



Antifa Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz (artist's interpretation).

"...in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak. Like water, take the path of least resistance, and do not keep a constant shape."

-*The Art of War*, traditionally credited to Sun Tzu

"...we should always try, in time of war, to have the probability of victory on our side. But this is not always possible... Were we to despair here, we would abandon the use of reason just when it becomes most necessary, when everything seems to be conspiring against us."

- Carl von Clausewitz, *Principles of War*

This is the best advice we know how to give, but it's your life, trust yourself first.

FROM YOUR FRIENDS,  
THE **BLACKTAILS** 



applying  
**MILITARY THEORY**  
to  
**STREET ACTIONS**

### Introduction

When you fight against the police, you are fighting against a military force, equipped with the weapons and tactics of an occupying army. While you fight against liberal hegemony and the cops who enforce it, you are also up against fascist insurgents -- a three way fight in an asymmetrical struggle for control of territory. We aren't applying the philosophies of war to street actions because they can be loosely compared, we're applying them because *this is a war*.

Humans have been doing war for a while, and as it turns out, we have a bit of a talent for it. As leftists, we fight against militarism, yes, but the enemy is not the only one who can use these skills – the skills of war.

## DON'T GET WEIRD ON ME

We are applying the lens of traditional military tactics to street actions because we believe it is useful to win the battles of our movement, not because we think militarism is cool. Please do not read this and start "playing general" or imitating military culture, hierarchy, or attitude. Those guys are assholes and imitating what we wish to fight is just another way to lose.

We're examining and applying the strategies that have shaped wars for millennia, and most of the people who know how to do war are not people we want to meet... this is not an endorsement of anyone we quoted.

## SALUTE.

You notice a group of dudes wearing yellow and black approaching the edge of your march... one's holding an american flag, another has a big video camera... people need to know, but what do you say?

### Report threats effectively using SALUTE:

**Size** How many people? How "strong" is their force?  
**Activity** What are they doing?  
**Location** Where are they? Are they moving?  
**Uniform** What are they wearing? What does it tell you?  
**Time** When did you see this?  
**Equipment** What do they have? Gas masks, flag poles, bats, shields...

What you end up saying into the radio doesn't have to be in SALUTE order or be at all "professional", it just has to get all the important information across. *"Four guys in proud boy colors are walking up right now, big flag, one's livestreaming, they're coming from the intersection of 10th and L!"*

"Resistance is never in vain.

The continuous sacrifices of those who resist will always pay off."  
– Basil Al-Araj

Know yourself and know your enemy. Fight where you are strong and they are weak. Do not not play by the rules your enemy expects, and certainly not the rules your enemy sets. Be cunning and full of tricks.  
And lastly,

We wouldn't be writing this if we didn't think we had a chance.

From your friends the Blacktails  
theblacktails.noblogs.org  
Ⓐ 2024, reproduce as desired.

The Blacktails are a loosely associated group with several attributed namesakes: a black bandana kept in a back pocket; Black-tailed deer (one subspecies of *Odocoileus hemionus*); and the black-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus melanopygus*).

Disclaimer (to our enemies):

The authors of this zine do not and would not advocate or participate in illegal activity. This is not legal advice and we are not lawyers.

Yours in inconvenience only,  
The Blacktails.

## STACKING DEFEATS

This is a continuation of the topic of *friction*.

One defeat is a rallying cry. It tightens the ranks, makes people take things seriously, brings in people who weren't paying attention before. This affects our enemies and ourselves, and it is the reason that you can't just win once, you have to win over and over. You don't drive proud boys out of town by giving them one big loss, you do it by exhausting them over and over until they stop showing up. Fascists are disgusted by weakness, especially their own. After a few big losses, public support starts fading. Multiple defeats in a row cause infighting as they blame each other for why they keep losing. Their resources are more and more exhausted, their connections to each other more and more strained, and their supporters are more and more embarrassed by them. *Friction!* Don't get complacent, take no easy victories— stack defeats!



## THE SURVIVABILITY ONION

The survivability onion is a method of assessing and avoiding risk to survive in a combat scenario. Worth mentioning here is the difference between *cover* and *concealment*: Cover protects you by stopping incoming projectiles (bullets) and concealment protects you from being seen (so the person shooting can't target you in the first place).

**Don't be there.** Avoid exposure.

**Don't be seen.** If a threat cannot detect the presence of potential target then it can't be engaged. Remember your concealment. Some find it necessary to also note that you can avoid being seen by a threat by eliminating it before it sees you.

**Don't be acquired.** The threat may simply choose not to engage with you. Encourage this, possibly by de-escalation or by making yourself look like you're not worth the trouble.

**Don't be hit.** The most effective way to not be hit is to end the engagement as soon as possible (close the engagement by eliminating the threat or by escaping it). Remember your cover.

**Don't be penetrated.** All else has failed: perhaps you resist a knife swing with slash-resistant clothing, or a shot strikes your armor.

**Don't be killed.** As long as you can move, you can fight: to survive, you must win or evade. Once the threat is no longer relevant, treat wounds!

## THE OODA LOOP

The OODA loop (observe, orient, decide, act) is a decision-making model developed by US military strategist Colonel John Boyd. According to Boyd, decision making goes in a cycle: observe, orient, decide, act, repeat. Going through that cycle faster than your opponent is how your agility can beat their raw power: new circumstances are created faster than the enemy can react to them. If you can break any step in your opponent's OODA loop, you can disable their decision making.

We're quoting *The Art of War* a lot, so we'll mark those quotes with a one (¹). Carl von Clausewitz quotes will be marked with a two (²). The Art of War is an ancient Chinese military text traditionally attributed to general Sun Tzu (771–256 BC). Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) was a Prussian general and military theorist.

**TRUST YOURSELF AND YOUR COMRADES MORE THAN YOU TRUST THIS ZINE!** Change is the nature of all things, even if this zine *could* get everything right (and it can't) it would eventually be wrong. This is just a collection of things to consider. Think about how they apply to your experiences or to things people have going on.

## OFFENSE

► “Appear at points which the enemy must hasten to defend; march swiftly to places where you are not expected.”¹

In 2023, a campus of the University of California hosted a fascist speaking event. The university expected protesters at the front entrance of the event hall and prepared for this. Protesters met the university's expectation and gathered there, and the university met the protester's expectation – it pulled all security resources to the front. This left the rest of the event hall largely unprotected, and a swift group of brave people were able to strike an undefended area. With their work done, they escaped just before the alerted university security force could reach them.

► “Take advantage of the enemy's unreadiness, make your way by unexpected routes, and attack unguarded spots.”¹

During “Stop the Steal” era protests (ca. 2020-2021), large far-right rallies were held weekly in state capitols to dispute the election results. The rallies themselves were prepared against attack, but activists were able to figure out where they kept parking their fragile cars: “attack unguarded spots”.

**“Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt.”¹**

► “That general is skillful in attack whose opponent does not know what to defend; and he is skillful in defense whose opponent does not know what to attack.”¹

The number of institutions worthy of a protest can be overwhelming, but this offers an advantage. A march can name one target and go to another, it can hit multiple targets, it can simply never name an intended target in the first place. By doing this, the enemy defenses are spread thin across many potential targets or are left running from place to place. The enemy does not know what to defend, so it is defenseless.

The second part of this quote is addressed in the section on defense.

**COVER TO COVER:** When the enemy is running from one safe place to another, the best time to attack is not when they first reveal themselves, but when they are in the middle of moving, when they cannot easily return to the safety of their first position and cannot easily arrive at the safety of their new position. Try it in Fortnite, you'll see.

► “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.” <sup>1</sup>

There is an advantage to defense, so if you can make your offense into a defense, consider it. When staging a counter-protest for an event or rally, you could occupy the space *first*. Compare two years of the Straight Pride hate rally in Modesto, California: In 2021, a scattered force attacked Straight Pride and though they were disruptive, they were not successful in ending the event. In 2022, a strong antifascist force occupied the space where Straight Pride was planned to take place, and when fascists came to set up they were easily sent home and the event was successfully canceled. Of course, the Modesto police then rolled in on armored vehicles, fired into the crowd with riot control rounds, and the antifascist force (though still triumphant in its goals) was made to retreat. A sufficiently powerful force can defeat the defender's advantage.

**“As in defense, as long as any resources are left, we must not give up until our purpose has been reached. Should the defender likewise be active, should he attack us at other points, we shall be able to gain victory only if we surpass him in energy and boldness. On the other hand, should he be passive, we really run no great danger.” <sup>2</sup>**

► “One of the strongest weapons of offensive warfare is the surprise attack. The closer we come to it, the more fortunate we shall be.” <sup>2</sup>

This ties in to what was discussed earlier about not letting your opponent know what they need to defend. A surprise attack is most effective because the enemy could not spend time preparing a defense.

## DEFENSE

► “A fundamental principle is never to remain completely passive, but to attack the enemy frontally and from the flanks, even while he is attacking us.” <sup>2</sup>

In defense, it can be tempting to just block your enemy's punches and not throw any of your own. Remember: A force is trying to defeat you, and you are trying to defeat them. Successful defenses punch back.

“This attack from a defensive position can take place the moment the enemy actually attacks, or while he is still on the march. I can also, at the moment the attack is about to be delivered, withdraw my troops, luring the enemy into unknown territory and attacking him from all sides.” <sup>2</sup>

## SUPERIORITY OF NUMBERS

The most general principle for victory is superiority of numbers (having more fighters than your enemy does). But it is not something that is necessary to win. If you have the superiority of numbers, use it well, and if you have less... tactics and strategy can outmaneuver even the largest beast.

► “We must select for our attack one point of the enemy's position (i.e., one section of his troops—a division, a corps) and attack it with great superiority, leaving the rest of his army in uncertainty but keeping it occupied. This is the only way that we can use an equal or smaller force to fight with advantage and thus with a chance of success. The weaker we are, the fewer troops we should use to keep the enemy occupied at unimportant points, in order to be as strong as possible at the decisive point.” <sup>2</sup>

When you are fighting a group that is bigger than yours is, you want to avoid going line to line, group-on-group, because you would probably lose. So don't. Focus your group on one section of theirs to create an artificial advantage. A line of one hundred [bad guys] vs. a line of forty [good guys] is probably a losing game, but when the forty [good guys] focus their power on overwhelming ten [bad guys], they could force a [bad guy] retreat.

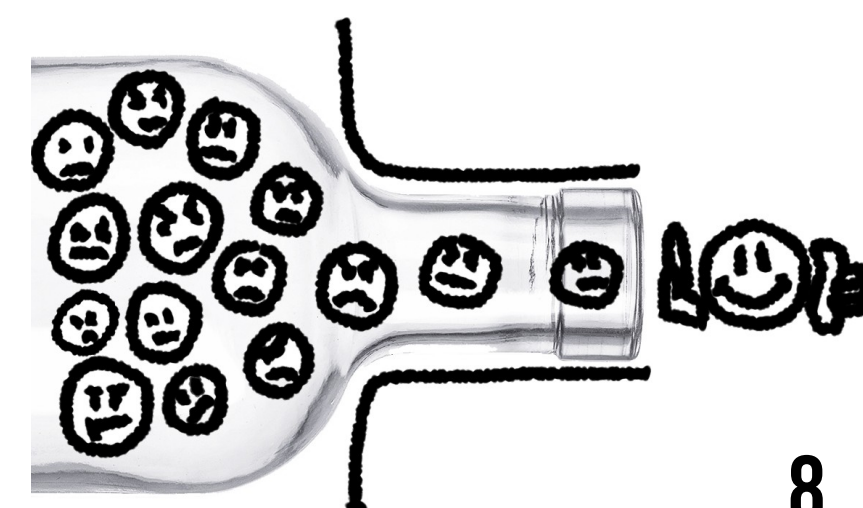
Of course you know why our enemies try to find us alone outside of our group, or when we're split up walking back to cars, but to apply the terms we've been using, they are guaranteeing a superiority of numbers by waiting until you are a smaller force.

Do not take this advice to mean “always keep your protest in one big group”. There is the danger of being encircled in a kettle (a police tactic where a riot line totally surrounds the crowd for beatings and arrests – the only way to escape a kettle is, actually, to focus on one point of attack and overwhelm it, as described above). Massive groups are also just generally easier to follow and contain than many different big groups. If you have an **absolute superiority** of numbers, like the times when thousands of protesters fill the streets, you can split into many groups:

“We can handle one 10000-person protest, but ten 1000-person protests throughout the city will overwhelm us.” – LA Police Dept. Chief Moore

By dividing your large attacking force, you can divide the defensive capacity of your enemy. There are too many targets to defend, so they cannot defend them well - too many groups to suppress, so they cannot suppress them.

A **bottleneck** or **choke point** is a feature of the land or buildings that a group is forced to pass through that is substantially narrowed. A bottleneck allows a small force to fight a much larger one because the large group cannot overwhelm the small one.



► “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.”<sup>1</sup>

When do *you* give up without fighting? When you believe you've already won, when you believe you cannot win, when you don't think it's worth the trouble, when your ability to fight has been disabled, when you cannot find your target, when you think it would make you look too bad... If you can get your enemy to believe these things, to give up on fighting on simple belief alone, you should congratulate yourself on a job well done.

The average university response to a protest encampment isn't to fight, it's to ignore it. When they ignore it they present no enemy to fight and the encampment leaks energy and resources until it packs up (the protester's solution, of course, is to refuse to be ignored – *escalate!*).

**“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 him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable.”<sup>1</sup>**

► “Do not press a desperate foe too hard,”<sup>1</sup> or as Tu Mu puts it, prevent your enemy from “fighting with the courage of despair.” If you corner a dog, the dog will have no choice but to bite you. This effect stands more in our benefit than our enemies, as in most cases *we* are the desperate foes. Chia Lin remarks: “if you fight with all your might, there is a chance of life; where as death is certain if you cling to your corner.”

► “Do not swallow bait offered by the enemy.”<sup>1</sup>

When you are holding a protest line and some proud boys across the way are egging you on shouting slurs, they're offering bait. They know they don't want to fight your whole group so they want you to leave your friends and go fight them by yourself. Your enemy offers bait because they believe taking it will put you in a losing position, but they aren't always right about this. In most cases, you might consider just keeping your winning position.

► “Be subtle! be subtle! and use your spies for every kind of business.”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the closest comparison between street actions and traditional war is the value and use of information and spies. When Sun Tzu says spies, he means all information collectors, including scouts. Protect and use both spies and scouts.

Do not allow the thought of enemy spies keep you from working. Don't poison a whole garden to kill the weeds – make your plants strong enough that the weeds do not matter. Use good *security culture*.

► “Politically speaking defensive war is a war which we wage for our independence. Strategically it is the kind of campaign in which we limit ourselves to fighting the enemy in a theater of war which we have prepared for this purpose.”<sup>2</sup>

You are the defender, you have the “home team” advantage. Not only is it easier to look good in the news when you're simply defending against attack, but you have physical strategic advantages. You begin with the most control over the situation and can prepare it to your needs. You have the supreme advantage of preparation. Determine what you can change and shape it.

Use sprinklers to muddy a lawn the enemy has to cross, block doors you don't want entered, place resources where you'll need them later, take the ground you want to stand on. Make it annoying and difficult to attack you – create *friction* for the enemy.

**“We must never lack calmness and firmness, which are so hard to preserve in time of war. Without them the most brilliant qualities of mind are wasted.”<sup>2</sup>**

► “...he is skillful in defense whose opponent does not know what to attack.”<sup>1</sup>

In order to attack you, your enemy has to find something to attack and reach it.

The enemy cannot attack what it cannot find, so hide things like your name, home, and job. Beyond the personal, you can obscure public events (this can cut both ways – consider the effects your strategy has on innocent attendees trying to find your event). Require people to ask for the location rather than putting it right on the flyer. Change the details of your event, or post an event just a few days before it is meant to happen, limiting the enemy's time to plan against it. If you have a sock puppet (an account you control that has a completely fake identity) in their chats, feed your enemy bad information, like the wrong location, wrong time, or convince them of an event that doesn't even exist. Make them distrust any target they think they might see. Once again, be careful you don't throw off your own people.

When moving an event location to avoid an expected counter-protest, make sure the change between locations is further than the enemy could reasonably walk. This makes them move meeting locations, find new parking, look at a new area on the map, and if done when they've already gathered, it completely frustrates their entire action. If they can manage to move to the new location, they arrive scattered and off balance.

► The idea that “the best defense is good offense”:

In war, this phrase has been used to justify some terrible attacks as “defensive,” but it does have its place here. Say there's a Black radical reading at your local library and you find out that five known racists have planned an attack. There are many ways you could defend the building, but perhaps the most decisive defense would be an offensive attack disabling the racists' cars at home before they ever get close to the event.

► “The enemy, while attacking one section of the front, often seeks to outflank and envelop us at the same time. The units which are kept in the background can meet this attempt and thus make up for the support usually derived from obstacles in the terrain. They are better suited for this than if they were standing in line and extending the front”<sup>2</sup>

In your march, holding a strong front line is important, maybe the *most* important, but a battle is not one dimensional. The best way to break a strong line is to flank it (go around and attack from the side). So, keep fighters behind your front line, both to relieve and support the front line fighters and to defend your back and sides.

## ON GENERAL STRATEGY:

► “...in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak.

Like water, take the path of least resistance, and do not keep a constant shape.”<sup>1</sup>

Meet your enemy where they are weak and you are strong. Where your enemy is strong, avoid it, where your enemy is weak, attack it. Everything – *everything* – has a weakness, even if it is one you create.

► “In war, then, let your great object be victory, not lengthy campaigns.”<sup>1</sup> It might sound obvious, but to win, you have to be *trying* to win – not just to protest for the sake of it. What goals do you see, and how are you working to actually achieve them? Where can you get a material victory?

**“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”<sup>1</sup>**

► “Never bring all our forces into play haphazardly and at one time, thereby losing all means of directing the battle; but fatigue the opponent, if possible, with few forces and conserve a decisive mass for the critical moment. Once this decisive mass has been thrown in, it must be used with the greatest audacity.”<sup>2</sup>

Clausewitz is a bit hasty with the “never” there for our tastes. If all you have is one big push, then do whatever you can to make that the decisive moment (the moment the winner is determined). But if you can wear your enemy down, picking off their resources and energy and fighters, and *then* make a big push when the time is right, then you will decide the battle.

► “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.”<sup>1</sup> Drums, music, banners, and rhythmic chants unite a crowd and fuel its actions. Chanting for hours will wear down a crowd, so consider saving it for when it matters most. *An! Anti! Anti-fascist-a!*

► Fight on your terms, not your enemy’s.

If you allow your enemy to set the rules you fight by, then you will never win. If you engage with your enemy only when and how *you* choose to, when you need to or you have the advantage, then you are on your way to winning. Fighting on your terms is how you avoid their strengths and hit their weaknesses.

Because everything is soaked in invisible liberalism, you might not realize you are limiting yourself to your enemy’s terms. Why is your march following the route the cops are laying out for you? Since when was your biggest goal a city council resolution? And if you do want a city council resolution passed, why would you obey council procedure and give up when they say “no”?

The state wrote the rules. To fight them, you must work outside of their rules, because they designed the rules to keep themselves from losing.

## FRICTION

“Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult. These difficulties accumulate and produce a *friction*, which no man can imagine exactly who has not seen war.”<sup>2</sup>

Friction is an important concept put forth by Clausewitz. A force of forty protesters is a simple enough thing. They have understandable needs and understandable abilities. However, friction is everywhere – fear, bad weather, injuries, got lost, security cameras are around, forgot something at home, late to the meeting time... friction is unavoidable.

“So in war, through the influence of an infinity of petty circumstances, which cannot be described on paper, things disappoint us, and we fall short of the mark.”<sup>2</sup>

As we work through our friction, we can encourage the enemy’s.

Everyone is familiar with the idea that lots of little bad things can add up to a very frustrating time. This is how the friction affects the war. By friction, a war is escalated. **We can create friction for the enemy – we can be an infinity of petty circumstances, and by this accumulation of small inconveniences, no act of resistance is wasted.**

No prominent neonazi has fallen from just one tactic. It takes some combination of factors - doxxing, legal battles, expensive car repairs, internal disputes, losing their job, events being shut down, attacks being repelled, each thing adding more *friction* to the lives of those who would see us dead.

“NO ONE WAY WORKS, it will take all of us shoving at the thing from all sides to bring it down.”

-Diane di Prima, Revolutionary Letter #8

Friction is another reason to not separate theory with practice. It is a reason not to take the principles described in this zine for granted. Clausewitz describes inexperienced war theorists as swimming instructors who teach swimming by exercising on dry land, forgetting that it is harder to move in water. “The society that separates its scholars from its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting by fools.” - Thucydides