PICK YOUR BATTLES CAREFULLY

THE PERFECT-ECONOMY STRATEGY

We all have limitations--our energies and skills will take us only so far. Danger comes from trying to surpass our limits. Seduced by some glittering prize into overextending ourselves, we end up exhausted and vulnerable. You must know your limits and pick your battles carefully. Consider the hidden costs of a war: time lost, political goodwill squandered, an embittered enemy bent on revenge. Sometimes it is better to wait, to undermine your enemies covertly rather than hitting them straight on. If battle cannot be avoided, get them to fight on your terms. Aim at their weaknesses; make the war expensive for them and cheap for you. Fighting with perfect economy, you can outlast even the most powerful foe.

THE SPIRAL EFFECT

In 281 B.C. war broke out between Rome and the city of Tarentum, on Italy's east coast. Tarentum had begun as a colony of the Greek city of Sparta; its citizens still spoke Greek, considered themselves cultured Spartans, and thought other Italian cities barbaric. Rome meanwhile was an emerging power, locked in a series of wars with neighboring cities.

> *In the utilization of a theater of war, as in everything else, strategy calls for economy of strength. The less one can manage with, the better; but manage one must, and here, as in commerce, there is more to it than mere stinginess.*
>
> CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ, 1780-1831

The prudent Romans were reluctant to take on Tarentum. It was Italy's wealthiest city at the time, rich enough to finance its allies in a war against Rome; it was also too far away, off in the southeast, to pose an immediate threat. But the Tarentines had sunk some Roman ships that had wandered into their harbor, killing the fleet's admiral, and when Rome had tried to negotiate a settlement, its ambassadors had been insulted. Roman honor was at stake, and it readied itself for war.

Tarentum had a problem: it was wealthy but had no real army. Its citizens had gotten used to easy living. The solution was to call in a Greek army to fight on its behalf. The Spartans were otherwise occupied, so the Tarentines called on

King Pyrrhus of Epirus (319-272 B.C.), the greatest Greek warrior king since Alexander the Great.

Epirus was a small kingdom in west-central Greece. It was a poor land, sparsely populated, with meager resources, but Pyrrhus--raised on stories of Achilles, from whom his family claimed to be descended, and of Alexander the Great, a distant cousin--was determined to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious ancestors and relatives, expanding Epirus and carving out his own empire. As a young man, he had served in the armies of other great military men, including Ptolemy, a general of Alexander's who now ruled Egypt. Pyrrhus had quickly proved his value as a warrior and leader. In battle he had become known for leading dangerous charges, earning himself the nickname "The Eagle." Back in Epirus he had built up his small army and trained it well, even managing to defeat the much larger Macedonian army in several battles.

Pyrrhus's reputation was on the rise, but it was hard for a small country like his to gain ascendancy over more powerful Greek neighbors like the Macedonians, the Spartans, and the Athenians. And the Tarentines' offer was tempting: First, they promised him money and a large army raised from allied states. Second, by defeating the Romans, he could make himself master of Italy, and from Italy he could take first Sicily, then Carthage in North Africa. Alexander had moved east to create his empire; Pyrrhus could move west and dominate the Mediterranean. He accepted the offer.

In the spring of 280 B.C., Pyrrhus set sail with the largest Greek army ever to cross into Italy: 20,000 foot soldiers, 3,000 horsemen, 2,000 bowmen, and twenty elephants. Once in Tarentum, though, he realized he had been tricked: not only did the Tarentines have no army, they had made no effort to assemble one, leaving Pyrrhus to do it himself. Pyrrhus wasted no time: he declared a military dictatorship in the city and began to build and train an army from among the Tarentines as fast as possible.

Pyrrhus's arrival in Tarentum worried the Romans, who knew his reputation as a strategist and fighter. Deciding to give him no time to prepare, they quickly sent out an army, forcing Pyrrhus to make do with what he had and he set off to face them. The two armies met near the town of Heraclea. Pyrrhus and his troops were outnumbered and at one point were on the verge of defeat, when he unleashed his secret weapon: his elephants, with their massive weight, loud, fearsome trumpeting, and soldiers on top, firing arrows down at will. The Romans had never faced elephants in battle before, and panic spread among them, turning the tide of the fight. Soon the disciplined Roman legions were in headlong retreat.

"The Eagle" had won a great victory. His fame spread across the Italian

peninsula; he was indeed the reincarnation of Alexander the Great. Now other cities sent him reinforcements, more than making up for his losses at Heraclea. But Pyrrhus was worried. He had lost many veterans in the battle, including key generals. More important, the strength and discipline of the Roman legions had impressed him--they were like no other troops he had faced. He decided to try to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Romans, offering to share the peninsula with them. At the same time, though, he marched on Rome, to give the negotiations urgency and to make it clear that unless the Romans sued for peace, they would face him again.

Meanwhile the defeat at Heraclea had had a powerful effect on the Romans, who were not easily intimidated and did not take defeat lightly. Immediately after the battle, a call went out for recruits, and young men responded in droves. The Romans proudly rejected the offer of a settlement; they would never share Italy.

The two armies met again near the town of Asculum, not far from Rome, in the spring of 279 B.C. This time their numbers were about equal. The first day of battle was fierce, and once again the Romans seemed to have the edge, but on the second day Pyrrhus, a strategic master, managed to lure the Roman legions onto terrain better suited to his own style of maneuvering, and he gained the advantage. As was his wont, near the end of the day he personally led a violent charge at the heart of the Roman legions, elephants in front. The Romans scattered, and Pyrrhus was once again victorious.

King Pyrrhus had now scaled the heights, yet he felt only gloom and foreboding. His losses had been terrible; the ranks of the generals he depended on were decimated, and he himself had been badly wounded. At the same time, the Romans seemed inexhaustible, undaunted by their defeat. When congratulated on his victory at Asculum, he replied, "If we defeat the Romans in one more such battle, we shall be totally ruined."

Pyrrhus, however, was already ruined. His losses at Asculum were too large to be quickly replaced, and his remaining forces were too few to fight the Romans again. His Italian campaign was over.

Interpretation

From the story of King Pyrrhus and his famous lament after the Battle of Asculum comes the expression "Pyrrhic victory," signifying a triumph that is as good as a defeat, for it comes at too great a cost. The victor is too exhausted to exploit his win, too vulnerable to face the next battle. And indeed, after the "victory" at Asculum, Pyrrhus staggered from one disaster to the next, his army never quite strong enough to defeat his growing hosts of enemies. This

culminated in his untimely death in battle, ending Epirus's hopes to become a power in Greece.

Pyrrhus could have avoided this downward spiral. Advance intelligence would have told him about both the disciplined ferocity of the Romans and the decadence and treachery of the Tarentines, and, knowing this, he could have taken more time to build an army or canceled the expedition altogether. Once he saw that he had been tricked, he could have turned back; after Heraclea there was still time to retrench, consolidate, quit while he was ahead. Had he done any of this, his story might have had a different ending. But Pyrrhus could not stop himself--the dream was too alluring. Why worry about the costs? He could recover later. One more battle, one more victory, would seal the deal.

Pyrrhic victories are much more common than you might think. Excitement about a venture's prospects is natural before it begins, and if the goal is enticing, we unconsciously see what we want to see--more of the possible gains, fewer of the possible difficulties. The further we go, the harder it becomes to pull back and rationally reassess the situation. In such circumstances the costs tend not just to mount--they spiral out of control. If things go badly, we get exhausted, which leads us to make mistakes, which lead to new, unforeseen problems, which in turn lead to new costs. Any victories we might have along the way are meaningless.

Understand: the more you want the prize, the more you must compensate by examining what getting it will take. Look beyond the obvious costs and think about the intangible ones: the goodwill you may squander by waging war, the fury of the loser if you win, the time that winning may take, your debt to your allies. You can always wait for a better time; you can always try something more in line with your resources. Remember: history is littered with the corpses of people who ignored the costs. Save yourself unnecessary battles and live to fight another day.

> *When the weapons have grown dull and spirits depressed, when our strength has been expended and resources consumed, then others will take advantage of our exhaustion to arise. Then even if you have wise generals you cannot make things turn out well in the end.*
>
> --The Art of War, *Sun-tzu (fourth century B.C.)*

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

When Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) ascended the throne of England in 1558, she inherited a second-rate power: the country had been racked by civil war, and its finances were in a mess. Elizabeth dreamed of creating a long period of peace

in which she could slowly rebuild England's foundations and particularly its economy: a government with money was a government with options. England, a small island with limited resources, could not hope to compete in war with France and Spain, the great powers of Europe. Instead it would gain strength through trade and economic stability.

> *He whom the ancients called an expert in battle gained victory where victory was easily gained. Thus the battle of the expert is never an exceptional victory, nor does it win him reputation for wisdom or credit for courage. His victories in battle are unerring. Unerring means that he acts where victory is certain, and conquers an enemy that has already lost.*
>
> *THE ART OF WAR*, SUN-TZU, FOURTH CENTURY B.C.

Year by year for twenty years, Elizabeth made progress. Then, in the late 1570s, her situation suddenly seemed dire: an imminent war with Spain threatened to cancel all the gains of the previous two decades. The Spanish king, Philip II, was a devout Catholic who considered it his personal mission to reverse the spread of Protestantism. The Low Countries (now Holland and Belgium) were properties of Spain at the time, but a growing Protestant rebellion was threatening its rule, and Philip went to war with the rebels, determined to crush them. Meanwhile his most cherished dream was to restore Catholicism to England. His short-term strategy was a plot to have Elizabeth assassinated and then to place her half sister, the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, on the British throne. In case this plan failed, his long-term strategy was to build an immense armada of ships and invade England.

Philip did not keep his intentions well hidden, and Elizabeth's ministers saw war as inevitable. They advised her to send an army to the Low Countries, forcing Philip to put his resources there instead of into an attack on England--but Elizabeth balked at that idea; she would send small forces there to help the Protestant rebels avert a military disaster, but she would not commit to anything more. Elizabeth dreaded war; maintaining an army was a huge expense, and all sorts of other hidden costs were sure to emerge, threatening the stability she had built up. If war with Spain really was inevitable, Elizabeth wanted to fight on her own terms; she wanted a war that would ruin Spain financially and leave England safe.

Defying her ministers, Elizabeth did what she could to keep the peace with Spain, refusing to provoke Philip. That bought her time to put aside funds for

building up the British navy. Meanwhile she worked in secret to damage the Spanish economy, which she saw as its only weak spot. Spain's enormous, expanding empire in the New World made it powerful, but that empire was far away. To maintain it and profit from it, Philip was entirely dependent on shipping, a vast fleet that he paid for with enormous loans from Italian bankers. His credit with these banks depended on the safe passage of his ships bringing gold from the New World. The power of Spain rested on a weak foundation.

And so Queen Elizabeth unleashed her greatest captain, Sir Francis Drake, on the Spanish treasure ships. He was to appear to be operating on his own, a pirate out for his own profit. No one was to know of the connection between him and the queen. With each ship that he captured, the interest rate on Philip's loans crept upward, until eventually the Italian bankers were raising the rate more because of the threat of Drake than because of any specific loss. Philip had hoped to launch his armada against England by 1582; short of money, he had to delay. Elizabeth had bought herself more time.

Meanwhile, much to the chagrin of Philip's finance ministers, the king refused to scale back the size of the invading armada. Building it might take longer, but he would just borrow more money. Seeing his fight with England as a religious crusade, he would not be deterred by mere matters of finance.

> *Achilles now routed the Trojans and pursued them towards the city, but his course, too, was run. Poseidon and Apollo, pledged to avenge the deaths of Cycnus and Troilus, and to punish certain insolent boasts that Achilles had uttered over Hector's corpse, took counsel together. Veiled with cloud and standing by the Scaean gate, Apollo sought out Paris in the thick of battle, turned his bow and guided the fatal shaft. It struck the one vulnerable part of Achilles's body, the right heel, and he died in agony.*
>
> *THE GREEK MYTHS, VOL. 2*, ROBERT GRAVES, 1955

While working to ruin Philip's credit, Elizabeth put an important part of her meager resources into building up England's spy network--in fact, she made it the most sophisticated intelligence agency in Europe. With agents throughout Spain, she was kept informed of Philip's every move. She knew exactly how large the armada was to be and when it was to be launched. That allowed her to postpone calling up her army and reserves until the very last moment, saving the government money.

Finally, in the summer of 1588, the Spanish Armada was ready. It comprised 128 ships, including twenty large galleons, and a vast number of sailors and soldiers. Equal in size to England's entire navy, it had cost a fortune. The

Armada set sail from Lisbon in the second week of July. But Elizabeth's spies had fully informed her of Spain's plans, and she was able to send a fleet of smaller, more mobile English ships to harass the Armada on its way up the French coast, sinking its supply ships and generally creating chaos. As the commander of the English fleet, Lord Howard of Effingham, reported, "Their force is wonderful great and strong; and yet we pluck their feathers little by little."

Finally the Armada came to anchor in the port of Calais, where it was to link up with the Spanish armies stationed in the Low Countries. Determined to prevent it from picking up these reinforcements, the English gathered eight large ships, loaded them with flammable substances, and set them on course for the Spanish fleet, which was anchored in tight formation. As the British ships approached the harbor under full sail, their crews set them on fire and evacuated. The result was havoc, with dozens of Spanish ships in flames. Others scrambled for safe water, often colliding with one another. In their haste to put to sea, all order broke down.

The loss of ships and supplies at Calais devastated Spanish discipline and morale, and the invasion was called off. To avoid further attacks on the return to Spain, the remaining ships headed not south but north, planning to sail home around Scotland and Ireland. The English did not even bother with pursuit; they knew that the rough weather in those waters would do the damage for them. By the time the shattered Armada returned to Spain, forty-four of its ships had been lost and most of the rest were too damaged to be seaworthy. Almost two-thirds of its sailors and soldiers had perished at sea. Meanwhile England had lost not a single ship, and barely a hundred men had died in action.

It was a great triumph, but Elizabeth wasted no time on gloating. To save money, she immediately decommissioned the navy. She also refused to listen to advisers who urged her to follow up her victory by attacking the Spanish in the Low Countries. Her goals were limited: to exhaust Philip's resources and finances, forcing him to abandon his dreams of Catholic dominance and instituting a delicate balance of power in Europe. And this, indeed, was ultimately her greatest triumph, for Spain never recovered financially from the disaster of the Armada and soon gave up its designs on England altogether.

> *Limitations are troublesome, but they are effective. If we live economically in normal times, we are prepared for times of want. To be sparing saves us from humiliation. Limitations are also indispensable in the regulation of world conditions. In nature there are fixed limits for summer and winter, day and night, and these limits give the year its meaning. In the same way, economy,*

by setting fixed limits upon expenditures, acts to preserve property and prevent injury to the people.

THE I CHING, CHINA, CIRCA EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.

Interpretation

The defeat of the Spanish Armada has to be considered one of the most cost-effective in military history: a second-rate power that barely maintained a standing army was able to face down the greatest empire of its time. What made the victory possible was the application of a basic military axiom: attack their weaknesses with your strengths. England's strengths were its small, mobile navy and its elaborate intelligence network; its weaknesses were its limited resources in men, weaponry, and money. Spain's strengths were its vast wealth and its huge army and fleet; its weaknesses were the precarious structure of its finances, despite their magnitude, and the lumbering size and slowness of its ships.

Elizabeth refused to fight on Spain's terms, keeping her army out of the fray. Instead she attacked Spain's weaknesses with her strengths: plaguing the Spanish galleons with her smaller ships, wreaking havoc on the country's finances, using special ops to grind its war machine to a halt. She was able to control the situation by keeping England's costs down while making the war effort more and more expensive for Spain. Eventually a time came when Philip could only fail: if the Armada sank, he would be ruined for years to come, and even if the Armada triumphed, victory would come so dear that he would ruin himself trying to exploit it on English soil.

Understand: no person or group is completely either weak or strong. Every army, no matter how invincible it seems, has a weak point, a place left unprotected or undeveloped. Size itself can be a weakness in the end. Meanwhile even the weakest group has something it can build on, some hidden strength. Your goal in war is not simply to amass a stockpile of weapons, to increase your firepower so you can blast your enemy away. That is wasteful, expensive to build up, and leaves you vulnerable to guerrilla-style attacks. Going at your enemies blow by blow, strength against strength, is equally unstrategic. Instead you must first assess their weak points: internal political problems, low morale, shaky finances, overly centralized control, their leader's megalomania. While carefully keeping your own weaknesses out of the fray and preserving your strength for the long haul, hit their Achilles' heel again and again. Having their weaknesses exposed and preyed upon will demoralize them, and, as they tire,

new weaknesses will open up. By carefully calibrating strengths and weaknesses, you can bring down your Goliath with a slingshot.

Abundance makes me poor.

--Ovid (43 B.C.-A.D. 17)

> *In all this--in selection of nutriment, of place and climate, of recreation--there commands an instinct of self-preservation which manifests itself most unambiguously as an instinct for self-defense. Not to see many things, not to hear them, not to let them approach one--first piece of ingenuity, first proof that one is no accident but a necessity. The customary word for this self-defensive instinct is taste. Its imperative commands, not only to say No when Yes would be a piece of "selflessness," but also to say No as little as possible. To separate oneself, to depart from that to which No would be required again and again. The rationale is that defensive expenditures, be they never so small, become a rule, a habit, lead to an extraordinary and perfectly superfluous impoverishment. Our largest expenditures are our most frequent small ones. Warding off, not letting come close, is an expenditure--one should not deceive oneself over this--a strength squandered on negative objectives. One can merely through the constant need to ward off become too weak any longer to defend oneself.... Another form of sagacity and self-defense consists in reacting as seldom as possible and withdrawing from situations and relationships in which one would be condemned as it were to suspend one's freedom, one's initiative, and become a mere reagent.*
>
> *ECCE HOMO,* FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, 1888

KEYS TO WARFARE

Reality can be defined by a sharp series of limitations on every living thing, the final boundary being death. We have only so much energy to expend before we tire; only so much in the way of food and resources is available to us; our skills and capacities can go only so far. An animal lives within those limits: it does not try to fly higher or run faster or expend endless energy amassing a pile of food, for that would exhaust it and leave it vulnerable to attack. It simply tries to make the most of what it has. A cat, for instance, instinctively practices an economy of motion and gesture, never wasting effort. People who live in poverty, similarly, are acutely aware of their limits: forced to make the most of what they have, they are endlessly inventive. Necessity has a powerful effect on their creativity.

The problem faced by those of us who live in societies of abundance is that we lose a sense of limit. We are carefully shielded from death and can pass

months, even years, without contemplating it. We imagine endless time at our disposal and slowly drift further from reality; we imagine endless energy to draw on, thinking we can get what we want simply by trying harder. We start to see everything as limitless--the goodwill of friends, the possibility of wealth and fame. A few more classes and books and we can extend our talents and skills to the point where we become different people. Technology can make anything achievable.

Abundance makes us rich in dreams, for in dreams there are no limits. But it makes us poor in reality. It makes us soft and decadent, bored with what we have and in need of constant shocks to remind us that we are alive. In life you must be a warrior, and war requires realism. While others may find beauty in endless dreams, warriors find it in reality, in awareness of limits, in making the most of what they have. Like the cat, they look for the perfect economy of motion and gesture--the way to give their blows the greatest force with the least expenditure of effort. Their awareness that their days are numbered--that they could die at any time--grounds them in reality. There are things they can never do, talents they will never have, lofty goals they will never reach; that hardly bothers them. Warriors focus on what they *do* have, the strengths that they *do* possess and that they must use creatively. Knowing when to slow down, to renew, to retrench, they outlast their opponents. They play for the long term.

Through the final years of French colonial rule in Vietnam and on through the Vietnam War, the military leader of the Vietnamese insurgents was General Vo Nguyen Giap. In first the French and then the Americans, he faced an enemy with vastly superior resources, firepower, and training. His own army was a ragtag collection of peasants; they had morale, a deep sense of purpose, but little else. Giap had no trucks to carry supplies, and his communications were nineteenth century. Another general would have tried to catch up, and Giap had the opportunity--he had the offer of trucks, radios, weapons, and training from China--but he saw them as a trap. It wasn't only that he didn't want to spend his limited funds on such things; in the long run, he believed, all they would do was turn the North Vietnamese into a weaker version of their enemy. Instead he chose to make the most of what he had, turning his army's weaknesses into virtues.

Trucks could be spotted from the air, and the Americans could bomb them. But the Americans could not bomb supply lines they could not see. Exploiting his resources, then, Giap used a vast network of peasant coolies to carry supplies on their backs. When they came to a river, they would cross it on rope bridges hung just below the surface of the water. Right up to the end of the war, the Americans were still trying to figure out how North Vietnam supplied its armies

in the field.

Meanwhile Giap developed hit-and-run guerrilla tactics that gave him enormous potential to disrupt American supply lines. To fight, move troops, and ferry supplies, the Americans used helicopters, which gave them tremendous mobility. But the war ultimately had to be fought on the ground, and Giap was endlessly inventive in using the jungle to neutralize American air power, disorient American foot soldiers, and camouflage his own troops. He could not hope to win a pitched battle against superior U.S. weaponry, so he put his effort into spectacular, symbolic, demoralizing attacks that would drive home the futility of the war when they appeared on American TV. With the minimum that he had, he created the maximum effect.

Armies that seem to have the edge in money, resources, and firepower tend to be predictable. Relying on their equipment instead of on knowledge and strategy, they grow mentally lazy. When problems arise, their solution is to amass more of what they already have. But it's not what you have that brings you victory, it's how you use it. When you have less, you are naturally more inventive. Creativity gives you an edge over enemies dependent on technology; you will learn more, be more adaptable, and you will outsmart them. Unable to waste your limited resources, you will use them well. Time will be your ally.

If you have less than your enemy, do not despair. You can always turn the situation around by practicing perfect economy. If you and your enemy are equals, getting hold of more weaponry matters less than making better use of what you have. If you have more than your enemy, fighting economically is as important as ever. As Pablo Picasso said, Even if you are wealthy, act poor. The poor are more inventive, and often have more fun, because they value what they have and know their limits. Sometimes in strategy you have to ignore your greater strength and force yourself to get the maximum out of the minimum. Even if you have the technology, fight the peasant's war.

This does not mean that you disarm or fail to exploit what advantages you may have in materiel. In Operation Desert Storm, the U.S. campaign against Iraq in 1991, American military strategists made full use of their superior technology, particularly in the air, but they did not depend on this for victory. They had learned the lesson of their debacle twenty years earlier in Vietnam, and their maneuvers showed the kind of deceptive feints and use of mobility associated with smaller, guerrilla-like forces. This combination of advanced technology and creative flair proved devastating.

War is a balance of ends and means: a general might have the best plan to achieve a certain end, but unless he has the means to accomplish it, his plan is worthless. Wise generals through the ages, then, have learned to begin by

examining the means they have at hand and then to develop their strategy out of those tools. That is what made Hannibal a brilliant strategist: he would always think first of the givens--the makeup of his own army and of the enemy's, their respective proportions of cavalry and infantry, the terrain, his troops' morale, the weather. That would give him the foundation not only for his plan of attack but for the ends he wanted to achieve in this particular encounter. Instead of being locked in to a way of fighting, like so many generals, he constantly adjusted his ends to his means. That was the strategic advantage he used again and again.

The next time you launch a campaign, try an experiment: do not think about either your solid goals or your wishful dreams, and do not plan out your strategy on paper. Instead think deeply about what you have--the tools and materials you will be working with. Ground yourself not in dreams and plans but in reality: think of your own skills, any political advantage you might have, the morale of your troops, how creatively you can use the means at your disposal. Then, out of that process, let your plans and goals blossom. Not only will your strategies be more realistic, they will be more inventive and forceful. Dreaming first of what you want and then trying to find the means to reach it is a recipe for exhaustion, waste, and defeat.

Do not mistake cheapness for perfect economy--armies have failed by spending too little as often as by spending too much. When the British attacked Turkey during World War I, hoping to knock it out of the war and then attack Germany from the east, they began by sending a fleet to break through the Dardanelles Strait and head for the Turkish capital of Constantinople. The fleet made good progress, but even so, after several weeks some ships had been sunk, more lives than expected had been lost, and the venture in general was proving costly. So the British called off the naval campaign, deciding instead to land an army on the peninsula of Gallipoli and fight through by land. That route seemed safer and cheaper--but it turned into a months-long fiasco that cost thousands of lives and in the end led nowhere, for the Allies eventually gave up and pulled out their troops. Years later, Turkish documents were uncovered that revealed that the British fleet had been on the verge of success: in another day or two, it would have broken through and Constantinople would probably have fallen. The whole course of the war might have been changed. But the British had overeconomized; at the last moment, they had pulled their punches, worrying about cost. In the end the cost of trying to win on the cheap wound up punitively expensive.

Every limitation has its value, but a limitation that requires persistent effort entails a cost of too much energy. When, however, the limitation is a natural

one (as, for example, the limitation by which water flows only downhill), it necessarily leads to success, for then it means a saving of energy. The energy that otherwise would be consumed in a vain struggle with the object is applied wholly to the benefit of the matter in hand, and success is assured.

THE I CHING, CHINA, CIRCA EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.

Perfect economy, then, does not mean hoarding your resources. That is not economy but stinginess--deadly in war. Perfect economy means finding a golden mean, a level at which your blows count but do not wear you out. Overeconomizing will wear you out more, for the war will drag on, its costs growing, without your ever being able to deliver a knockout punch.

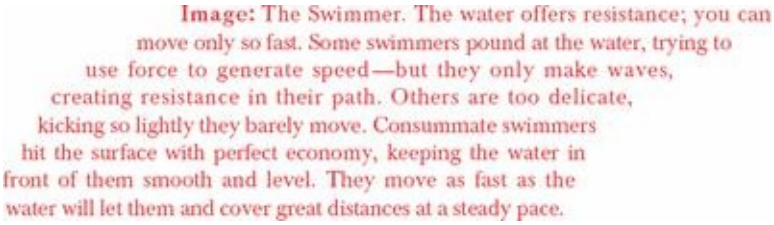
Several tactics lend themselves to economy in fighting. First is the use of deception, which costs relatively little but can yield powerful results. During World War II the Allies used a complicated series of deceptions to make the Germans expect an attack from many different directions, forcing them to spread themselves thin. Hitler's Russian campaign was much weakened by the need to keep troops in France and the Balkans, to defend from attacks there--attacks that never came. Deception can be a great equalizer for the weaker side. Its arts include the gathering of intelligence, the spreading of misinformation, and the use of propaganda to make the war more unpopular within the enemy camp.

Second, look for opponents you can beat. Avoid enemies who have nothing to lose--they will work to bring you down whatever it costs. In the nineteenth century, Otto von Bismarck built up Prussia's military power on the backs of weaker opponents such as the Danes. Easy victories enhance morale, develop your reputation, give you momentum, and, most important, do not cost you much.

There will be times when your calculations misfire; what had seemed to be an easy campaign turns out hard. Not everything can be foreseen. Not only is it important to pick your battles carefully, then, but you must also know when to accept your losses and quit. In 1971 the boxers Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, both at the heights of their careers, met for the world heavyweight championship. It was a grueling match, one of the most exciting in history; Frazier won by a decision after nearly knocking out Ali in the fifteenth round. But both men suffered horribly in the fight; both threw a lot of good punches. Wanting revenge, Ali gained a rematch in 1974--another grueling fifteen-round affair--and won by a decision. Neither boxer was happy, both wanted a more conclusive result, so they met again in 1975, in the famous "Thrilla in Manila."

This time Ali won in the fourteenth round, but neither man was ever the same again: these three fights had taken too much out of them, shortening their careers. Pride and anger had overtaken their powers of reason. Do not fall into such a trap; know when to stop. Do not soldier on out of frustration or pride. Too much is at stake.

Finally, nothing in human affairs stays the same. Over time either your efforts will tend to slow down--a kind of friction will build up, whether from unexpected exterior events or from your own actions--or momentum will help to move you forward. Wasting what you have will create friction, lowering your energy and morale. You are essentially slowing yourself down. Fighting economically, on the other hand, will build momentum. Think of it as finding your level--a perfect balance between what you are capable of and the task at hand. When the job you are doing is neither above nor below your talents but at your level, you are neither exhausted nor bored and depressed. You suddenly have new energy and creativity. Fighting with perfect economy is like hitting that level--less resistance in your path, greater energy unleashed. Oddly enough, knowing your limits will expand your limits; getting the most out of what you have will let you have more.



Authority: The value of a thing sometimes lies not in what one attains with it but in what one pays for it--what it costs us.

--Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

REVERSAL

There can never be any value in fighting uneconomically, but it is always a wise course to make your opponent waste as much of his resources as possible. This can be done through hit-and-run tactics, forcing him to expend energy chasing after you. Lure him into thinking that one big offensive will ruin you; then bog that offensive down in a protracted war in which he loses valuable time and resources. A frustrated opponent exhausting energy on punches he cannot land will soon make mistakes and open himself up to a vicious counterattack.