

The Seven Basic Maneuvers of Warfare

Penetration of the Centre

Notes:

This is probably one of the oldest tactical maneuvers. May be of particular interest whenever both enemy flanks are protected (by natural obstacles, for example).

Typical execution:

Secondary units engage the left and right wings of the enemy front in order to attract enemy reserves. The main blow, by a superior force (including reserves), is then unleashed against the enemy centre, in an attempt to break their forces apart. A second reserve stands ready in order to exploit a successful main attack.

If well executed, the maneuver offers the possibility of encircling parts of the enemy force. However, if insufficient force is expended for the main blow, or if the flanks are too weak (because of concentration in the centre), the commander could risk getting enveloped.

Envelopment of a Single Flank

Notes:

Believed to be the second most frequently employed tactic.

Typical execution:

The enemy is engaged frontally (through pinning attacks), while reserves and a portion of the army are committed against one of the enemy's open flanks, in an attempt to turn and roll up the enemy front towards its centre.

When building up strength for the flank attack, a commander must be careful not to excessively weaken his centre. A counterblow by the enemy through the weakened centre could be fatal.

Envelopment of Both Flanks

Notes:

More difficult to achieve than envelopment of a single flank. Requires massive force superiority.

Typical execution:

Similar to the envelopment of a single flank, except that the commander attempts to attack both of the enemy's exposed flanks, in order to completely encircle him.

This maneuver is risky, because unless a superior force is at hand, a commander could easily overextend his forces, inviting the enemy to counterattack by concentrating a superior force at one or more points.

Attack in Oblique Order

Notes:

This maneuver dates back to ancient times. Has been employed by many great commanders. May be of particular interest whenever both enemy flanks are protected (by natural obstacles, for example).

Typical execution:

The commander attempts to mass superior strength against one wing of the enemy army, while smaller, secondary forces pin down the rest of the frontline and lure away reserves from the main attack on the other wing.

The Feigned Withdrawal

Notes:

Has often been employed to lure the enemy into an ambush, or to surprise him and throw him off balance.

Typical execution:

A flight or retreat is feigned to entice the enemy forces to abandon their battle formations or into a weakened position. If only the center withdraws, the enemy can be lured forward into a 'pocket', thereby exposing themselves to flank attacks. When the center reverses and starts to push back after their feigned withdrawal, the enemy will find himself attacked from three directions.

Care must be exercised, otherwise the feigned retreat could easily become a real one.

Attack from a Defensive Position

Notes:

This maneuver is similar to the feigned withdrawal.

Typical execution:

A well-chosen defensive position is prepared, and the commander proceeds to lure his enemy into the position, before resuming an offensive at a well-timed moment.

Care must be exercised in order to avoid excessive defensive-mindedness. Blind reliance on strongly prepared positions could also be a mistake.

The Indirect Approach

Notes:

Speed, surprise, superiority of force and timing are essential if this risky method is to succeed. This approach also forces a decisive action upon the enemy, even if he's unwilling to accept battle.

Typical execution:

The commander attempts to divert the enemy's attention by secondary attacks, whilst the main body strategically envelops the enemy's flank or rear, in order to cut off the enemy's lines of communication (i.e., his links to base and depots). A successful execution of this maneuver will interrupt the enemy's supplies and reinforcements, and cut off their natural line of retreat, thereby leaving the enemy in a critical position.