

DESTROY FROM WITHIN

THE INNER-FRONT STRATEGY

A war can only really be fought against an enemy who shows himself. By infiltrating your opponents' ranks, working from within to bring them down, you give them nothing to see or react against--the ultimate advantage. From within, you also learn their weaknesses and open up possibilities of sowing internal dissension. So hide your hostile intentions. To take something you want, do not fight those who have it, but rather join them--then either slowly make it your own or wait for the moment to stage a coup d'etat. No structure can stand for long when it rots from within.

Athene now inspired Prylis, son of Hermes, to suggest that entry should be gained into Troy by means of a wooden horse; and Epeius, son of Panopeus, a Phocian from Parnassus, volunteered to build one under Athene's supervision. Afterwards, of course, Odysseus claimed all the credit for this stratagem..... [Epeius] built an enormous hollow horse of fir planks, with a trapdoor fitted into one flank, and large letters cut on the other which consecrated it to Athene: "In thankful anticipation of a safe return to their homes, the Greeks dedicate this offering to the Goddess." Odysseus persuaded the bravest of the Greeks to climb fully armed up a rope-ladder and through the trapdoor into the belly of the horse.... Among them were Menelaus, Odysseus, Diomedes, Sthenelus, Acamas, Thoas, and Neoptolemus. Coaxed, threatened, and bribed, Epeius himself joined the party. He climbed up last, drew the ladder in after him and, since he alone knew how to work the trapdoor, took his seat beside the lock. At nightfall, the remaining Greeks under Agamemnon followed Odysseus's instructions, which were to burn their camp, put out to sea and wait off Tenedos and the Calydnian Islands until the following evening..... At the break of day, Trojan scouts reported that the camp lay in ashes and that the Greeks had departed, leaving a huge horse on the seashore. Priam and several of his sons went out to view it and, as they stood staring in wonder, Thymoetes was the first to break the silence. "Since this is a gift to Athene," he said, "I propose that we take it into Troy and haul it up to her citadel." "No, no!" cried Capys. "Athene favoured the Greeks too long; we must either burn it at once or break it open

to see what the belly contains." But Priam declared: "Thymoetes is right. We will fetch it in on rollers. Let nobody desecrate Athene's property." The horse proved too broad to be squeezed through the gates. Even when the wall had been breached, it stuck four times. With enormous efforts the Trojans then hauled it up to the citadel; but at least took the precaution of repairing the breach behind them.... At midnight...Odysseus ordered Epeius to unlock the trapdoor.... Now the Greeks poured silently through the moonlit streets, broke into the unguarded houses, and cut the throats of the Trojans as they slept.

THE GREEK MYTHS, VOL. 2, ROBERT GRAVES, 1955

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY

Late in 1933, Adolf Hitler appointed the forty-six-year-old Rear Admiral Wilhelm Canaris chief of the Abwehr, the secret intelligence and counter-espionage service of the German General Staff. Hitler had recently won dictatorial powers as the ruler of Germany, and, with an eye on future conquests in Europe, he wanted Canaris to make the Abwehr an agency as efficient as the British Secret Service. Canaris was a slightly odd choice for the position. He came from the aristocracy, was not a member of the Nazi Party, and had not had a particularly outstanding military career. But Hitler saw traits in Canaris that would make him a superior spymaster: cunning in the extreme, a man made for intrigue and deception, he knew how to get results. He would also owe his promotion exclusively to Hitler.

In the years to come, Hitler would have reason to feel proud of his choice. Canaris rigorously reorganized the Abwehr and extended its spy networks throughout Europe. Then, in May 1940, he provided exceptional intelligence for the blitzkrieg invasion of France and the Low Countries early in World War II. And so, in the summer of that same year, Hitler gave Canaris his most important task to date: providing intelligence for Operation Sealion, a plan to conquer England. After the blitzkrieg and the evacuation of the Allied army at Dunkirk, the British seemed deeply vulnerable, and knocking them out of the war at this point would ensure Hitler's conquest of Europe.

A few weeks into the job, however, Canaris reported that the Germans had underestimated the size of the English army and air force. Sealion would require resources much larger than the Fuhrer had anticipated; unless Hitler was willing to commit many more troops, it could turn into a mess. This was highly disappointing news for Hitler, who had wanted to knock out England in one quick blow. With his eye on an imminent invasion of Russia, he was unwilling to commit large numbers to Sealion or to spend years subduing the British. Having come to trust Canaris, he abandoned the planned invasion.

That same summer General Alfred Jodl came up with a brilliant plan to damage England in another way: using Spain as a base of operations, he would invade the British-owned island of Gibraltar, cutting off England's sea routes through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal to its empire in India and points east--a disastrous blow. But the Germans would have to act fast, before the English caught on to the threat. Excited by the prospect of ruining England in this indirect way, Hitler once again asked Canaris to assess the plan. The Abwehr chief went to Spain, studied the situation, and reported back. The moment a German army moved into Spain, he said, the English would see the plan, and Gibraltar had elaborate defenses. The Germans would also need the cooperation of Francisco Franco, dictator of Spain, who Canaris believed would not be sufficiently helpful. In short: Gibraltar was not worth the effort.

There were many around Hitler who believed that taking Gibraltar was eminently realizable and could mean overall victory in the war against Britain. Shocked at Canaris's report, they vocally expressed their doubts about the intelligence he had been providing all along. His enigmatic nature--he spoke little and was impossible to read--only fueled their suspicions that he was not to be trusted. Hitler heard his staff out, but a meeting with Generalissimo Franco to discuss the Gibraltar plan indirectly corroborated everything Canaris had said. Franco was difficult and made all kinds of silly demands; the Spanish would be impossible to deal with; the logistics were too complicated. Hitler quickly lost interest in Jodl's plan.

In the years that followed, German officials in increasing numbers would come to suspect Canaris of disloyalty to the Third Reich, but no one could pin anything concrete on him. And Hitler himself had great faith in the Abwehr chief and sent him on critical top-secret missions. One such assignment occurred in the summer of 1943, when Marshal Pietro Badoglio, the former chief of the Italian General Staff, arrested Benito Mussolini, dictator of Italy and Hitler's staunchest ally. The Germans feared that Badoglio might secretly open talks with General Dwight D. Eisenhower for Italy's surrender--a devastating blow to the Axis that Hitler could forestall, if necessary, by sending an army to Rome, arresting Badoglio, and occupying the capital. But was it necessary?

Hitler's armies were needed elsewhere, so Canaris was dispatched to assess the likelihood of Italy's surrender. He met with his counterpart in the Italian government, General Cesare Ame, then arranged for a meeting between high-ranking members of both countries' intelligence services. At the meeting, Ame emphatically denied that Badoglio had any intention of betraying Germany; in fact, the marshal was fiercely loyal to the cause. And Ame was very convincing. Hitler accordingly left Italy alone. A few weeks later, however, Badoglio indeed

surrendered to Eisenhower, and the valuable Italian fleet moved into Allied hands. Canaris had been fooled--or was it Canaris who had done the fooling?

General Walter Schellenberg, chief of the foreign intelligence branch of the SS, began to investigate the Badoglio fiasco and found two men in Ame's service who had listened in on one of Canaris's talks with their boss. Canaris, they reported, had known of Badoglio's intentions to surrender all along and had collaborated with Ame to deceive Hitler. Surely this time the Abwehr chief had been caught in the act and would pay with his life. Schellenberg accumulated a thick dossier of other actions that cast more doubts on Canaris. He presented it to Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, who, however, told his subordinate to keep quiet--he would present the dossier to Hitler when the time was right. Yet, to Schellenberg's dismay, months went by and Himmler did nothing, except eventually to retire Canaris with honors from the service.

Shortly after Canaris's retirement, his diaries fell into the hands of the SS. They revealed that he had conspired against Hitler from the beginning of his service as Abwehr chief, even plotting to assassinate the Fuhrer in schemes that had only barely misfired. Canaris was sent to a concentration camp, where, in April 1945, he was tortured and killed.

Interpretation

Wilhelm Canaris was a devoutly patriotic and conservative man. In the earliest days of the Nazi Party's rise to power, he had come to believe that Hitler would lead his beloved Germany to destruction. But what could he do? He was just one man, and to raise his voice against Hitler would get him no more than a little publicity and an early death. Canaris cared only about results. So he kept quiet, and, when offered the job of Abwehr chief, he seized his opportunity. At first he bided his time, gaining credibility by his work in the Abwehr and getting to understand the inner workings of the Nazi government. Meanwhile he secretly organized a group of like-minded conspirators, the Schwarze Kapelle (Black Orchestra), who would hatch several plots to kill Hitler. From his position in the Abwehr, Canaris was to some extent able to protect the Schwarze Kapelle from investigation. He also quietly gathered intelligence on the dirtiest secrets of high-ranking Nazis like Himmler and let them know that any move against him would result in revelations that would ruin them.

Assigned to prepare for Operation Sealion, Canaris doctored the intelligence to make England look much more formidable than it was. Assigned to investigate an invasion of Gibraltar, he secretly told the Spanish that to let Germany use their country would spell disaster: Germany would never leave. Hence Franco's alienating treatment of Hitler. In both of these cases, Canaris

exploited Hitler's impatience for quick and easy victories to discourage him from ventures that could have easily and irrevocably turned the war in his favor. Finally, in the case of Badoglio, Canaris understood Hitler's weak spot--a paranoid concern with the loyalty of others--and coached Ame on how to appeal to this weakness and make a show of Italy's devotion to the Axis cause. The results of Canaris's work from the inside are astounding: one man played a major role in saving England, Spain, and Italy from disaster, arguably turning the tide of the war. The resources of the German war machine were essentially at his disposal, to disrupt and derail its efforts.

As the story of Canaris demonstrates, if there is something you want to fight or destroy, it is often best to repress your desire to act out your hostility, revealing your position and letting the other side know your intentions. What you gain in publicity, and perhaps in feeling good about expressing yourself openly, you lose in a curtailment of your power to cause real damage, particularly if the enemy is strong.

Instead the ultimate strategy is to seem to stay on the enemy side, burrowing deep into its heart. From there you can gather valuable information: weaknesses to attack, incriminating evidence to publicize. Here subtle maneuvers, like passing along false information or steering your opponent into a self-destructive policy, can have large effects--much larger than anything you could do from the outside. The enemy's powers become weapons you can use against it, a kind of turncoat armory at your disposal. It is hard for most people to imagine that someone who outwardly plays the part of a loyal supporter or friend can secretly be a foe. This makes your hostile intentions and maneuvers relatively easy to cloak. When you are invisible to the enemy, there is no limit to the destructive powers at your command.

Speak deferentially, listen respectfully, follow his command, and accord with him in everything. He will never imagine you might be in conflict with him.

Our treacherous measures will then be settled.

--Tai Kung, Six Secret Teachings (circa fourth century B.C.)

THE FRIENDLY TAKEOVER

In the summer of 1929, Andre Breton, the thirty-three-year-old leader of Paris's avant-garde surrealist movement, saw a private screening of a film called *Un Chien Andalou*. It was directed by a Spanish member of the group, Luis Bunuel, and its first image showed a man slicing open a woman's eye with a knife. This, Breton exclaimed, was the first surrealist film. *Un Chien Andalou* generated excitement in part because of the contribution to it of a new artist on the scene,

Salvador Dali, a friend and collaborator of Bunuel's. The director spoke highly to Breton of his fellow Spaniard, whose paintings, he said, could certainly be considered surrealist and whose personality was supremely peculiar. Soon others, too, were talking about Dali, discussing what he called his "paranoid-critical" method of painting: he delved deep into his dreams and unconscious and interpreted the images he found there, no matter what their content, in delirious detail. Dali still lived in Spain, but Breton was suddenly seeing his name everywhere he went. Then, in November 1929, the twenty-five-year-old Dali had his first major show in a Paris gallery, and Breton was transfixed by the images. He wrote of the exhibition, "For the first time the windows of the mind had opened wide."

The late 1920s were a difficult period for Breton. The movement he had founded some five years earlier was stagnating, its members constantly bickering over ideological points that bored Breton to tears. In truth, surrealism was on the verge of becoming passe. Perhaps Dali could offer the fresh blood it needed: his art, his ideas, and his provocative character might make surrealism something people talked about again. With all this in mind, Breton invited Dali into the movement, and the Spaniard happily accepted. Dali moved to Paris and established himself there.

For the next few years, Breton's strategy seemed to be working. Dali's scandalous paintings were the talk of Paris. His exhibitions caused riots. Suddenly everyone was interested in surrealism again, even younger artists. But by 1933, Breton was beginning to rue his inclusion of Dali. He had begun to get letters from the Spaniard expressing great interest in Hitler as a source of paranoiac inspiration. Only the surrealists, Dali felt, were capable of "saying pretty things on the subject" of Hitler; he even wrote of sexually charged dreams about Hitler. As news of Dali's infatuation with the Fuhrer spread within the movement, it provoked a great deal of argument. Many surrealists had communist sympathies and were disgusted by the Spanish artist's musings. To make matters worse, he included in one enormous painting an image of Lenin in a grotesque pose--exposing oversized buttocks (nine feet long), propped on a crutch. Many in the surrealist group admired Lenin; was Dali being deliberately provocative? After Breton told Dali he disliked this rendition of the human buttocks and anus, a delirious profusion of anus images suddenly began to populate the artist's paintings.

Throughout his revolutionary and missionary travels, Hasan [leader of the Nizari Ismailis] was searching for an impregnable fortress from which to conduct his resistance to the Seljuk empire. In about 1088, he finally chose

the castle of Alamut, built on a narrow ridge on a high rock in the heart of the Elburz Mountains in a region known as the Rudbar. The castle dominated an enclosed cultivated valley thirty miles long and three miles across at its widest, approximately six thousand feet above sea level. Several villages dotted the valley, and their inhabitants were particularly receptive to the ascetic piety of Hasan. The castle was accessible only with the greatest difficulty through a narrow gorge of the Alamut River.... Hasan employed a careful strategy to take over the castle, which had been granted to its current Shiite owner, named Mahdi, by the Seljuk sultan Malikshah. First, Hasan sent his trusted dai Husayn Qai-ni and two others to win converts in the neighboring villages. Next, many of the residents and soldiers of Alamut were secretly converted to Ismailism. Finally, in September 1090, Hasan himself was secretly smuggled into the castle. When Mahdi realized that Hasan had in fact quietly taken over his fortress, he left peacefully....

THE TEMPLARS AND THE ASSASSINS, JAMES WASSERMAN, 2001

By early 1934, Breton could stand no more, and he issued a statement, cosigned by several members, proposing Dali's expulsion from the surrealist group. The movement was split down the middle; Dali had both supporters and enemies. Finally a meeting was called to debate the issue. Dali had a fever and a sore throat; he came to the meeting wearing half a dozen layers of clothing and with a thermometer in his mouth. As Breton paced the room, listing the reasons for his banishment, Dali began to take off and put on his overcoat, jacket, and sweaters, trying to regulate his temperature. It was hard for anyone to pay attention to Breton.

Finally Dali was asked to respond. "I had painted both Lenin and Hitler on the basis of dreams," he said, the thermometer in his mouth making him spit many of his words. "Lenin's anamorphic buttock was not insulting, but the very proof of my fidelity to surrealism." He continued to put on and take off clothing. "All taboos are forbidden, or else a list has to be made of those to be observed, and let Breton formally state that the kingdom of surrealist poetry is nothing but a little domain used for the house arrest of those convicted felons placed under surveillance by the vice squad or the Communist Party."

The members of the circle were perplexed to say the least: Dali had turned their meeting into a kind of surrealist performance, both making fun of the creative freedom they advocated and claiming it for himself. He had also made them laugh. A vote to exclude him would only confirm the accusations he had leveled at them. For the time being, they decided to leave him alone, but in the meeting's aftermath it was clear that the surrealist movement was now more

divided than ever.

At the end of that year, Dali disappeared to New York. Word came back to Paris that he had completely conquered the art world in America, making surrealism the hottest movement around. In the years to come, he would actually emigrate to the United States, and his face would grace the cover of *Time* magazine. From New York his fame spread far, wide, and around the world. Meanwhile the surrealists themselves faded quietly from public view, marginalized by other art movements. In 1939, Breton, disgusted by his lack of control over Dali, finally expelled the Spanish artist from the group, but by then it hardly mattered: Dali himself had become synonymous with surrealism, and it would stay that way long after the surrealist movement had died.

Interpretation

Salvador Dali was an extremely ambitious man. Although he appeared eccentric to say the least, his diaries show the extent to which he applied strategy to get what he wanted. Languishing in Spain early on in his career, he saw the importance of capturing the Paris art world, the center of the modern-art movement, if he were to rise to the heights of fame. And if he were to make it in Paris, his name would have to be attached to some kind of movement--that would demonstrate his avant-garde status and give him free publicity. Considering the nature of his work and paranoiac-critical method, surrealism was the only logical choice. Of course it helped that Dali's good friend Bunuel was already a member of the group and that his lover, Gala, was also the wife of Paul Eluard, one of surrealism's principal authors and thinkers. Through Bunuel, Gala, and a few others (people Dali called "messengers" and "porters"), he spread his name strategically throughout Paris and aimed himself directly at Breton. In truth, Dali despised any kind of organized group and actively disliked Breton, but both could be useful to him. By insinuating his presence through others and suggesting that he was a surrealist *avant la lettre*, he cleverly managed to get Breton to invite him into the group.

Now, as a true surrealist, an official insider, Dali could continue to wage his insidious war. At first he made a show of being a loyal member of the group, the platform from which he spent several years winning over Paris with his striking paintings. The surrealists were grateful for the new life he had given them, but in reality he was using their name and presence to propel his career. Then, once his fame was secure, he proceeded to dynamite the group from the inside. The weaker the surrealists were internally, the more he could dominate them publicly. Dali deliberately chose Hitler and Lenin as images he knew would disgust many in the group. That would both bring out Breton's totalitarian side and cause a

major split among the members. Dali's "performance" at the meeting to expel him was a surrealist masterpiece in itself, and a strategic blow to any vestiges of group unity. Finally, when the movement was riven with division, he scampered off to New York to complete his campaign. Appropriating the seductive name of surrealism for himself, he would go down in history as its most famous member, far more famous than Breton.

It is hard to make your way in the world alone. Alliances can help, but if you are starting out, it is hard to get the right people interested in an alliance with you; there is nothing in it for them. The wisest strategy is often to join the group that can best serve your long-term interests, or the one with which you have the most affinity. Instead of trying to conquer this group from the outside, you burrow your way into it. As an insider you can gather valuable information about how it functions and particularly about its members' hypocrisies and weaknesses--knowledge you can use to wage insidious intraorganizational warfare. From the inside you can divide and conquer.

Remember: your advantage here is that, unlike the other members, you have no sentimental attachment to the group; your only allegiance is to yourself. That gives you the freedom you need to make the manipulative and destructive maneuvers that will propel you to the fore at the others' expense.

If you decide to wage a war for the total triumph of your individuality, you must begin by inexorably destroying those who have the greatest affinity with you.

--Salvador Dali (1904-1989)

KEYS TO WARFARE

The most common form of defense in old-fashioned warfare was the fortress or walled city, and military leaders strategized for centuries about how to take such structures. The fortress presented a simple problem: it was designed to be impenetrable, to require such an effort to take it that unless doing so was strategically essential, an army would tend to pass it by. The conventional strategy against the fortress was to scale or breach its walls, using siege engines and battering rams. Often that meant first besieging it, creating around it circles known as "lines of circumvallation and contravallation" that would prevent supplies and reinforcements from coming in and the defenders from leaving. The city's inhabitants would slowly starve and weaken, making it possible eventually to breach the walls and take the castle. These sieges tended to be quite long and bloody.

Over the centuries, however, certain enlightened strategists hit upon a

different way to bring down the walls. Their strategy was based on a simple premise: the apparent strength of the fortress is an illusion, for behind its walls are people who are trapped, afraid, even desperate. The city's leaders have essentially run out of options; they can only put their faith in the fortress's architecture. To lay siege to these walls is to mistake the appearance of strength for reality. If in fact the walls are hiding great weakness within, then the proper strategy is to bypass them and aim for the interior. This can be done literally, by digging tunnels beneath the walls, undermining their strength--a conventional military strategy. A better, more devious route is to infiltrate people inside them or to work with the city's disaffected inhabitants. This is known as "opening an inner front"--finding a group on the inside who will work on your behalf to spread discontent and will eventually betray the fortress into your hands, sparing you a long siege.

In late January 1968, the North Vietnamese launched the famous Tet Offensive against the South Vietnamese and American armies. Among their targets was Hue, the ancient capital of Vietnam and a city of great religious significance for the Vietnamese people. In the center of Hue is a massive fort called the Citadel, and within the Citadel is the Imperial Palace compound, the heart and soul of Hue. The Citadel has incredibly thick and high walls and is surrounded on all sides by water. In 1968 it was guarded by American soldiers and their allies. Yet the North Vietnamese were somehow able to take the Citadel with remarkable ease. They held it for several weeks, then disappeared from Hue as if by magic after a massive U.S. counterattack. The Citadel was unimportant to them as a physical or strategic possession; what they were after was the symbolism of being able to take it, showing the world that American invincibility was a myth.

The capture of the Citadel was a remarkable feat, and this is how it was done. Months before Tet, the North Vietnamese began to infiltrate men into the city and to organize those of their sympathizers who already lived in Hue and worked inside the Citadel. They got hold of detailed plans of the fortress, which allowed them to dig elaborate tunnels under its walls. They were also able to leave stockpiles of weapons at key points. During the Tet holiday, they infiltrated even more of their men into the city, dressed as peasants. Confederates inside the fortress helped them to overrun some of the guard posts and open the gates. Melting into the local population, they made it impossible for the Citadel's defenders to distinguish friend from foe. Finally, having reconnoitered the location of the concentrated command structure inside the Citadel, the North Vietnamese were able to take it out right away, leaving the defenders unable to communicate with one another. This created mass confusion, and in the process

the defense of the Citadel collapsed.

The North Vietnamese called this strategy the "blooming lotus." It has deep roots in Asian military thinking, and its applications go far beyond war. Instead of focusing on the enemy's formidable front, on capturing key points in the periphery of its defenses and finding a way through them (the traditional Western approach), the lotus strategy aims first and foremost at the center--the soft and vulnerable parts within. The goal is to funnel soldiers and confederates into this central area by whatever means possible and to attack it first in order to spread confusion. Rather than trying to penetrate defenses, it infiltrates them. This includes the minds of the enemy soldiers and officers--strategizing to get under their skin, to unbalance their reasoning powers, to soften them up from within. As with the lotus flower, everything unfolds from the center of the target.

To attack or to intervene. --We often make the mistake of actively opposing a tendency or party or age because we happen to have seen only its external side, its deliquescence or the "faults of its virtues" necessarily adhering to it--perhaps because we ourselves have participated in them to a marked degree. Then we turn our back on them and go off in an opposite direction; but it would be better if we sought out their good and strong side instead or evolved and developed it in ourself. It requires, to be sure, a more penetrating eye and a more favorable inclination to advance what is imperfect and evolving than to see through it in its imperfection and deny it.

HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN, FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, 1878

The basic principle here is that it is easiest to topple a structure--a wall, a group, a defensive mind--from the inside out. When something begins to rot or fall apart from within, it collapses of its own weight--a far better way to bring it down than ramming yourself against its walls. In attacking any group, the lotus strategist thinks first of opening an inner front. Confederates on the inside will provide valuable intelligence on the enemy's vulnerabilities. They will silently and subtly sabotage him. They will spread internal dissension and division. The strategy can weaken the enemy to the point where you can finish him off with a penetrating blow; it can also bring down the enemy in and of itself.

A variation on the lotus strategy is to befriend your enemies, worming your way into their hearts and minds. As your targets' friend, you will naturally learn their needs and insecurities, the soft interior they try so hard to hide. Their guard will come down with a friend. And even later on, when you play out your treacherous intentions, the lingering resonance of your friendship will still confuse them, letting you keep on manipulating them by toying with their

emotions or pushing them into overreactions. For a more immediate effect, you can try a sudden act of kindness and generosity that gets people to lower their defenses--the Trojan Horse strategy. (For ten long years, the Greeks battered the walls of Troy to no effect; the simple gift of a wooden horse let them sneak a few men into Troy and open the gates from within.)

The lotus strategy is widely applicable. When confronted by something difficult or thorny, do not be distracted or discouraged by its formidable outer appearance; think your way into the soft core, the center from which the problem blossoms. Perhaps the source of your problem is a particular person; perhaps it is yourself and your own stale ideas; perhaps it is the dysfunctional organization of a group. Knowing the problem's core gives you great power to change it from the inside out. Your first thought must always be to infiltrate to the center--whether in thought or in action--never to whale away at the periphery or just pound at the walls.

If there is someone on the inside whom you need to get rid of or thwart, the natural tendency is to consider conspiring with others in your group who feel the same way. In most conspiracies the goal is some large-scale action to topple the leader and seize power. The stakes are high, which is why conspiracies are so often difficult and dangerous. The main weakness in any conspiracy is usually human nature: the higher the number of people who are in on the plot, the higher the odds that someone will reveal it, whether deliberately or accidentally. As Benjamin Franklin said, "Three may keep a secret if two of them are dead." No matter how confident you may be of your fellow conspirators, you cannot know for certain what is going on in their minds--the doubts they may be having, the people they may be talking to.

A prince need trouble little about conspiracies when the people are well disposed, but when they are hostile and hold him in hatred, then he must fear everything and everybody.

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI, 1469-1527

There are a few precautions you can take. Keep the number of conspirators as small as possible. Involve them in the details of the plot only as necessary; the less they know, the less they have to blab. Revealing the schedule of your plan as late as possible before you all act will give them no time to back out. Then, once the plan is described, stick to it. Nothing sows more doubts in conspirators' minds than last-minute changes. Even given all this insurance, keep in mind that most conspiracies fail and, in their failure, create all kinds of unintended consequences. Even the successful plot to assassinate Julius Caesar led not to the

restoration of the Roman Republic, as the conspirators intended, but eventually to the undemocratic regime of the emperor Augustus. Too few conspirators and you lack the strength to control the consequences; too many and the conspiracy will be exposed before it bears fruit.

In destroying anything from within, you must be patient and resist the lure of large-scale, dramatic action. As Canaris showed, the placement of little wrenches in the machinery is just as destructive in the long run, and safer because harder to trace. Consider the ability to dissuade your opponents from acting aggressively or to make their plans misfire as a kind of battlefield victory, even if your triumph is surreptitious. A few such victories and your enemy will fall apart from within.

Finally, morale plays a crucial part in any war, and it is always wise to work to undermine the morale of the enemy troops. The Chinese call this "removing the firewood from under the cauldron." You can attempt this from the outside, through propaganda, but that often has the opposite effect, reinforcing the cohesion of soldiers and civilians in the face of an alien force trying to win them over. It is much more effective to find sympathizers within their ranks, who will spread discontent among them like a disease. When soldiers see those on their own side having doubts about the cause they are fighting for, they are generally demoralized and vulnerable to more disaffection. If their leaders overreact to this threat by punishing grumblers, they play into your hands, representing themselves as unjust and heavy-handed; if they leave the problem alone, it will only spread; and if they start to see enemies everywhere around them, their paranoia will cloud their strategic abilities. Using an inner front to spread dissension is often enough to give you the advantage you need to overwhelm the enemy.

Image: The Termite.
From deep within the
structure
of the house,
the termite silently
eats away at the wood,
its armies patiently
boring through beams
and supports. The
work goes unnoticed,
but not the result.

Authority: The worst [military policy is] to assault walled cities.... If your commander, unable to control his temper, sends your troops swarming at the walls, your casualties will be one in three and still you will not have

taken the city.... Therefore the expert in using the military subdues the enemy's forces without going to battle, takes the enemy's walled cities without launching an attack.

--Sun-tzu (fourth century B.C.)

REVERSAL

There are always likely to be disgruntled people in your own group who will be liable to turning against you from the inside. The worst mistake is to be paranoid, suspecting one and all and trying to monitor their every move. Your only real safeguard against conspiracies and saboteurs is to keep your troops satisfied, engaged in their work, and united by their cause. They will tend to police themselves and turn in any grumblers who are trying to foment trouble from within. It is only in unhealthy and decaying bodies that cancerous cells can take root.