

[PDF] The Art Of War

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Books Details:

Title: The Art of War
Author: Baron De Jomini, Capt. G.H.
Released: 2011-01-01
Language:
Pages: 202
ISBN: 1612030793
ISBN13: 978-1612030791
ASIN: 1612030793

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Description:

Language Notes Text: English (translation)

Original Language: French --This text refers to the edition.

From the Publisher Excerpt from Chapter III of the The Art of War

STRATEGY

DEFINITION OF STRATEGY AND THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF WAR

The art of war, independently of its political and moral relations, consists of five principal parts, viz.: Strategy, Grand Tactics, Logistics, Tactics of the different arms, and the Art of the Engineer. We will treat of the first three branches, and begin by defining them. In order to do this, we will follow the order of procedure of a general when war is first declared, who commences with the points of the highest importance, as a plan of campaign, and afterward descends to the necessary details. Tactics, on the contrary, begins with details, and ascends to combinations and generalization necessary for the formation and handling of a great army.

We will suppose an army taking the field: the first care of its commander should be to agree with the head of the state upon the character of the war: then he must carefully study the theater of war, and select the most suitable base of operations, taking into consideration the frontiers of the state and those of its allies.

The selection of this base and the proposed aim will determine the zone of operations. The general will take a first objective point: he will select the line of operations leading to this point, either as a temporary or permanent line, giving it the most advantageous direction; namely, that which promises the greatest number of favorable opportunities with the least danger. An army marching on this line of operations will have a front of operations and a strategic front. The temporary positions which the corps d'armee will occupy upon this front of operations, or upon the line of defense, will be strategic positions.

When near its first objective point, and when it begins to meet resistance, the army will either attack the enemy or maneuver to compel him to retreat; and for this end it will adopt one or two strategic lines of maneuvers, which, being temporary, may deviate to a certain degree from the general line of operations, with which they must not be confounded.

To connect the strategic front with the base as the advance is made, lines of supply, depots, &c. will be established.

If the line of operations be long, and there be hostile troops in annoying proximity to it, these bodies may either be attacked and dispersed or be merely observed, or the operations against the enemy may be carried on without reference to them. If the second of these courses be pursued, a double strategic front and large detachments will be the result.

The army being almost within reach of the first objective point, if the enemy oppose him there will be a battle; if indecisive, the fight will be resumed; if the army gains the victory, it will secure its objective point or will advance to attain a second. Should the first objective point be the possession of an important fort, the siege will be commenced. If the army be not strong enough to continue its march, after detaching a sufficient force to maintain the siege, it will take a strategic position to cover it, as did the army of Italy in 1796, which, less than fifty thousand strong, could not pass Mantua to enter Austria, leaving twenty-five thousand enemies within its walls, and having forty thousand more in front on the double line of the Tyrol and Frioul.

If the army be strong enough to make the best use of its victory, or if it have no siege to make, it will operate toward a second and more important objective point.

If this point be distant, it will be necessary to establish an intermediate point of support. One or more secure cities already occupied will form an eventual base: when this cannot be done, a small strategic reserve may be established, which will protect the rear and also the depots by temporary fortifications. When the army crosses large streams, it will construct tetes de pont; and, if the bridges are within walled cities, earth-works will be thrown up to increase the means of defense and to secure the safety of the eventual base or the strategic reserve which may occupy these posts.

Should the battle be lost, the army will retreat toward its base, in order to be reinforced therefrom by detachments of troops, or, what is equivalent, to strengthen itself by the occupation of fortified posts and camps, thus compelling the enemy to halt or to divide his forces.

When winter approaches, the armies will either go into quarters, or the field will be kept by the army which has obtained decisive success and is desirous of profiting to the utmost by its superiority. These winter campaigns are very trying to both armies, but in other respects do not differ from ordinary campaigns, unless it be in demanding increased activity and energy to attain prompt success.

Such is the ordinary course of a war, and as such we will consider it, while discussing combinations which result from these operations. --This text refers to an alternate edition.

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