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Q2

The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Essay · 125 marks · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Philosophical and ethical quotes

Core demand of the question

- **Name the source:** Sun Tzu, Art of War - victory without battle
- **Stake:** the highest power is to change the opponent's will, not to stack bodies
- **Dimensions:** self, diplomacy, economy, information, law. Counter: some evils must be fought

Revision summary

Guidance only.

Anecdote of a dispute ended by shared interest.

- **Sun Tzu + Kautilya:** force last. Gandhi as moral cousin.
- **Body:** self, reform, diplomacy, deterrence, information.
- **Counter:** some evils require fight. Close on a republic's unused wars.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A village dispute over a path is settled when the elder does not raise his voice. He walks both families to the well they already share. No one "wins" the path; the need to fight it dies. Sun Tzu's line is that elder, scaled to states: "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."

Heading map

Unpack the quote

- **Sun Tzu**, The Art of War: supreme excellence is breaking resistance without battle.
- Subdue = change incentives, isolate, outlast, persuade - not only kill.
- Enemy = rival state, insurgent, epidemic, own rage.

Quote to earn: Kautilya's sama, dana, bheda, danda - force is last, not first. Gandhi's satyagraha: change the opponent's consent.

Self

- Anger is a small war. Pause is Sun Tzu at the desk.
- **Civil servant:** a file that removes a grievance subdues a crowd without lathi.

Society and politics

- Social reform that makes a custom expensive (education, law, shame) beats periodic riots.

- **Fact peg:** India's Constitution abolished untouchability (**Art. 17**); the fight continues in practice - law as non-battle pressure.

Statecraft

- **Diplomacy, trade, water treaties, cricket:** instruments that bind.
- **Fact peg:** **Indus Waters Treaty (1960)** survived wars - a channel that "fights" scarcity without a new front.
- **Nuclear deterrence:** peace of a grim kind - subduing by making fighting unthinkable. Name the moral cost.

Information and economy

- Sanctions, technology denial, supply chains - twenty-first century "war without fighting".
- Disinformation is a cheap battle; truth-telling is slower subduing.

Counter

Some enemies - genocide, invasion, a virus - do not yield to courtesy. Then fighting is not failure of art; it is the last article. The quote ranks methods; it does not forbid danda.

India pegs to expand

- **Neighbourhood:** talks, trade, and lines of control together.
- **Internal:** talks with insurgents plus development, not only AFSPA as personality.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** a republic's strength is the wars it does not need. Expand with one diplomatic case and one honest limit (when force is duty). This map is not the essay.

Facts & figures

Sun Tzu

The Art of War: supreme excellence is to break the enemy's resistance without fighting.

Kautilya

Four upayas - conciliation, gifts, division, force - force is not the opening move.

Indus Waters Treaty

1960 India-Pakistan water-sharing that outlived several wars - imperfect, durable.

Art. 17

Abolition of untouchability: a legal subduing of a social enemy, still unfinished in practice.