thousand 1,000 ounces of silver. There will be commotion at home and abroad, and people will drop down exhausted on the highways. As many as 700,000 families will be impeded in their labor.

Hostile armies may face each other for years, striving for the victory that is decided in a single day. To remain in ignorance of the enemy's condition simply because one grudges the outlay of 100 ounces of silver in honors and emoluments is the height of inhumanity.

One who acts thus is no leader, no present help to a sovereign, no master of victory. Thus, what enables the wise sovereign and the good general to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary leader, is foreknowledge. Now this foreknowledge cannot be elicited from spirits; it cannot be obtained inductively from experience, nor by any deductive calculation.

Knowledge of the enemy's dispositions can only be obtained from other people.

What follows is a straightforward discussion of spying. Progressives have ethical problems with deception that our opponents lack. This is one reason to study the use of spies — to protect ourselves from the opposition's. But consider the importance of understanding opponents in their lived world — gathering awareness of what they do among themselves, knowing what their leaders say to their audiences to move their activists.

For Sun Tzu, the more learned about the enemy, the better the strategy. This makes it inhumane to place lives in jeopardy by neglecting to gather knowledge that might spare them.

We must research and examine our opponents continually and in depth. To act without doing so is negligence and shows profound disrespect for those who have contributed hard-earned resources to our efforts.

There are five classes of spies: local, inward, converted, doomed, and surviving.

When these five kinds of spy are all at work, none can discover the secret system. This is called “divine manipulation of the threads.” It is the sovereign’s most precious faculty.

Having local spies means employing the services of the inhabitants of a district.

Leadership needs a keen awareness of local situations. Someone from a national headquarters will not fully understand a locale without grassroots awareness and support.

Having inward spies means making use of officials of the enemy.

Having converted spies means getting hold of the enemy’s spies and using them for our own purposes.

Inward and converted spies, for our purposes, are the opposition’s disenchanted — those who are unmoored from the opposition’s cause while still aware and connected to its people. They provide greater context for our understanding.

Having doomed spies is doing certain things openly for purposes of deception, and allowing our spies to know of them and report them to the enemy.

If opponents believe they found useful information about our efforts, we can influence their actions in our favor.

Surviving spies, finally, are those who bring back news from the enemy’s camp.

This approach ranges from research, attending opposition events or volunteering in opponents' offices. These are literally people who go out to take a look and report back.

There are no more intimate relations to be maintained in the whole army than with spies. None should be more liberally rewarded. In no other business should greater secrecy be preserved.

Spies cannot be usefully employed without a certain intuitive discernment. They cannot be properly managed without benevolence and straightforwardness. Without subtle ingenuity of mind, one cannot make certain of the truth of their reports.

Be subtle! Be subtle! Use your spies for every kind of business.

If a secret piece of news is divulged by a spy before the time is ripe, the spy must be put to death along with the person to whom the secret was told.

Whether the object be to crush an army, storm a city, or assassinate an individual, it is always necessary to begin by finding out the names of the attendants, aides-de-camp, and door-keepers and sentries of the general in command. Our spies must be commissioned to ascertain these.

The enemy's spies who have come to spy on us must be sought out, tempted with bribes, led away, and comfortably housed. Thus, they will become converted spies and available for our service.

It is through the information brought by the converted spy that we are able to acquire and employ local and inward spies. It is owing to such information, again, that we can cause the doomed spy to carry false tidings to the enemy. Lastly, it is by such information that the surviving spy can be used on appointed occasions.

The end and aim of spying in all its five varieties is knowledge of the enemy; this knowledge can only be derived, in the first instance, from the converted spy. It is essential that the converted spy be treated with the utmost liberality.

It is only the enlightened ruler and the wise general who will use the highest intelligence of the army for purposes of spying; thereby, they achieve great results. Spies are a most important element in operations on water, because on them depends an army's ability to move.

Understanding opponents in their world, with their activists, affords opportunities to see their strategy before they act.

The best knowledge is foreknowledge.



A Progressive Art of War



Progressives' opponent is always Privilege. As Cleveland Mayor Tom Johnson said best in the forward of his 1911 autobiography *My Story*:

“The greatest movement in the world to-day may be characterized as the struggle of the people against Privilege.

“On the one side the People — slow to wake up, slow to recognize their own interests, slow to realize their power, slow to invoke it. On the other, Privilege — always awake and quick to act, owning many of the newspapers, controlling the appointment of judges, dictating to city councils, influencing legislatures, and writing our national laws.

“Privilege is the advantage conferred on one by law of denying the competition of others ... And just to the extent that it grants special favors to some to the exclusion of others, do the people suffer from this evil.”

Privilege

Privilege is always personal. We do not contend against ideas; we struggle against a few to win the support of many. Privilege resides in coalition. There is a complex network of people who create, maintain, and expand it for the benefit of Privilege.

Progressives do not fight for universal health care; we contend against specific people whose privilege is threatened: those profiting from our current system and resisting change.

We do not fight for the environment, but against those who gain from pollution. Standing against racism means opposing those who benefit from marginalizing people of color.

Worldviews

Privilege generally holds the definition of the situation at any juncture. Legal and cultural levers are available to defend beneficial positions against progressive change, and it possesses resources to move them. These levers exist within a socially recognized worldview — a set of social and political definitions of situations, accepted by the majority, even by those who never benefit from Privilege.

Additionally, people have varying degrees of anxiety and resistance to changing worldviews, typically seen in the political spectrum between Right and Left. While Progressives contend with Privilege's active machinations, we also face a native anxiety to social change in others' worldviews that is part of the terrain. Privilege knows how to use this anxiety to recruit activists and move against us.

But we do not struggle against an abstract worldview. Specific individuals create and sustain Privilege and their efforts must be defeated — the elected and appointed, corporate executives and lobbyists, foundations and think-tanks, billionaires and secret PACs. From Davos conferences to local courthouses, there are specific actors appearing in all progressive efforts who are generals, officers, and soldiers of Privilege standing against us.

Flaws

There are four flaws in the American progressive movement to consider.

First is a belief that evidence and logic alone win political contests. People are seldom convinced through logic. They have to trust messengers first. Progressives need to win that trust, by using words to inspire hope and alleviate anxiety. We need to speak with care to those we ask to change. Our words matter more than evidence. Changing the definition of the situation requires understanding people — who they are, where they live, the challenges and anxieties they face — and building trust before they will accept our positions.

Second is strategic ossification. We do not need another march on Washington, D.C. Every campaign is different, yet we are unimaginative in our approach. The 1960s civil rights struggle is not the only template, *Rules for Radicals* not the only guidebook.

Third is that ideological purity interferes with progress. Social change often requires intermediate steps. This is not a moral compromise, but a recognition of how people actually incorporate social, political and economic change. There are injustices that must be immediately opposed — desperate ground, such as crimi-

nal treatment of migrants. Most others, such as health care, must move in stages that show the benefit and harmlessness of change at each point.

Fourth, we impute moral weakness and corruption onto peoples' worldviews that are not ours. We need to understand why people believe what they do. What tools were they given to understand their world? This is not to justify racism or sexism, but to understand how such beliefs can be circumvented now and changed over time.

Progressivism at its historical base is a pragmatic, scientific effort to understand fully where we are, how we got here, and how can we move people, psychologically and socially, from where they are towards Privilege's end. It is no compromise to see the world through others' eyes. Progressives must face the world as it is, with all the uncomfortable truths about how it turns every day.

Progress

The consistent idea throughout Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* is that conflict has a cost that must be respected. Respect is shown through careful consideration and acting only for demonstrable need, not from anger or another's urging, in a manner that is commensurate with the cost. Progressive leadership owes a debt to everyone who contributes hard-earned resources to causes. Our activists look to us to make change happen in the world. This is a tremendous responsibility that organizations and individual leaders take on when given this legitimacy.

Foremost, we must consider how opponents can defeat us before taking a single action. This does not mean avoid conflict, but rather not to defeat ourselves before conflict begins and incur losses without any progress. Hopefulness and righteousness are the enemy of effective strategy. Understanding opponents, developing activists, growing resources, doing thoughtful planning, and taking deliberate action: This how to succeed.

We oppose individuals of Privilege who have vulnerabilities to exploit. We must understand and disrupt power's operation. Without lying to people, we must conceal our strategies. We must break down the alliances supporting Privilege and discredit opponents' claim to define the situation. Moving people to change is as much quieting reactionary voices as is it providing new insights towards a better world.

This is no call for any centrism, but a plea for creativity of expression. We must recast our most radical notions in accessible and defensible language, and take unexpected paths to victory.



About this Text



This work is based on the public domain 1910 English translation of Sun Tzu's text by Lionel Giles. His rendering of the original text, the traditional commentators, plus his own observations, constitutes a useful edition. Only Sun Tzu text was used here, lightly abridged and edited for 21st-century readers.

My Story, by Tom L. Johnson¹ is an excellent autobiography of the progressive Mayor of Cleveland (1901–1909). Historians regard Johnson as one of the best mayors in U.S. history.

1. <http://clevelandmemory.org/ebooks/Johnson/>

About the Author

Eric Hensal is a veteran progressive communications, political and policy strategist with over 20 years of extensive experience with non-profits ranging from environmental groups to labor unions, state and local governments, and political candidates.

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Eric is best know for his Murray Hill Inc. for Congress campaign, when he ran his corporation for public office to protest the Citizens United decision in 2010.

