

Open-the-End

Lesson 21 · Subutai · the deliberate gap — what it required, and whether it transfers to 2026

The tactic, in the source's own words

"[12] **Open-the-End Tactics** — If the enemy was very strong and ready to fight to the death, the Mongols would leave a gap in their ranks. In this way, the enemy might think they could see an escape route, scatter, and start to run. At that precise moment, the Mongols would fix upon a suitable place to kill the fleeing enemy."

— *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Appendix, tactic 12 of 13 (PDF p. 294)

It is a herding technique before it is a battle technique. The army trained it every winter in the **nerge**, the great hunt: a line of soldiers eighty miles wide, moving for three months, wings gradually extending into a semicircle until the circle closed and contracted toward the centre. You do not break a cornered animal. You give it a direction and own the ground it runs to.

What the tactic actually requires

This is the part that matters, because the tactic is almost never the constraint — the preconditions are.

1. **The encirclement must already be complete.** The gap is a *choice*. You cannot leave one open unless you hold every other exit.
2. **The enemy must be massed and co-located**, so that "scatter and run" describes a single body moving one way.
3. **You must own the ground they flee onto**, and choose it before they move.
4. **Their objective must be survival.** The escape route is only bait if living is the thing they want most.
5. **Pursuit must outpace flight.** Mongol remounts made the chase faster than the escape.

Test 1 — the IRGC, 2026

Precondition	Holds?	Why
Encirclement complete	No	Land borders on several states, sea access, and sanctioned oil still moving. The gap exists already — and it is held by Beijing, not Washington
Enemy massed	No	The proxy architecture is the opposite of massed. There is no body to scatter
Own the killing ground	No	It would sit inside other sovereign states
Objective is survival	Yes	Regime survival is the stated priority. This one transfers
Pursuit outpaces flight	No	Not a pursuit problem at all

One of five. And the one that holds is the diplomatic version, not the military one: offering a face-saving off-ramp so an adversary stops rather than escalates. That is a real instrument, it is older than the Mongols — Sun Tzu's 圍師必闕, *when you surround an army, leave an outlet* — and it is already standard practice.

But the Mongol ending does not transfer, and this is the whole finding.

Subutai's gap ends in annihilation after the enemy takes it. Use an off-ramp that way once and you have destroyed the credibility that makes every future off-ramp work. The Mongols were playing a

one-shot game against each opponent. The US and Israel are in a repeated game with the same actors, indefinitely. Open-the-End is a weapon you can fire exactly once, and firing it costs you the instrument.

Test 2 — the Houthis, 2026

Zero of five, and the fourth fails hardest. The Houthis are not trying to escape. Being attacked is the product — it supplies the legitimacy, the recruitment and the regional standing. An escape route is only bait for someone who wants out.

Lesson 13's cost arithmetic says the same thing from the other side. In Yemen, Iran failed most of its stated objectives and still tied Riyadh into a conflict costing over **\$200 million a day**. An actor who wins by not losing cannot be herded, because there is no direction in which running helps him.

The inversion — they are running it on us

The grey zone is the gap left open. Attacks calibrated to stay under the threshold that would justify a full war present the stronger power with an attractive escape route: respond in a limited way, do not commit, stay in the engagement. The stronger side takes it every time, because it looks like restraint and costs little on the day.

And then it bleeds. Open-the-End does not require you to be stronger — it requires you to know which way the other side would rather run. Lesson 13's finding was that defence is economics, not walls. This is the mechanism underneath it: the weaker actor chooses the cheap exit the stronger actor will keep walking through.

What to take away

- **The tactic is a preconditions problem, not a cleverness problem.** Four of five do not hold against a distributed state actor and none hold against a movement.
- **An enemy who wants to survive can be herded. An enemy who wants to persist cannot.** The Mongols fought armies. Both of these are movements with a state attached.
- **The off-ramp is real and it is the only transferable part** — but only if you do not spring the trap, because you need it again next year.
- **Check who is holding the gap.** In both 2026 cases it is not the stronger side, and in the grey zone it is the weaker side leaving it open on purpose.

Commentary, not forecasting — the same posture as Lesson 13's scorecard. Mongol claims are sourced to the two books ingested 2026-10-05; the 2026 assessments are argument from stated public positions and are deliberately falsifiable. One ingested source (*The Mongol Art of War and the Tsunami Strategy*, Golden Horde Civilization vol. 8, 2015) is a partly Russian-language scanned paper recovered by OCR; its text was read as evidence only.