



# **The Art of War**

**A Strategic Deconstruction  
of Sun Tzu's Masterpiece**

Based on the 1910 Translation and  
Critical Notes by Lionel Giles

**THE ART OF WAR**

# The Prerequisite of Command

If orders are clear and disobeyed, it is the fault of the officers.



## The Legend: The Concubine Drill

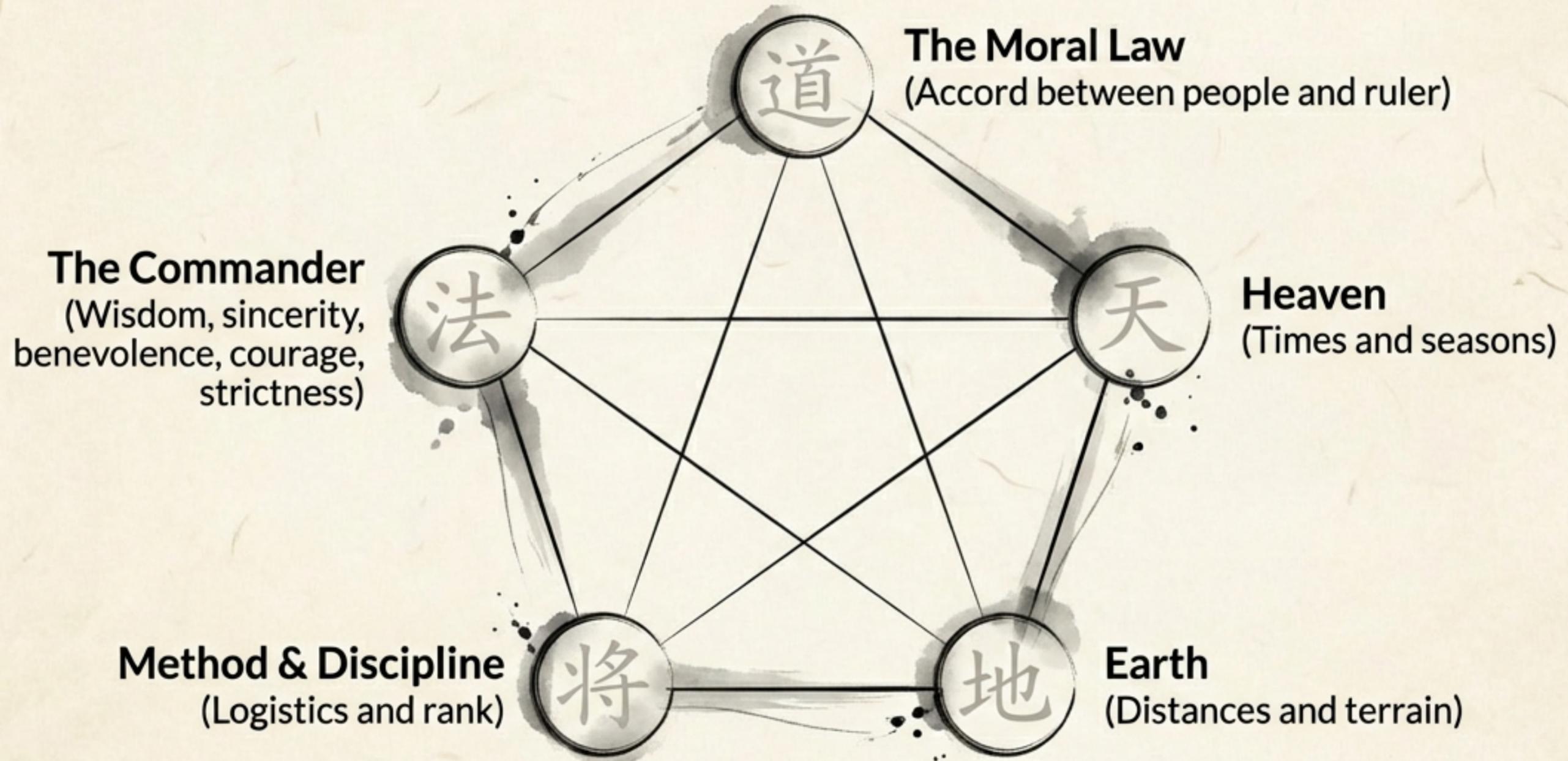
The King of Wu challenged Sun Tzu to drill 180 palace women. When the women laughed at his commands, Sun Tzu ordered the execution of the King's two favorites who were leading the squads.



**“ The King’s favorites were beheaded; the remaining women drilled with perfect precision and silence. ”**

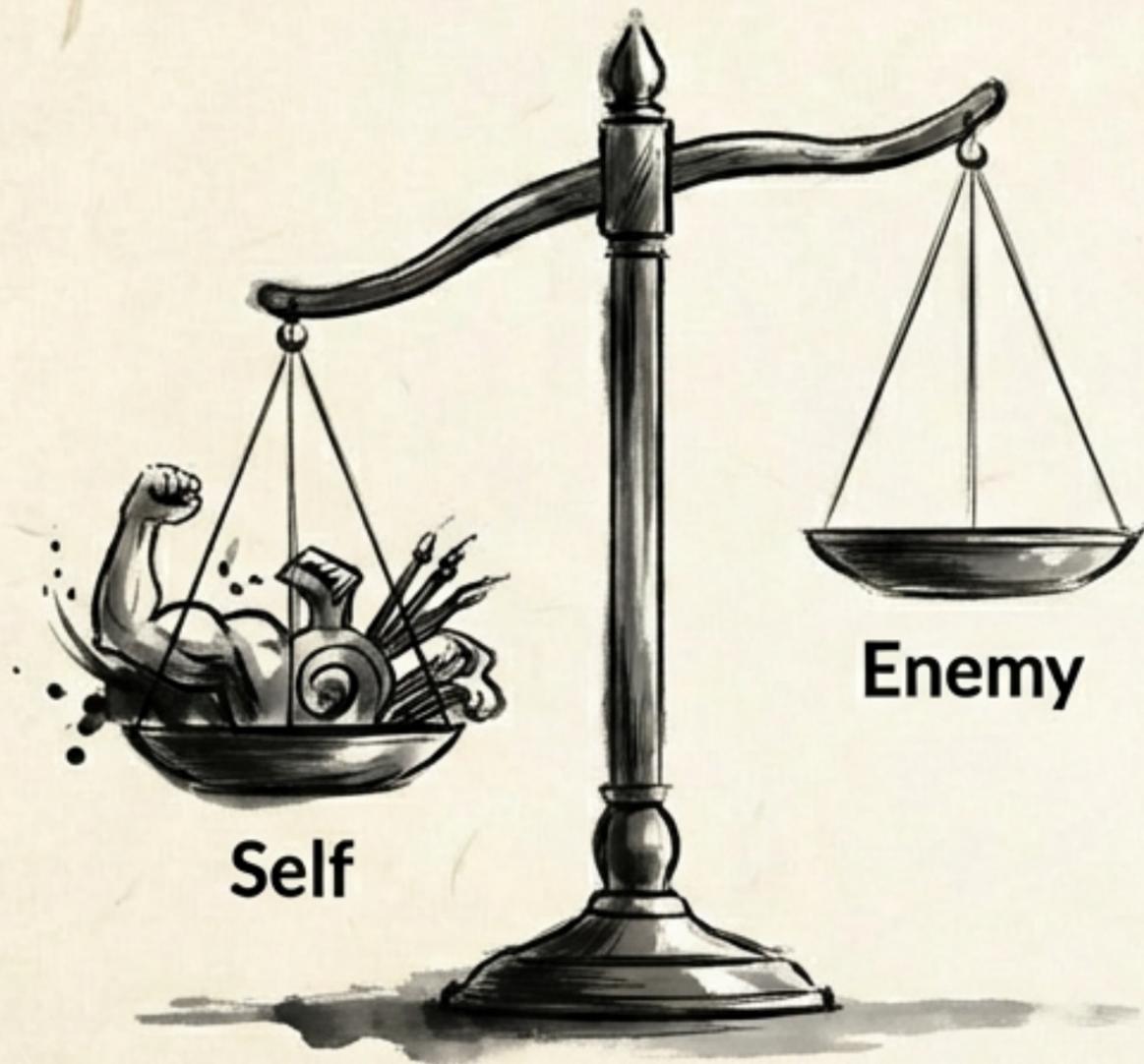
**Key Insight:** Strategy is useless without an iron chain of command.

# The Temple Calculations: Five Constant Factors



“ The general that hearkens to my counsel and acts upon it, will conquer. ”

# The Seven Considerations (The Audit)



1. Which sovereign is imbued with the Moral law?
2. Which general has the most ability?
3. With whom lie the advantages derived from Heaven and Earth?
4. On which side is discipline most rigorously enforced?
5. Which army is the stronger?
6. On which side are officers and men more highly trained?
7. In which army is there the greater constancy both in reward and punishment?

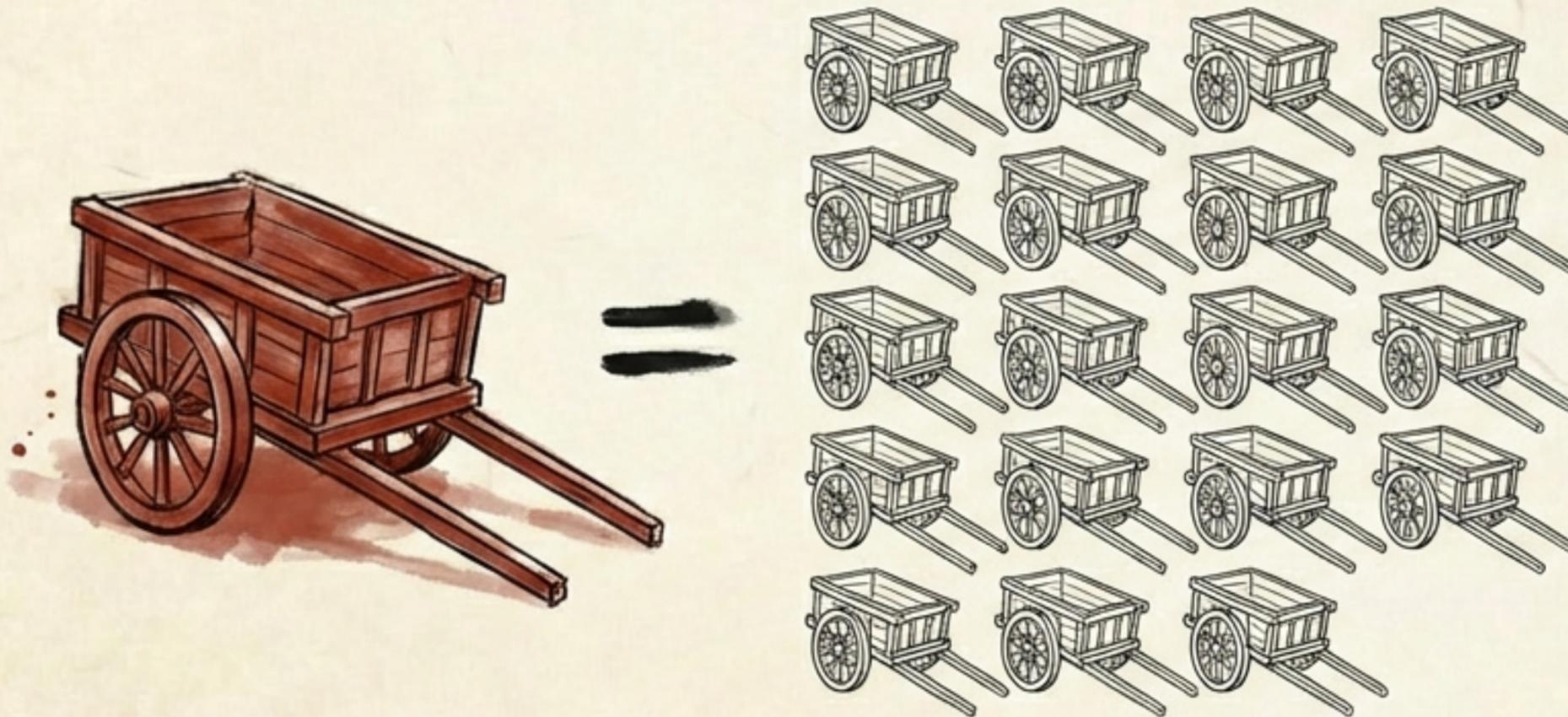
---

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

# The Economics of Conflict

## Daily Burn Rate:

**1,000 ounces of silver per 100,000 men.**



1 cartload of the enemy's provision = 20 of one's own.

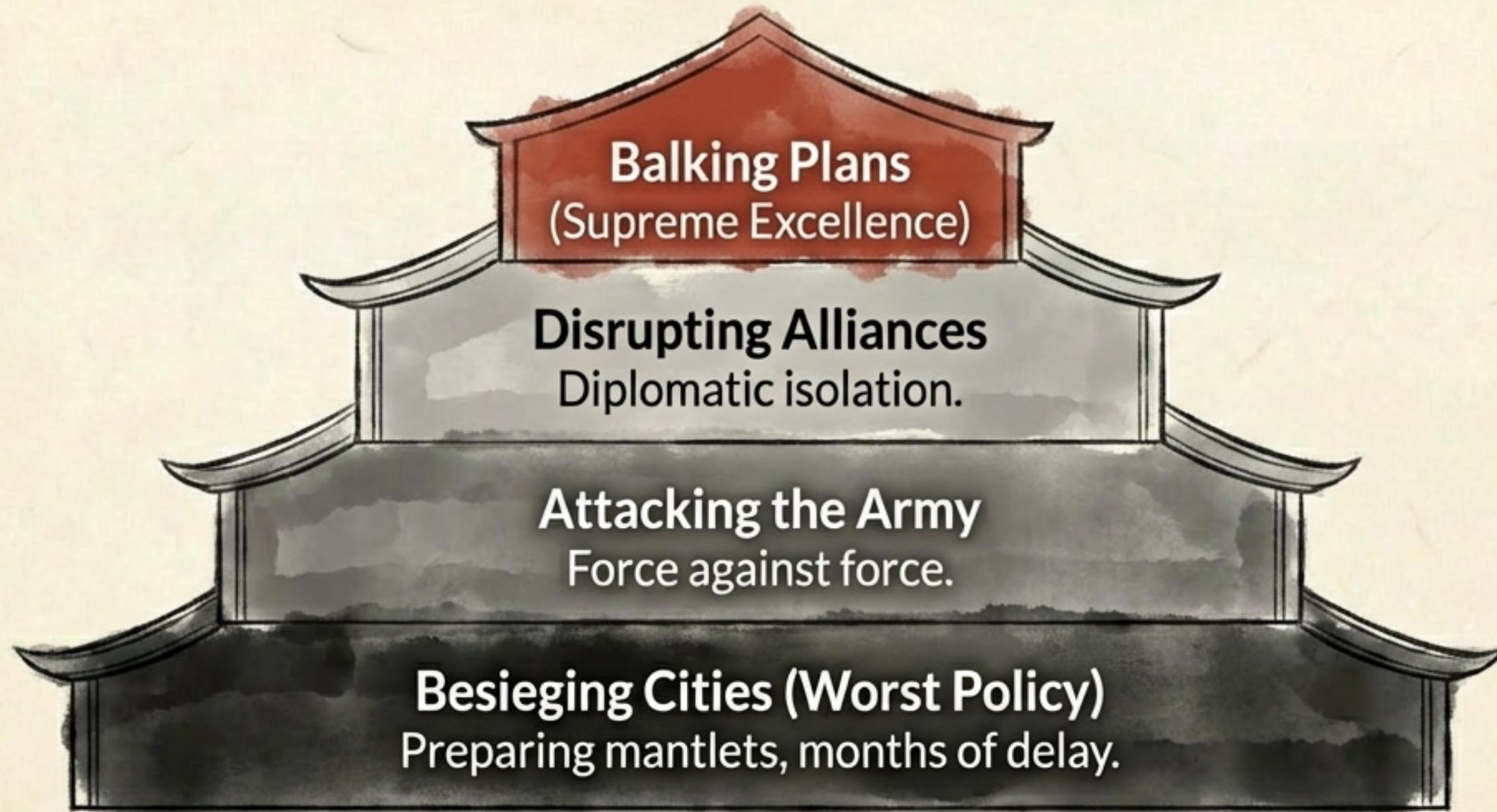
### The Rule of Time:

There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare.

### The Rule of Logistics:

Forage on the enemy.

# The Apex of Skill



---

“ **Supreme excellence** consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting. ”

# The Dichotomy of Control

## Invincibility (Self)



You control your safety.  
The enemy controls  
your opportunity.

The skilled defender hides in the  
most secret recesses of the earth.

## Victory (Enemy)

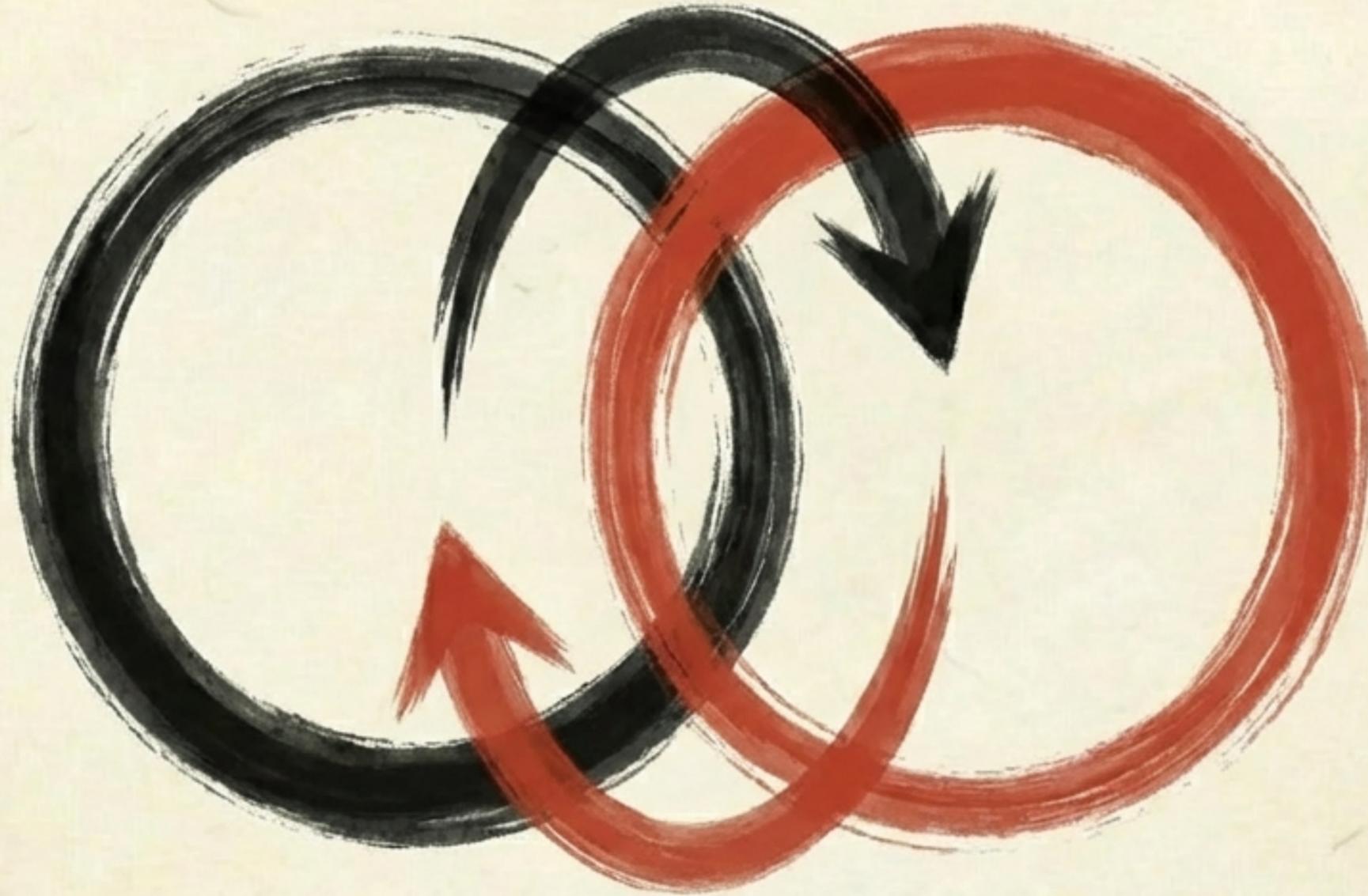


The skilled attacker flashes forth  
from the topmost heights of heaven.

# The Infinite Cycle: Cheng and Ch'i

## Cheng (Direct)

Fixing force.  
Frontal  
engagement.  
Order.



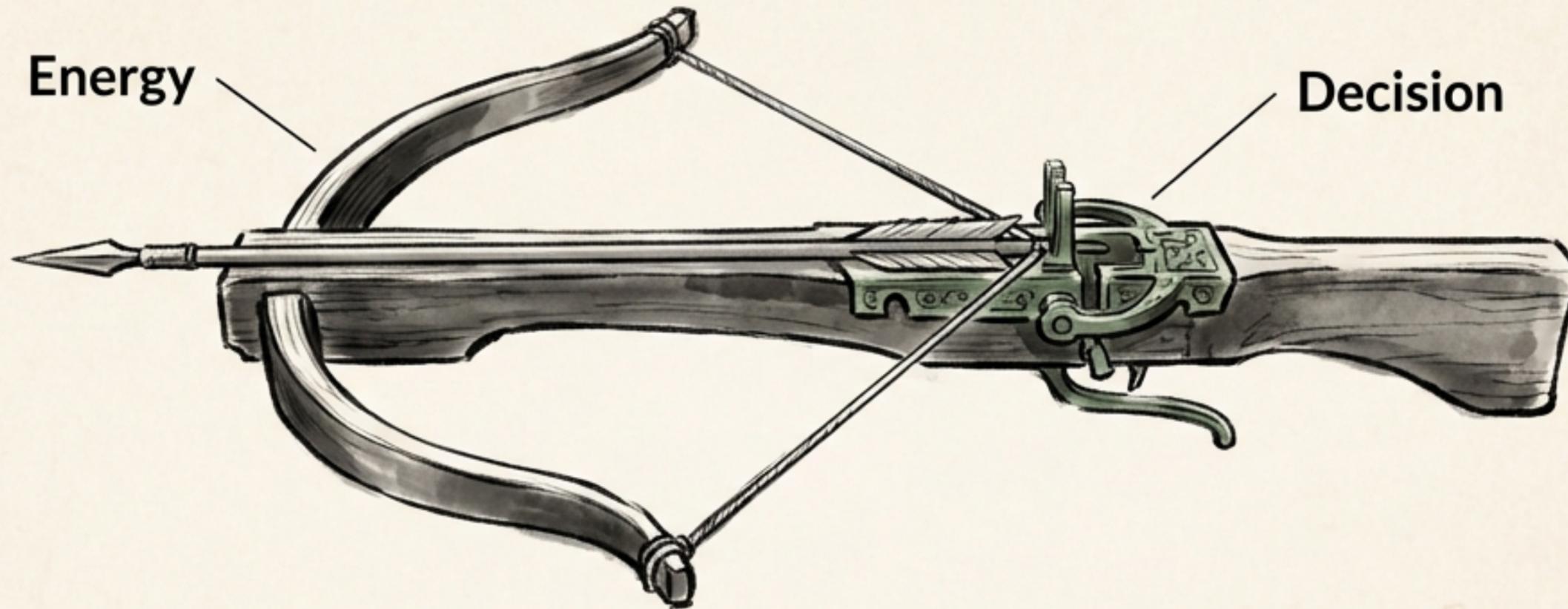
## Ch'i (Indirect)

Flanking force.  
Surprise.  
Disruption.

---

“Endless as the flow of rivers and streams; like the sun and moon, they end but to begin anew.”

# Potential Energy vs. Decision



**Energy (The Bow):** The quality of troops, position, and morale.  
The bending of the crossbow.

**Decision (The Trigger):**  
The timing and specific command.  
The releasing of the trigger.

**“Momentum allows a timid man to be brave.”**

# The Philosophy of Fluids



**“Military tactics are like unto water; for water in its natural course runs away from high places and hastens downwards.”** 〰

## **Principle**

Avoid the Strong (Solid).  
Strike the Weak (Empty).

Do not repeat tactics. Adapt to the enemy like water shapes its course to the ground.

# The Artifice of Deviation

Concept: Turning the devious into the direct, and misfortune into gain.



Entice the enemy out of the way. Start after him, but arrive before him.

**Historical Note:** The march of Chao She: Bluffing passivity for 28 days, then rushing for two days to seize the high ground.



**Rapidity of the Wind**  
(Advancing)



**Compactness of the Forest**  
(Marching)



**Raiding like Fire**  
(Aggression)



**Immovability of a Mountain**  
(Defense)



Let your plans be dark as Night,  
and fall like a Thunderbolt.



# Field Guide: Reading the Signs



**Dust high and sharp: Chariots**



**Dust low and wide: Infantry**



**Birds rising: Ambush below**



**Startled beasts: Sudden attack**



**Humble words  
+  
Preparation**

***Violent language*  
+  
Driving forward**

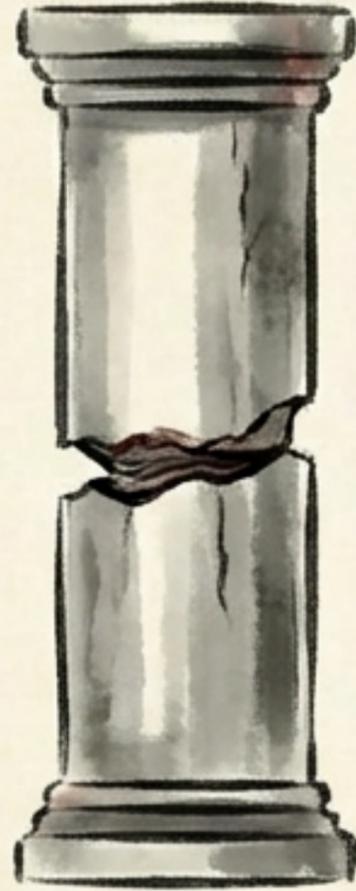
**Enemy will  
Retreat**

Observe the land, understand the enemy,  
and anticipate their movements.

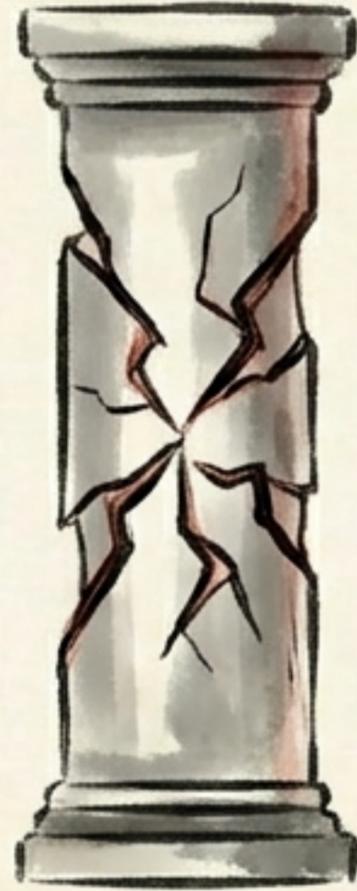
# The Five Dangerous Faults



**Recklessness**  
(Leads to  
destruction)



**Cowardice**  
(Leads to  
capture)



**Hasty Temper**  
(Provoked by  
insults)



**Delicacy of  
Honor**  
(Sensitive to  
shame)

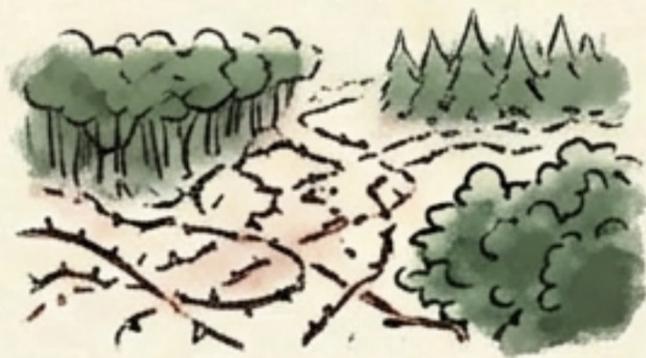


**Over-solicitude**  
(Worry leading  
to trouble)

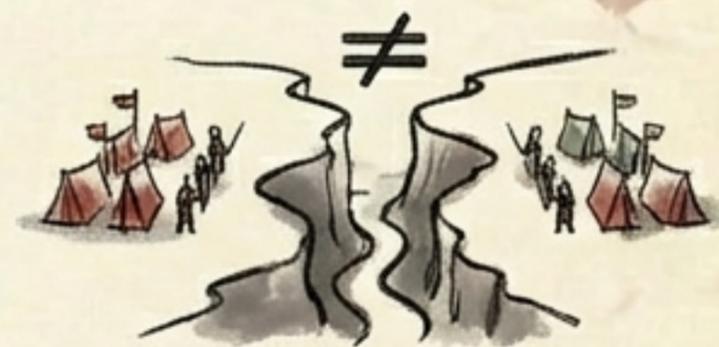
# The Six Terrains



**1. Accessible**  
(Freely traversed)



**2. Entangling**  
(Hard to re-occupy)



**3. Temporizing**  
(Stalemate ground)



**4. Narrow Passes**  
(Garrison strongly)



**5. Precipitous Heights**  
(Occupy sunny spots)

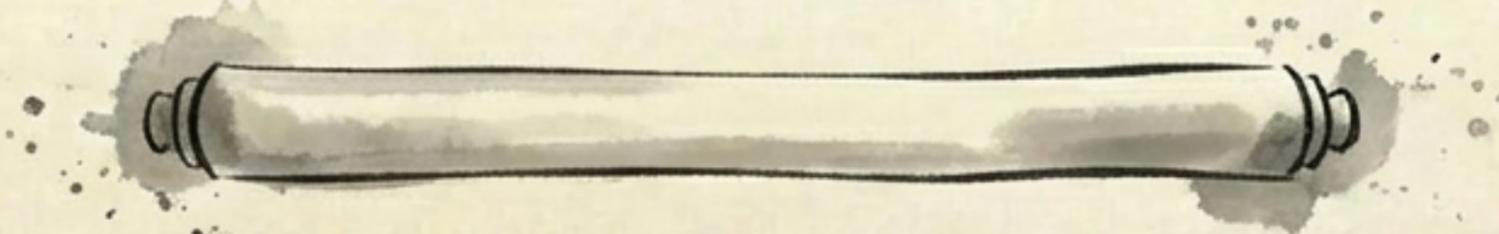
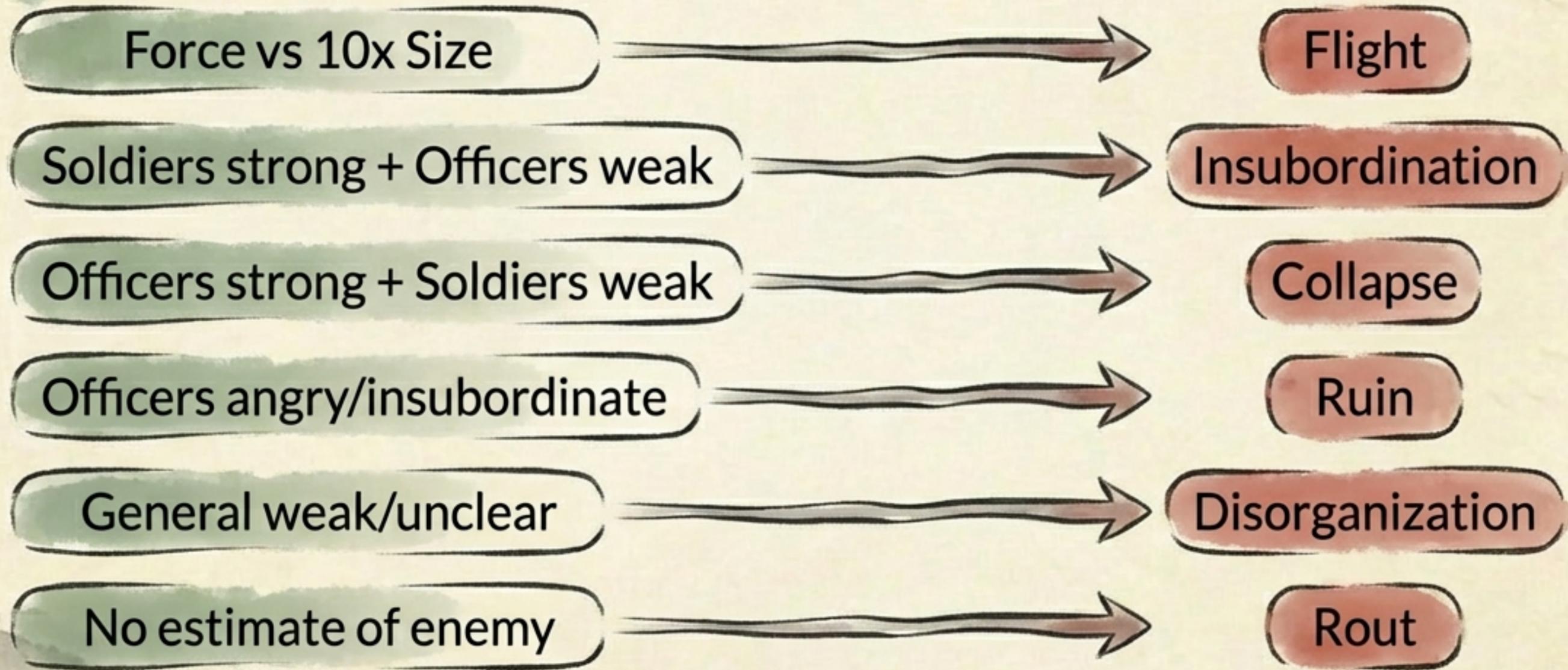


**6. Distance**  
(Fighting is disadvantageous)

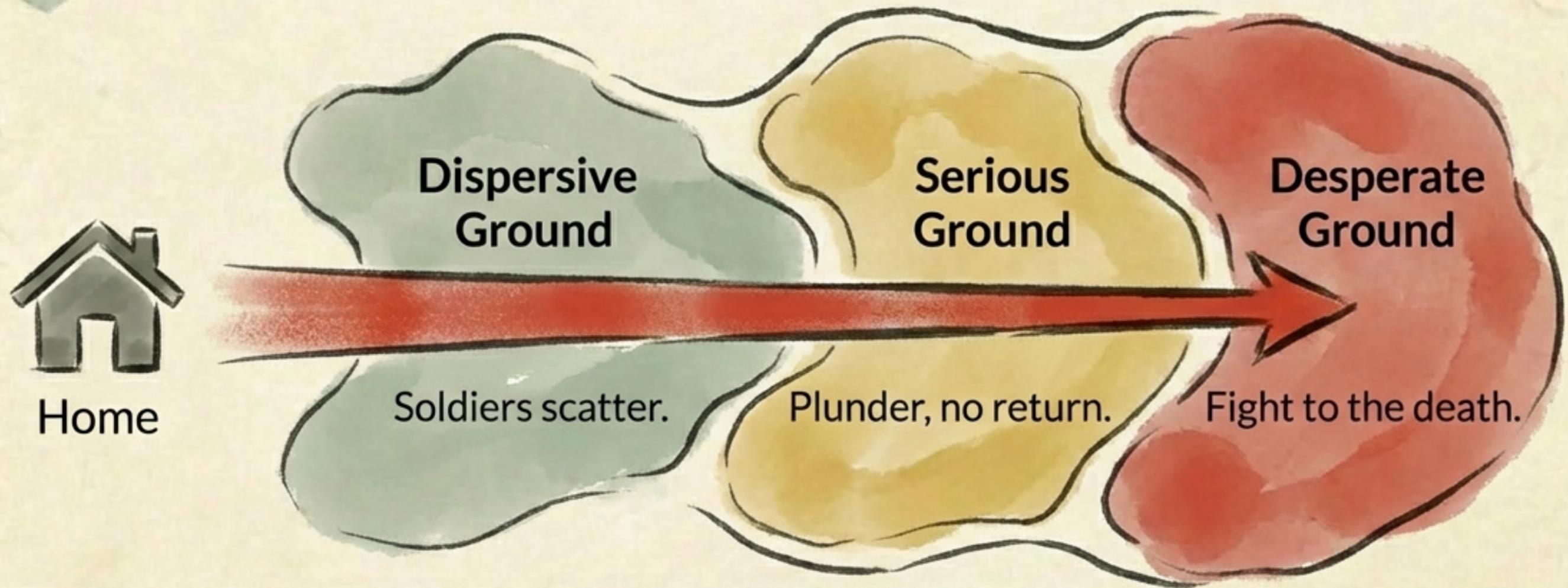
*"The natural formation of the country is the soldier's best ally."*

# The Six Calamities (Leadership Failures)

---



# The Nine Situations: Psychological Ground



*"Burn your boats and bridges... make it clear there is no hankering after home."*

# Case Study: The Burning Oxen



- General T'ien Tan, besieged in Chi-mo, used deception to enrage his own troops (**Desperate Ground**).
- He then released 1,000 oxen with burning rushes on their tails against the enemy camp at night (**Surprise/Ch'i**).

*Result: The enemy fled in terror; 70 cities were recovered.*

# The Ultimate Maxim

Know the Enemy + Know Yourself = No fear in 100 battles.

Know Yourself + Not Enemy = 1 Victory / 1 Defeat.

Know Neither = Succumb in every battle.

# The Jewel of the Kingdom

---



The General who advances without coveting fame and retreats without fearing disgrace, whose only thought is to **protect his country** and do good service for his sovereign, is the **Jewel of the Kingdom**.