DEFEAT THEM IN DETAIL

THE DIVIDE-AND-CONQUER STRATEGY

When you look at your enemies, do not be intimidated by their appearance. Instead look at the parts that make up the whole. By separating the parts, sowing dissension and division from within, you can weaken and bring down even the most formidable foe. In setting up your attack, work on their minds to create internal conflict. Look for the joints and links, the things that connect the people in a group or connect one group to another. Division is weakness, and the joints are the weakest part of any structure. When you are facing troubles or enemies, turn a large problem into small, eminently defeatable parts.

> *There were, however, many occasions when the French were faced not by one but by two or a whole series of enemy armies within supporting distance of one another. Faced with such a difficult situation, Napoleon often adopted a second system of maneuver--the "strategy of the central position." Very often under these circumstances the French found themselves operating at a numerical disadvantage against the combined strength of their opponents, but could procure superior numbers against any one part of their adversaries' forces. It was this second factor that the system was designed to exploit to the full. "The art of generalship consists in, when actually inferior in numbers to the enemy (overall), being superior to him on the battlefield." In brief, Napoleon set himself the task of isolating one part of the enemy armament, concentrating a stronger force to ensure its defeat and if possible its destruction, and then turning with his full strength to attack the second enemy army; that is to say, instead of a single decisive blow, he planned a series of smaller blows against scattered adversaries and set out to destroy them in detail. How could this be done? Once again, the sequence of the Napoleonic attack reveals the formula. First of all the Emperor would accumulate as much information about the forces facing him from captured newspapers, deserters and most especially from the indications brought in by his probing cavalry patrols. From the data thus provided, he would carefully plot the known dispositions of his foes on the map, and then select the place where their respective army boundaries converged. This was the "hinge" or "joint" of the enemy's strategic dispositions, and as such was vulnerable to attack.*

This point would be selected by Napoleon for his initial blitzkrieg attack, carried out as often as not in full strength. Shielded by the cavalry screen, the French army would perform a crash concentration and fall like a thunderbolt on the handful of troops defending this central point. Invariably this initial onslaught would be successful. Immediately Napoleon had massed his army at this newly captured point, he was master of the "central position"--that is to say, he had successfully interposed his concentrated army between the forces of his enemies who, ideally, would have staggered back under the impact of the surprise blow in such a way as to increase the distance between their respective armies. This would inevitably mean that the foe would have to operate on "exterior lines" (i.e., have greater distances to march from one flank to the other) while the better-positioned French would have a shorter distance to travel to reach either enemy.

THE CAMPAIGNS OF NAPOLEON, DAVID G. CHANDLER, 1966

THE CENTRAL POSITION

One day in early August of 490 B.C., the citizens of Athens received word that a massive Persian fleet had just landed some twenty-four miles to the north, along the coastal plains of Marathon. A mood of doom quickly spread. Every Athenian knew Persia's intentions--to capture their city; destroy its young democracy and restore a former tyrant, Hippias, to the throne; and sell many of its citizens into slavery. Some eight years earlier, Athens had sent ships to support the Greek cities of Asia Minor in a rebellion against King Darius, ruler of the Persian Empire. The Athenians had sailed home after a few battles--they soon saw that this business was hopeless--but they had participated in burning down the city of Sardis, an unforgivable outrage, and Darius wanted revenge.

The Athenians' predicament seemed desperate. The Persian army was enormous, some 80,000 men strong, transported by hundreds of ships; it had excellent cavalry and the best archers in the world. The Athenians, meanwhile, had only infantry, some 10,000 strong. They had sent a runner to Sparta urgently requesting reinforcements, but the Spartans were celebrating their moon festival and it was taboo to fight during such a time. They would send troops as soon as they could, within a week--but that would probably be too late. Meanwhile a group of Persian sympathizers within Athens--mostly from wealthy families--despised the democracy, looked forward to Hippias's return, and were doing their best to sow dissension and betray the city from within. Not only would the Athenians have to fight the Persians alone, but they were divided into factions

among themselves.

The leaders of democratic Athens gathered to discuss the alternatives, all of which seemed bad. The majority argued for concentrating the Athenian forces outside the city in a defensive cordon. There they could wait to fight the Persians on terrain they knew well. The Persian army, however, was large enough to surround the city by both land and sea, choking it off with a blockade. So one leader, Miltiades, made a very different proposal: to march the entire Athenian army immediately toward Marathon, to a place where the road to Athens passed through a narrow pass along the coast. That would leave Athens itself unprotected; in trying to block the Persian advance on land, it would open itself to an attack by sea. But Miltiades argued that occupying the pass was the only way to avoid being surrounded. He had fought the Persians in Asia Minor and was the Athenians' most experienced soldier. The leaders voted for his plan.

And so a few days later, the 10,000 Athenian infantrymen began the march north, slaves carrying their heavy body armor, mules and donkeys transporting their food. When they reached the pass looking down on the plains of Marathon, their hearts sank: as far as the eye could see, the long strip of land was filled with tents, horses, and soldiers from all over the Persian Empire. Ships cluttered the coast.

For several days neither side moved. The Athenians had no choice but to hold their position; without cavalry and hopelessly outnumbered, how could they do battle at Marathon? If enough time went by, perhaps the Spartans would arrive as reinforcements. But what were the Persians waiting for?

Before dawn on August 12, some Greek scouts ostensibly working for the Persians slipped across to the Athenian side and reported startling news: under cover of darkness, the Persians had just sailed for the Bay of Phaleron outside Athens, taking most of their cavalry with them and leaving a holding force of some 15,000 soldiers in the plains of Marathon. They would take Athens from the sea, then march north, squeezing the Athenian army at Marathon between two larger forces.

Of the Athenian army's eleven commanders, Miltiades alone seemed calm, even relieved: this was their opportunity. As the sun was getting ready to rise, he argued for an immediate attack on the Persians at Marathon. Some of the other commanders resisted this idea: the enemy still had more men, some cavalry, and plenty of archers. Better to wait for the Spartans, who would surely arrive soon. But Miltiades countered that the Persians had divided their forces. He had fought them before and knew that the Greek infantryman was superior in discipline and spirit. The Persians at Marathon now only slightly outnumbered the Greeks; they could fight them and win.

Meanwhile, even with a good wind, it would take the Persian ships ten to twelve hours to round the coast and arrive at the Bay of Phaleron. Then they would need more time to disembark the troops and horses. If the Athenians defeated the Persians at Marathon quickly, they would have just enough time to run back to Athens and defend the city the same day. If instead they opted to wait, the Spartans might never arrive; the Persians would surround them, and, more ominously, the Persian sympathizers within Athens would probably betray the city from within and open its walls to the barbarians. It was now or never. By a vote of six to five, the commanders decided to attack at dawn.

At six in the morning, the Athenians began their charge. A hail of arrows from the Persian archers rained down on them, but they closed in on the enemy so quickly that the battle now had to be fought hand-to-hand--and, as Miltiades had foreseen, in close combat the Athenians were superior. They pushed the Persians back into the marshes at the north end of the plain, where thousands drowned. The waters reddened with blood. By nine in the morning, the Athenians had control of the plains, having lost fewer than two hundred men.

Although emotionally spent by this battle, the Athenians now had only around seven hours to make the twenty-four miles back to Athens in time to stop the Persians. There was simply no time to rest; they ran, as fast their feet could take them, loaded down in their heavy armor, impelled by the thought of the imminent dangers facing their families and fellow citizens. By four in the afternoon, the fastest among them had straggled to a point overlooking the Bay of Phaleron. The rest soon followed. Within a matter of minutes after their arrival, the Persian fleet sailed into the bay to see a most unwelcome sight: thousands of Athenian soldiers, caked in dust and blood, standing shoulder to shoulder to fight the landing.

The Persians rode at anchor for a few hours, then headed out to sea, returning home. Athens was saved.

Interpretation

The victory at Marathon and race to Athens were perhaps the most decisive moments in Athenian history. Had the soldiers not come in time, the Persians would have taken the city, then certainly all of Greece, and eventually they would have expanded throughout the Mediterranean, for no other power in existence at the time could have stopped them. History would have been altered irrevocably.

Miltiades' plan worked by the narrowest of margins, but it was based on sound and timeless principles. When a powerful foe attacks you in strength, threatening your ability to advance and take the initiative, you must work to

make the enemy divide its forces and then defeat these smaller forces one by one--"in detail," as the military say.

The key to Miltiades' strategy was his intuition to take the battle to Marathon. By placing himself at the pass that led to Athens, he occupied the central position in the war instead of the southern periphery. With the entire army holding the pass, the Persians would have a bloody time forcing their way through, so they decided to divide their forces before the Spartan reinforcements arrived. Once divided, and with their cavalry diluted, they lost their advantage and the central position from which they could dominate the war.

For the Athenians it was imperative to fight the smallest force first, the one they faced at Marathon. That done, and having taken the central position, they had the shorter route to Athens, while the invaders had to round the coast. Arriving first at Phaleron, the Athenians allowed no safe place to disembark. The Persians could have returned to Marathon, but the arrival of the bloodied Athenian soldiers from the north must have told them they had already lost the battle there, and their spirits were broken. Retreat was the only option.

There will be times in life when you face a powerful enemy--a destructive opponent seeking your undoing, a slew of seemingly insurmountable problems hitting you at once. It is natural to feel intimidated in these situations, which may paralyze you into inaction or make you wait in the vain hope that time will bring a solution. But it is a law of war that by allowing the larger force to come to you, at full strength and unified, you increase the odds against you; a large and powerful army on the move will gain an irresistible momentum if left unchecked. You will find yourself quickly overwhelmed. The wisest course is to take a risk, meet the enemy before it comes to you, and try to blunt its momentum by forcing or enticing it to divide. And the best way to make an enemy divide is to occupy the center.

Think of battle or conflict as existing on a kind of chessboard. The chessboard's center can be physical--an actual place like Marathon--or more subtle and psychological: the levers of power within a group, the support of a critical ally, a troublemaker at the eye of the storm. Take the center of the chessboard and the enemy will naturally break into parts, trying to hit you from more than one side. These smaller parts are now manageable, can be defeated in detail or forced to divide yet again. And once something large is divided, it is prone to further division, to being splintered into nothingness.

As your army faces the enemy and the enemy appears powerful, try to attack the enemy in one particular spot. If you are successful in crumbling that one particular spot, leave that spot and attack the next, and so on and so forth, as

if you were going down a winding road.
--Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645)

ATTACKING THE JOINTS

As a young man, Samuel Adams (1722-1803) of colonial-era Boston developed a dream: the American colonies, he believed, should one day win complete independence from England and establish a government based on the writings of the English philosopher John Locke. According to Locke, a government should reflect the will of its citizens; a government that did not do so had lost its right to exist. Adams had inherited a brewery from his father, but he did not care about business, and while the brewery veered toward bankruptcy, he spent his time writing articles on Locke and the need for independence. He was an excellent writer, good enough to get his articles published, but few took his ideas seriously: he seemed to rant, to be somewhat out of touch with the world. He had that obsessive glint in the eye that makes people think you're a crackpot. The problem was that the ties between England and America were strong; the colonists did have their grievances, but there was hardly a clamor for independence. Adams began to have bouts of depression; his self-appointed mission seemed hopeless.

The British desperately needed money from the colonies, and in 1765 they passed a law called the Stamp Act: to make any document legal, American businesses would be required to purchase and affix to it a stamp of the British crown. The colonists were growing ticklish about the taxes they paid to England; they saw the Stamp Act as a new kind of tax in disguise, and a few disgruntled voices were raised in urban taverns. Even so, for most the issue seemed minor--but Adams saw the Stamp Act as the opportunity he had been waiting for his whole life. It gave him something tangible to attack, and he flooded newspapers throughout the colonies with editorials, all fulminating against the act. Without consulting the colonies, he wrote, England was imposing a new kind of tax, and this, in a memorable phrase, was taxation without representation, the first step toward tyranny.

> *A novice chess player soon learns that it is a good idea to control the center of the board. This recognition will recur, in novel disguises, in situations far from the chessboard. It may help to seek the equivalent of the center of the board in any situation, or to see that the role of the center has migrated to the flanks, or to realize that there is no board and no singular topology....*

These editorials were so well written and so audacious in their criticisms that many began to take a closer look at the Stamp Act, and they did not like what they saw. Adams had never previously gone beyond writing articles, but now that he had lit this fire of discontent, he saw the urgency in stoking it further with action. For many years he had fraternized with working-class people considered riffraff by polite society--dockworkers and the like; now he banded these men into an organization called the Sons of Liberty. The group marched through the streets of Boston shouting a slogan Adams had coined: "Liberty, property, and no stamps!" They burned effigies of political figures who had promoted the Stamp Act. They distributed pamphlets containing Adams's arguments against the act. They also worked to intimidate the future distributors of the stamps, even going so far as to destroy one of their offices. The more dramatic the action, the more publicity Adams would earn, publicity into which he could insert arguments against the act.

Having gained momentum, the relentless Adams would not stop. He organized a statewide work stoppage for the day the act was to become law: shops would close, the courts would be empty. Since no business would be conducted in Massachusetts, no stamps would be purchased. The boycott was massively successful.

Adams's articles, demonstrations, and boycott made a splash in England, and there were members of Parliament who sympathized with the colonists and spoke out against the Stamp Act. Finally King George III had had enough, and in April 1766 the act was repealed. Americans rejoiced at their first show of power. The British were smarting from their defeat, however, and the following year they sneaked in another series of indirect taxes known as the Townshend System.

Clearly they had underestimated their enemy: Adams went to war. As he had with the Stamp Act, he wrote countless articles on the nature of the taxes the English had tried to disguise, once again stirring up anger. He also organized further demonstrations by the Sons of Liberty, now more menacing and violent than ever--in fact, the English were forced to send troops to Boston to keep the peace. This had been Adams's goal all along; he had ratcheted up the tension. Belligerent encounters between the Sons of Liberty and the English troops put the soldiers on edge, and finally a nervous group of them fired into a crowd, killing several Bostonians. Adams called this the Boston Massacre and spread fiery word of it throughout the colonies.

With the people of Boston now bubbling with anger, Adams organized

another boycott: no citizen of Massachusetts, not even a prostitute, would sell anything to British soldiers. No one would rent them lodgings. They were shunned in the streets and taverns; even eye contact was avoided. All of this had a demoralizing effect on the British soldiers. Feeling isolated and antagonized, many of them began to desert or find ways to be sent home.

> *Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?*
>
> LUKE 11:14

News of the problems in Massachusetts spread north and south; colonists everywhere began to talk about Britain's actions in Boston, its use of force, its hidden taxes, its patronizing attitude. Then, in 1773, Parliament passed the Tea Act, on the surface a rather harmless attempt to solve the economic problems of the East India Company by giving it a virtual monopoly on the sale of tea in the colonies. The law also levied a nominal tax, but, even so, it would have made tea cheaper in the colonies, because the middlemen--the colonial importers--were to be cut out. The Tea Act, however, was deceptive in its effect, and confusing, and Adams saw in it a chance to apply the coup de grace: it would ruin many colonial tea importers, and it did include a hidden tax, yet another form of taxation without representation. In exchange for cheaper tea, the English were making a mockery of democracy. In language more fiery than ever, Adams began to turn out articles opening up the old wounds from the Stamp Act and the Boston Massacre.

When East India Company ships began to arrive in Boston at the end of that year, Adams helped to organize a nationwide boycott of their tea. No dockworker would unload the cargo, no warehouse would store it. Then, one night in mid-December, after Adams had addressed a town meeting about the Tea Act, a group of members of the Sons of Liberty--disguised as Mohawk Indians, body paint and all--erupted in war whoops, charged to the wharves, boarded the tea ships, and destroyed their cargo, cutting open the cases of tea and pouring them into the harbor, all of this done with great revelry.

This provocative act, which later became known as the Boston Tea Party, was the turning point. The British could not tolerate it and quickly closed down Boston harbor and imposed military law on Massachusetts. Now all doubt vanished: pushed into a corner by Adams, the British were acting just as tyrannically as he had prophesied they would. The heavy military presence in Massachusetts was predictably unpopular, and it was only a matter of months

before violence erupted: in April 1775, English soldiers fired on Massachusetts militiamen in Lexington. This "shot heard 'round the world" became the spark for the war that Adams had so diligently worked to kindle out of nothing.

Interpretation

Before 1765, Adams labored under the belief that well-reasoned arguments would be enough to convince the colonists of the rightness of his cause. But as the years of failure piled up, he confronted the reality that the colonists retained a deep emotional attachment to England, as children do to a parent. Liberty meant less to them than did England's provision of protection and a sense of belonging in a threatening environment. When Adams realized this, he reformulated his goals: instead of preaching independence and the ideas of John Locke, he set to work to sever the colonists' ties with England. He made the children distrust the parent, whom they came to see not as a protector but as a domineering overlord exploiting them for its profit. The bond with England loosened, Adams's arguments for independence began to resonate. Now the colonists began to look for their sense of identity not to Mother England but to themselves.

With the Stamp Act campaign, then, Adams discovered strategy, the bridge between his ideas and reality. His writings now aimed at stirring up anger. The demonstrations he organized--pure theater--were also designed to create and build anger among the middle and lower classes, key components of the future revolution. Adams's innovative use of boycotts was calibrated to infuriate the British and bait them into rash action. Their violent response contrasted brilliantly with the relatively peaceful methods of the colonists, making them seem as tyrannical as he had said they were. Adams also worked to stir dissension among the English themselves, weakening the bond on all sides. The Stamp Act and Tea Act were actually rather trivial, but Adams strategically manipulated them to manufacture outrage, making them into wedges driven between the two sides.

Understand: rational arguments go in one ear and out the other. No one is changed; you are preaching to the converted. In the war to win people's attention and influence them, you must first separate them from whatever ties them to the past and makes them resist change. You must realize that these ties are generally not rational but emotional. By appealing to people's emotions, you can make your targets see the past in a new light, as something tyrannical, boring, ugly, immoral. Now you have room to infiltrate new ideas, shift people's vision, make them respond to a new sense of their self-interest, and sow the seeds for a new cause, a new bond. To make people join you, separate them from their past.

When you size up your targets, look for what connects them to the past, the source of their resistance to the new.

A joint is the weakest part of any structure. Break it and you divide people internally, making them vulnerable to suggestion and change. Divide their minds in order to conquer them.

Make the enemy believe that support is lacking;...cut off, flank, turn, in a thousand ways make his men believe themselves isolated. Isolate in like manner his squadrons, battalions, brigades and divisions; and victory is yours.

--Colonel Ardant du Picq (1821-1870)

KEYS TO WARFARE

Thousands of years ago, our primitive ancestors were prone to feelings of great weakness and vulnerability. To survive in the hostile environment of our early world, animals had speed, teeth and claws, fur against winter cold, and other advantages of power and protection. Humans had none of this and must have felt terrifyingly exposed and alone. The only way to compensate for such weakness was to form groups.

THE THREE OXEN AND THE LION

There were three oxen who always grazed together. A lion had his designs upon them and wanted to eat them, but he could never get at one of them because they were always together. So he set them against each other with slanderous talk and managed to get them separated, whereupon they were isolated and he was able to eat them one after the other.

FABLES, AESOP, SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

The group or tribe offered a defense against predators and greater effectiveness in the hunt. In the group there were enough people to watch your back. The larger the group, the more it allowed its members to refine that great human invention, the division of labor, and the more different individuals in the group were freed from the immediate needs of survival, the more time and energy they could devote to higher tasks. These different roles were mutually supportive and reinforcing, and the result was a net increase in human strength.

Over the centuries groups became ever larger and more complex. By learning to live in towns and settlements, people found that they could escape the feeling of imminent danger and need. Living with others also offered more subtle psychological protections. In time humans began to forget the fear that had made them form tribes in the first place. But in one group--the army--that primal terror remained as strong as ever.

The standard mode of ancient warfare was hand-to-hand combat, a frightening drama in which individuals were at all times exposed to death from behind and to each side. Military leaders learned early on to form their soldiers into tight, cohesive ranks. Trusting his fellows on either side of him not to retreat and leave him exposed, a soldier could fight the man in front of him with more spirit and confidence. The Romans extended this strategy by placing the youngest, most impetuous fighters in the front ranks, the most experienced and best fighters in the rear, and everyone else in the center. This meant that the weakest soldiers--the ones most prone to panic--were surrounded by those who were braver and steadier, giving them a powerful sense of security. No army went into battle with more cohesion and trust than the Roman legions.

In studying ancient warfare, the great nineteenth-century military writer Colonel Ardant du Picq noticed a peculiar phenomenon: in some of the most celebrated battles (Hannibal's victory over the Romans at Cannae and Julius Caesar's over Pompey at Pharsalus, for example), the losses on each side were fantastically disproportionate--a few hundred for the victors, thousands upon thousands among the vanquished. According to du Picq, what had happened in these cases was that through maneuver the ultimately victorious army had managed to surprise the enemy and splinter its lines into parts. Seeing their ranks breaking up, losing their sense of solidarity and support, and feeling isolated, soldiers panicked, dropped their weapons, and fled--and a soldier who turned his back on the enemy was an easy soldier to kill. Thousands were slaughtered this way. These great victories, then, were essentially psychological. Hannibal was vastly outnumbered at Cannae, but by making the Romans feel vulnerable and isolated, he made them overreact and retreat in confusion: easy pickings.

> *Roosevelt...disliked being completely committed to any one person. He enjoyed being at the center of attention and action, and the system made him the focus through which the main lines of action radiated..... The main reason for Roosevelt's methods, however, involved a tenacious effort to keep control of the executive branch in the face of the centrifugal forces of the American political system. By establishing in an agency one power center that counteracted another, he made each official more dependent on White*

House support; the President in effect became the necessary ally and partner of each. He lessened bureaucratic tendencies toward self-aggrandizement; he curbed any attempt to gang up on him. He was, in effect, adapting the old method of divide and conquer to his own purposes..... His technique was curiously like that of Joseph Stalin, who used the overlapping delegation of function, a close student of his methods has said, to prevent "any single chain of command from making major decisions without confronting other arms of the state's bureaucracy and thus bringing the issues into the open at a high level." Roosevelt, like Stalin, was a political administrator in the sense that his first concern was power--albeit for very different ends.

ROOSEVELT: THE LION AND THE FOX, JAMES MACGREGOR BURNS, 1956

The phenomenon is timeless: the soldier who feels he is losing the support of those around him is borne back into an intolerable primitive terror. He fears he will face death alone. Many great military leaders have turned this terror into strategy. Genghis Khan was a master at it: using the mobility of his Mongol cavalry to cut off his enemies' communications, he would isolate parts of their armies to make them feel alone and unprotected. He worked consciously to instill terror. The divide-and-isolate strategy was also used to great effect by Napoleon and the guerrilla forces of Mao Tse-tung, among many others.

Our nature has not changed. Lurking deep in even the most civilized among us is the same basic fear of being alone, unsupported, and exposed to danger. People today are more dispersed and society is less cohesive than ever before, but that only increases our need to belong to a group, to have a strong network of allies--to feel supported and protected on all sides. Take away this feeling and we are returned to that primitive sensation of terror at our own vulnerability. The divide-and-conquer strategy has never been more effective than it is today: cut people off from their group--make them feel alienated, alone, and unprotected--and you weaken them enormously. That moment of weakness gives you great power to maneuver them into a corner, whether to seduce or to induce panic and retreat.

Throughout the 1960s, one of Mao Tse-tung's most loyal and trusted followers was his minister of defense, Lin Biao. No one praised the Chinese ruler more fulsomely than Lin. And yet by 1970 Mao had come to suspect that the flattery was a ruse to disguise his intentions: Lin was plotting to be his successor. And what made Lin particularly dangerous was that, as minister of defense, he had accumulated allies in the military.

Mao went to work with great subtlety. In public he went out of his way to

support Lin, as if he, too, saw the minister as his successor. That soothed the natural wariness of the plotter. At the same time, however, Mao also attacked and demoted some of Lin's most important supporters in the military. Lin was a bit of a radical, veering left on most issues; Mao urged him to propose some of his more extreme ideas for restructuring the military, secretly knowing that these ideas would prove unpopular. Lin's support among the higher branches of the military slowly began to thin.

Lin finally realized what Mao was up to, but it was too late. He had lost his power base. Frustrated and scared, he resorted to plotting a coup d'etat, a desperate act that played straight into Mao's hands. In 1971, Lin died under suspicious circumstances in a plane crash.

As Mao understood, in political environments people depend on their connections even more than on their talents. In such a world, a person whose career seems to be waning is one whom few will want to know. And people who feel isolated will often overreact and do something desperate--which of course just makes them more isolated. So Mao created the impression that Lin was losing his connections. Had he attacked Lin directly, he would have gotten bogged down in an ugly fight. Dividing the minister from his power base, and in the process making him appear to be on the decline, was much more effective.

Before you launch an outright attack on your enemies, it is always wise first to weaken them by creating as much division in their ranks as possible. One good place to drive a wedge is between the leadership and the people, whether soldiers or citizenry; leaders function poorly when they lose their support among the people. So work to make them look authoritarian or out of touch. Or steal their foundation, as the Republican president Richard Nixon did in 1972 by wooing the blue-collar types who had traditionally voted Democrat: he split the Democrats' base. (The Republicans have been doing the same thing ever since.) Remember: once your enemy begins to splinter in any way, the rupture will tend to gain momentum. Division usually leads to more division.

In 338 B.C., Rome defeated its greatest enemy at the time, the Latin League--a confederation of Italian cities that had formed to block Rome's expansion. With this victory, however, the Romans faced a new problem: how to govern the region. If they crushed the league's members, they would leave a power vacuum, and down the road another enemy would emerge that might prove a still-greater threat. If they simply swallowed up the cities of the league, they would dilute the power and prestige of Rome, giving themselves too large an area to protect and police.

The solution the Romans came up with, which they would later call *divide et impera* (divide and rule), was to become the strategy by which they forged their

empire. Essentially they broke up the league but did not treat all of its parts equally. Instead they created a system whereby some of its cities were incorporated into Roman territory and their residents given full privileges as Roman citizens; others were deprived of most of their territory but granted near-total independence; and others still were broken up and heavily colonized with Roman citizens. No single city was left powerful enough to challenge Rome, which retained the central position. (As the saying goes, all roads led to Rome.)

The key to the system was that if an independent city proved itself loyal enough to Rome or fought well enough for Rome, it won the chance of being incorporated into the empire. The individual cities now saw it as more in their interest to gain Rome's favor than to ally themselves elsewhere. Rome held out the prospect of great power, wealth, and protection, while isolation from Rome was dangerous. And so the once proud members of the Latin League now competed against one another for Rome's attention.

Divide and rule is a powerful strategy for governing any group. It is based on a key principle: within any organization people naturally form smaller groups based on mutual self-interest--the primitive desire to find strength in numbers. These subgroups form power bases that, left unchecked, will threaten the organization as a whole. The formation of parties and factions can be a leader's greatest threat, for in time these factions will naturally work to secure their own interests before those of the greater group. The solution is to divide to rule. To do so you must first establish yourself as the center of power; individuals must know they need to compete for your approval. There has to be more to be gained by pleasing the leader than by trying to form a power base within the group.

> *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."*
>
> MATTHEW 10:34

When Elizabeth I became queen, England was a nation divided. The remnants of feudalism entailed many competing power centers, and the court itself was full of factions. Elizabeth's solution was to weaken the nobility by deliberately pitting one family against another. At the same time, she occupied the center, making herself a symbol of England itself, the hub around which

everything revolved. Within the court, too, she made sure that no individual--except of course herself--gained ascendancy. When she saw that first Robert Dudley and then the Earl of Essex believed themselves her favorites, she quickly cut them loose.

The temptation to maintain a favorite is understandable but dangerous. Better to rotate your stars, occasionally making each one fall. Bring in people with different viewpoints and encourage them to fight it out. You can justify this as a healthy form of democracy, but the effect is that while those below you fight to be heard, you rule.

The film director Alfred Hitchcock faced enemies on all sides--writers, set designers, actors, producers, marketers--any of them quite capable of putting their egos before the quality of the film. Writers wanted to show off their literary skills, actors wanted to look like stars, producers and marketers wanted the movie to be commercial--the whole crew had competing interests. Hitchcock's solution, like Queen Elizabeth's, was to take the central position, in a variant of divide and rule. His carefully crafted role as a public celebrity was part of this: his movies' publicity campaigns always involved him as spokesperson, and he made bit-part appearances in most of his films, becoming an instantly recognizable, endearingly humorous figure. He put himself in the middle of every aspect of production, from writing the script before the shoot began to editing the film when the shoot was finished. At the same time, he kept all the filmmaking departments, even that of the producer, a little out of the loop; information about every detail of the film was kept in his head, his drawings, and his notes. No one could bypass him; every decision went through him. Before the film was shot, for example, Hitchcock would set out in detail the look of the leading lady's costumes. If the costume designer wanted to change anything, she would have to go through him or be caught out in rank insubordination. In essence, he was like Rome: all roads led to Hitchcock.

Within your group, factions may emerge quite subtly by virtue of the fact that people who are experts in their area may not tell you everything they're doing. Remember: they see only the small picture; you are in charge of the whole production. If you are to lead, you must occupy the center. Everything must flow through you. If information is to be withheld, you are the one to do it. That is divide and rule: if the different parts of the operation lack access to all the information, they will have to come to you to get it. It is not that you micromanage but that you keep overall control of everything vital and isolate any potential rival power base.

Throughout the 1950s and '60s, Major General Edward Lansdale was considered America's principal expert in counterinsurgency. Working with

President Ramon Magsaysay of the Philippines, he had crafted a plan that had defeated the country's Huk guerrilla movement in the early 1950s. Counterinsurgency requires a deft hand, more political than military, and for Lansdale the key to success was to stamp out government corruption and bring the people close to the government through various popular programs. That would deny the insurgents their cause, and they would die of isolation. Lansdale thought it folly to imagine that leftist rebels could be defeated by force; in fact, force just played into their hands, giving them a cause they could use to rally support. For insurgents, isolation from the people is death.

Think of the people in your group who are working primarily for their own interests as insurgents. They are Cassius types who thrive on discontent in the organization, fanning it into dissension and factionalism. You can always work to divide such factions once you know about them, but the better solution is to keep your soldiers satisfied and contented, giving the insurgents nothing to feed on. Bitter and isolated, they will die off on their own.

The divide-and-rule strategy is invaluable in trying to influence people verbally. Start by seeming to take your opponents' side on some issue, occupying their flank. Once there, however, create doubt about some part of their argument, tweaking and diverting it a bit. This will lower their resistance and maybe create a little inner conflict about a cherished idea or belief. That conflict will weaken them, making them vulnerable to further suggestion and guidance.

Japan's great seventeenth-century swordsman Miyamoto Musashi on several occasions faced bands of warriors determined to kill him. The sight of such a group would intimidate most people, or at least make them hesitate--a fatal flaw in a samurai. Another tendency would be to lash out violently, trying to kill as many of the attackers as possible all at once, but at the risk of losing control of the situation. Musashi, however, was above all else a strategist, and he solved these dilemmas in the most rational way possible. He would place himself so that the men would have to come at him in a line or at an angle. Then he would focus on killing the first man and move swiftly down the line. Instead of being overwhelmed or trying too hard, he would break the band into parts. Then he just had to kill opponent number one, while leaving himself in position to deal with opponent number two and preventing his mind from being clouded and confused by the other attackers awaiting him. The effect was that he could retain his focus while keeping his opponents off balance, for as he proceeded down the line, they would become the ones who were intimidated and flustered.

Whether you are beset by many small problems or by one giant problem, make Musashi the model for your mental process. If you let the complexity of the situation confuse you and either hesitate or lash out without thought, you will

lose mental control, which will only add momentum to the negative force coming at you. Always divide up the issue at hand, first placing yourself in a central position, then proceeding down the line, killing off your problems one by one. It is often wise to begin with the smallest problem while keeping the most dangerous one at bay. Solving that one will help you create momentum, both physical and psychological, that will help you overwhelm all the rest.

The most important thing is to move quickly against your enemies, as the Athenians did at Marathon. Waiting for troubles to come to you will only multiply them and give them a deadly momentum.

Image: The Knot. It is large, hopelessly entangled, and seemingly impossible to unravel. The knot consists of thousands of smaller knots, all twisted and intertwined. Let time go by and the knot will get only worse. Instead of trying to pick it apart from this side or that, take up your sword and cut it in half with one blow. Once divided, it will come undone on its own.

Authority: In antiquity those who were referred to as excelling in the employment of the army were able to keep the enemy's forward and rear forces from connecting; the many and few from relying on each other; the noble and lowly from coming to each other's rescue; the upper and lower ranks from trusting each other; the troops to be separated, unable to reassemble, or when assembled, not to be well-ordered. —*Sun-tzu (fourth century B.C.)*

REVERSAL

Dividing your forces as a way of creating mobility can be a powerful strategy, as Napoleon demonstrated with his flexible system of corps, which let him hit his enemy unpredictably from many different angles. But to make his system work, Napoleon needed precise coordination of its parts and overall control over their movements--and his goal was ultimately to bring the parts together to strike a major blow. In guerrilla warfare a commander will disperse his forces to make

them harder to hit, but this, too, demands coordination: a guerrilla army cannot succeed if the parts are unable to communicate with each other. In general, any division of your forces must be temporary, strategic, and controlled.

THE PLOUGHMAN'S QUARRELSOME SONS

A ploughman's sons were always quarrelling. He scolded them to no avail--his words did nothing to change their ways. So he decided to teach them a practical lesson. He asked them to bring him a load of firewood. As soon as they had done this he gave a bundle to each and told them to break it all up for him. But, in spite of all their efforts, they were unable to do so. The ploughman therefore undid the bundles and handed each of his sons a stick at a time. These they broke without any trouble. "So!" said the father, "you too, my children, if you stay bound together, can be invincible to your enemies. But if you are divided you will be easy to defeat."

FABLES, AESOP, SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

In attacking a group in order to sow division, be careful that your blow is not too strong, for it can have the opposite effect, causing people to unite in times of great danger. That was Hitler's miscalculation during the London Blitz, his bombing campaign designed to push England out of World War II. Intended to demoralize the British public, the Blitz only made them more determined: they were willing to suffer short-term danger in order to beat him in the long run. This bonding effect was partly the result of Hitler's brutality, partly the phenomenon of a culture willing to suffer for the greater good.

Finally, in a divided world, power will come from keeping your own group united and cohesive, and your own mind clear and focused on your goals. The best way to maintain unity may seem to be the creation of enthusiasm and high morale, but while enthusiasm is important, in time it will naturally wane, and if you have come to depend on it, you will fail. Far greater defenses against the forces of division are knowledge and strategic thinking. No army or group can be divided if it is aware of the enemy's intentions and makes an intelligent response. As Samuel Adams discovered, strategy is your only dependable sword and shield.