KNOW HOW TO END THINGS

THE EXIT STRATEGY

You are judged in this world by how well you bring things to an end. A messy or incomplete conclusion can reverberate for years to come, ruining your reputation in the process. The art of ending things well is knowing when to stop, never going so far that you exhaust yourself or create bitter enemies that embroil you in conflict in the future. It also entails ending on the right note, with energy and flair. It is not a question of simply winning the war but the way you win it, the way your victory sets you up for the next round. The height of strategic wisdom is to avoid all conflicts and entanglements from which there are no realistic exits.

NO EXIT

For the most senior members of the Soviet Politburo--General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, KGB head Yuri Andropov, and Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov--the late 1960s and early '70s seemed a golden era. These men had survived the nightmare of the Stalin years and the bumbling reign of Khrushchev. Now, finally, there was some stability in the Soviet empire. Its satellite states in Eastern Europe were relatively docile, particularly after an uprising in Czechoslovakia in 1968 had been squashed. Its archnemesis, the United States, had received a black eye from the Vietnam War. And, most promising of all, the Russians had slowly been able to expand their influence in the Third World. The future looked bright.

> *If one overshoots the goal, one cannot hit it. If a bird will not come to its nest but flies higher and higher, it eventually falls into the hunter's net. He who in times of extraordinary salience of small things does not know how to call a halt, but restlessly seeks to press on and on, draws upon himself misfortune at the hands of gods and men, because he deviates from the order of nature.*
>
> *THE I CHING*, CHINA, CIRCA EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.

A key country in the Russians' plans for expansion was Afghanistan, on their southern border. Afghanistan was rich in natural gas and other minerals and had ports on the Indian Ocean; to make it a Soviet satellite would be a dream come true. The Russians had been insinuating themselves into the country since the 1950s, helping to train its army, building the Salang Highway from Kabul north to the Soviet Union, and trying to modernize this backward nation. All was going according to plan until the early to mid 1970s, when Islamic fundamentalism began to become a political force across Afghanistan. The Russians saw two dangers: first, that the fundamentalists would come to power and, seeing communism as godless and loathsome, would cut off ties with the Soviets; and second, that fundamentalist unrest would spill over from Afghanistan into the southern Soviet Union, which had a large Islamic population.

In 1978, to prevent such a nightmare scenario, Brezhnev secretly supported a coup that brought the Afghan Communist Party to power. But the Afghan Communists were hopelessly factionalized, and only after a long power struggle did a leader emerge: Hafizullah Amin, whom the Soviets distrusted. On top of that, the Communists were not popular in Afghanistan, and Amin resorted to the most brutal means to maintain his party's power. This only fed the fundamentalist cause. All around the country, insurgents--the mujahideen--began to rebel, and thousands of Afghan soldiers defected from the army to them.

By December 1979 the Communist government in Afghanistan was on the verge of collapse. In Russia the senior members of the Politburo met to discuss the crisis. To lose Afghanistan would be a devastating blow and a source of instability after so much progress had been made. They blamed Amin for their problems; he had to go. Ustinov proposed a plan: Repeating what the Soviets had done in quelling rebellions in Eastern Europe, he advocated a lightning strike by a relatively small Soviet force that would secure Kabul and the Salang Highway. Amin would then be ousted, and a Communist named Babrak Karmal would take his place. The Soviet army would assume a low profile, and the Afghan army would be beefed up to take over from it. During the course of some ten years, Afghanistan would be modernized and would slowly become a stable member of the Soviet Bloc. Blessed with peace and prosperity, the Afghan people would see the great benefits of socialism and embrace it.

A few days after the meeting, Ustinov presented his plan to the army's chief of staff, Nikolai Orgakov. Told that the invading army would not exceed 75,000 men, Orgakov was shocked: that force, he said, was far too small to secure the large, mountainous expanses of Afghanistan, a very different world from Eastern Europe. Ustinov countered that a giant invading force would generate bad

publicity for the Soviets in the Third World and would give the insurgents a rich target. Orgakov responded that the fractious Afghans had a tradition of suddenly uniting to throw out an invader--and that they were fierce fighters. Calling the plan reckless, he said it would be better to attempt a political solution to the problem. His warnings were ignored.

The plan was approved by the Politburo and on December 24 was put in motion. Some Red Army forces flew into Kabul while others marched down the Salang Highway. Amin was quietly taken away and killed while Karmal was shuffled into power. Condemnation poured in from all over the world, but the Soviets figured that would eventually die down--it usually did.

In February 1980, Andropov met with Karmal and instructed him on the importance of winning the support of the Afghan masses. Presenting a plan for that purpose, he also promised aid in money and expertise. He told Karmal that once the borders were secured, the Afghan army built up, and the people reasonably satisfied with the government, Karmal should politely *ask* the Soviets to leave.

> *Solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant (They create desolation and call it peace).*
>
> TACITUS, CIRCA A.D. 55-CIRCA 120

The invasion itself went more easily than the Soviets had expected, and for this military phase their leaders could confidently declare "mission accomplished." But within weeks of Andropov's visit, they had to adjust this assessment: the mujahideen were not intimidated by the Soviet army, as the Eastern Europeans had been. In fact, since the invasion their power only seemed to grow, their ranks swelling with both Afghan recruits and outsiders. Ustinov funneled more soldiers into Afghanistan and ordered a series of offensives in parts of the country that were sheltering the mujahideen. The Soviets' first major operation was that spring, when they moved into the Kunar Valley with heavy weaponry, leveling entire villages and forcing the inhabitants to flee to refugee camps in Pakistan. Having cleared the area of rebels, they withdrew.

A few weeks later, reports came in that the mujahideen had quietly returned to the Kunar Valley. All the Soviets had done was leave the Afghans more embittered and enraged, making it easier for the mujahideen to recruit. But what could the Soviets do? To let the rebels alone was to give the mujahideen the time and space to grow more dangerous, yet the army was too small to occupy whole regions. Its answer was to repeat its police operations again and again, but with more violence, hoping to intimidate the Afghans--but, as Orgakov had predicted,

this only emboldened them.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL:
still the fine's the crown; Whate'er the course, the end is the renown.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, 1564-1616

Ten thousand Muslims then marched through the mountain valleys upon Mecca. Muhammad divided his force into four columns.... Muhammad gave strict orders that no violence was to be used. His own tent was pitched on high ground immediately overlooking the town. Eight years before, he had fled from Mecca under cover of darkness, and lain hidden three days in a cave on Mount Thor, which from his tent he could now see rising beyond the city. Now ten thousand warriors were ready to obey his least command and his native town lay helpless at his feet. After a brief rest, he remounted his camel and entered the town, reverently touched the black stone and performed the seven ritual circuits of the kaaba.... Muhammad the Conqueror was not vindictive. A general amnesty was proclaimed, from which less than a dozen persons were excluded, only four being actually executed. Ikrima, the son of Abu Jahal, escaped to the Yemen, but his wife appealed to the Apostle, who agreed to forgive him.... The Muslim occupation of Mecca was thus virtually bloodless. The fiery Khalid ibn al Waleed killed a few people at the southern gate and was sharply reprimanded by Muhammad for doing so. Although the Apostle had himself been persecuted in the city and although many of his bitterest opponents were still living there, he won all hearts by his clemency on his day of triumph. Such generosity, or statesmanship, was particularly remarkable among Arabs, a race to whom revenge has always been dear. His success had been won by policy and diplomacy rather than by military action. In an age of violence and bloodshed, he had realized that ideas are more powerful than force.

THE GREAT ARAB CONQUESTS, JOHN BAGOT GLUBB, 1963

Meanwhile Karmal initiated programs to teach literacy, to give more power to women, to develop and modernize the country--all to peel off support from the rebels. But the Afghans preferred their traditional way of life by a vast majority, and the Communist Party's attempts to expand its influence had the opposite effect.

Most ominous of all, Afghanistan quickly became a magnet for other countries eager to exploit the situation there against the Soviets. The United States in particular saw an opportunity to revenge itself on Russia for supplying

the North Vietnamese during the Vietnam War. The CIA funneled vast sums of money and materiel to the mujahideen. In neighboring Pakistan, President Zia ul-Haq viewed the invasion as a gift from heaven: having come to power a few years earlier in a military coup, and having recently earned worldwide condemnation by executing his prime minister, Zia saw a way to gain favor with both the United States and the Arab nations by allowing Pakistan to serve as a base for the mujahideen. The Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, who had recently signed a controversial peace treaty with Israel, likewise saw a golden opportunity to shore up his Islamic support by sending aid to fellow Muslims.

With Soviet armies stretched thin in Eastern Europe and around the world, Ustinov refused to send in more men; instead he armed his soldiers with the latest weaponry and worked to enlarge and strengthen the Afghan army. But none of this translated into progress. The mujahideen improved their ambushes of Soviet transports and used the latest Stinger missiles acquired from the Americans to great effect. Years passed, and morale in the Soviet army dropped precipitously: the soldiers felt the hatred of the local population and were stuck guarding static positions, never knowing when the next ambush would come. Abuse of drugs and alcohol became widespread.

As the costs of the war rose, the Russian public began to turn against it. But the Soviet leaders could not afford to pull out: besides creating a dangerous power vacuum in Afghanistan, that would deliver a sharp blow to their global reputation as a superpower. And so they stayed, each year supposedly the last. The senior members of the Politburo slowly died off--Brezhnev in 1982, Andropov and Ustinov in 1984--without seeing the slightest progress.

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Soviet Union. Having opposed the war from the beginning, Gorbachev started phased withdrawals of troops from Afghanistan. The last soldiers left early in 1989. In all, over 14,000 Soviet soldiers died in the conflict, but the hidden costs--to the delicate Russian economy, to the people's slender faith in their government--were far greater. Only a few years later, the entire system would come tumbling down.

Interpretation

The great German general Erwin Rommel once made a distinction between a gamble and a risk. Both cases involve an action with only a chance of success, a chance that is heightened by acting with boldness. The difference is that with a risk, if you lose, you can recover: your reputation will suffer no long-term damage, your resources will not be depleted, and you can return to your original position with acceptable losses. With a gamble, on the other hand, defeat can

lead to a slew of problems that are likely to spiral out of control. With a gamble there tend to be too many variables to complicate the picture down the road if things go wrong. The problem goes further: if you encounter difficulties in a gamble, it becomes harder to pull out--you realize that the stakes are too high; you cannot afford to lose. So you try harder to rescue the situation, often making it worse and sinking deeper into a hole that you cannot get out of. People are drawn into gambles by their emotions: they see only the glittering prospects if they win and ignore the ominous consequences if they lose. Taking risks is essential; gambling is foolhardy. It can be years before you recover from a gamble, if you recover at all.

The invasion of Afghanistan was a classic gamble. The Soviets were drawn in by the irresistible lure of possessing a client state in the region. Dazzled by that prospect, they ignored the reality: the mujahideen and outside powers had too much at stake to ever allow the Soviets to leave behind a secure Afghanistan. There were too many variables beyond their control: the actions of the United States and Pakistan, the mountainous border areas impossible to seal off, and more. An occupying army in Afghanistan involved a double bind: the larger the military presence, the more it would be hated, and the more it was hated, the larger it would have to be to protect itself, and so on indefinitely.

Yet the Soviets took their gamble and made their mess. Now, too late, they realized that the stakes had been raised: to pull out--to lose--would be a devastating blow to their prestige. It would mean the expansion of American interests and a cancerous insurgency on their border. Since they should never have invaded in the first place, they had no rational exit strategy. The best they could do would be to cut their losses and run--but that is nearly impossible with a gamble, for gambling is governed by emotions, and once the emotions are engaged, it is difficult to retreat.

The worst way to end anything--a war, a conflict, a relationship--is slowly and painfully. The costs of such an ending run deep: loss of self-confidence, unconscious avoidance of conflict the next time around, the bitterness and animosity left breeding--it is all an absurd waste of time. Before entering any action, you must calculate in precise terms your exit strategy. How exactly will the engagement end, and where it will leave you? If the answers to those questions seem vague and full of speculation, if success seems all too alluring and failure somewhat dangerous, you are more than likely taking a gamble. Your emotions are leading you into a situation that could end up a quagmire.

Before that happens, catch yourself. And if you do find you have made this mistake, you have only two rational solutions: either end the conflict as quickly as you can, with a strong, violent blow aimed to win, accepting the costs and

knowing they are better than a slow and painful death, or cut your losses and quit without delay. Never let pride or concern for your reputation pull you farther into the morass; both will suffer far greater blows by your persistence. Short-term defeat is better than long-term disaster. Wisdom is knowing when to end.

Aut non tentaris, aut perfice (Either don't attempt it, or carry it through to the end).

OVID, 43 B.C.-A.D. 17

To go too far is as bad as to fall short.
--Confucius (551?-479 B.C.)

ENDING AS BEGINNING

As a young man, Lyndon B. Johnson had just one dream: to climb the ladder of politics and become president. When Johnson was in his mid-twenties, the goal was starting to seem unreachable. A job as the secretary of a Texas congressman had allowed him to meet and make an impression on President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had named him the Texas director of the National Youth Administration, a post promising excellent political connections. But Texas voters were extremely loyal, often returning congressmen to their seats for decades, or until they died. Johnson urgently wanted a seat in Congress. If he did not get one soon enough, he would be too old to climb the ladder, and he burned with ambition.

On February 22, 1937, out of the blue, the chance of a lifetime opened up: the Texas congressman James Buchanan suddenly died. The seat he left empty, that of Texas's Tenth District, was a rare opportunity, and the state's eligible political heavyweights immediately threw their hats in the ring. The many contenders included Sam Stone, a popular county judge; Shelton Polk, an ambitious young Austin attorney; and C. N. Avery, Buchanan's former campaign manager, the favorite to win. Avery had the support of Tom Miller, mayor of Austin, the Tenth District's only large city. With Miller's backing he could count on almost enough votes to win the election.

Johnson was faced with a terrible predicament. If he entered the race, the odds would be absurdly against him: he was young--only twenty-eight--and in the district he was unknown and poorly connected. A bad loss would damage his reputation and set him far back on the road to his long-term goal. If he chose not to run, on the other hand, he might wait ten years for another chance. With all

this in mind, he threw caution to the winds and entered the race.

> *Indeed, deepening study of past experience leads to the conclusion that nations might often have come nearer to their object by taking advantage of a lull in the struggle to discuss a settlement than by pursuing the war with the aim of "victory." History reveals, also, that in many cases a beneficial peace could have been obtained if the statesmen of the warring nations had shown more understanding of the elements of psychology in their peace "feelers." Their attitude has commonly been too akin to that seen in the typical domestic quarrel; each party is afraid to appear yielding, with the result that when one of them shows any inclination towards conciliation this is usually expressed in language that is too stiff, while the other is apt to be slow to respond--partly from pride or obstinacy and partly from a tendency to interpret such a gesture as a sign of weakening when it may be a sign of returning common sense. Thus the fateful moment passes, and conflict continues--to the common damage. Rarely does a continuation serve any good purpose where the two parties are bound to go on living under the same roof. This applies even more to modern war than to domestic conflict, since the industrialization of nations has made their fortunes inseparable.*
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> *STRATEGY,* B. H. LIDDELL HART, 1954

Johnson's first step was to call to his side the dozens of young men and women whom he had helped or hired over the years. His campaign strategy was simple: he would separate himself from the other contenders by presenting himself as Roosevelt's staunchest supporter. A vote for Johnson was a vote for the president, the popular architect of the New Deal. And since Johnson could not compete in Austin, he decided to aim his army of volunteers at the countryside, the sparsely populated Hill Country. This was the district's poorest area, a place where candidates rarely ventured. Johnson wanted to meet every last farmer and sharecropper, shake every possible hand, win the votes of people who had never voted before. It was the strategy of a desperate man who recognized that this was his best and only chance for victory.

One of Johnson's most loyal followers was Carroll Keach, who would serve as his chauffeur. Together the two men drove every square mile of the Hill Country, tracing every dirt path and cow trail. Spotting some out-of-the-way farmhouse, Johnson would get out of the car, walk to the door, introduce himself to the startled inhabitants, listen patiently to their problems, then leave with a hearty handshake and a gentle plea for their vote. Convening meetings in dusty towns consisting mainly of a church and a gas station, he would deliver his

speech, then mingle with the audience and spend at least a few minutes with everyone present. He had an incredible memory for faces and names: if he happened to meet the same person twice, he could recall everything he or she had said the first time around, and he often impressed strangers by knowing someone who knew them. He listened intensely and was always careful to leave people with the feeling that they would see him again, and that if he won they would finally have someone looking out for their interests in Washington. In bars, grocery stores, and gas stations all through the Hill Country, he would talk with the locals as if he had nothing else to do. On leaving he would make sure to buy something--candy, groceries, gasoline--a gesture they greatly appreciated. He had the gift of creating a connection.

As the race ran on, Johnson went days without sleep, his voice turning hoarse, his eyes drooping. As Keach drove the length of the district, he would listen in amazement as the exhausted candidate in the car muttered to himself about the people he had just met, the impression he had made, what he could have done better. Johnson never wanted to seem desperate or patronizing. It was that last handshake and look in the eye that mattered.

The polls were deceptive: they continued to show Johnson behind, but he knew he had won votes that no poll would register. And in any case he was slowly catching up--by the last week he had crept into third place. Now, suddenly, the other candidates took notice. The election turned nasty: Johnson was attacked for his youth, for his blind support of Roosevelt, for anything that could be dug up. Trying to win a few votes in Austin, Johnson came up against the political machine of Mayor Miller, who disliked him and did everything possible to sabotage his campaign. Undeterred, Johnson personally visited the mayor several times in that last week to broker some kind of truce. But Miller saw through his charm. His personal appeal might have won over the district's poorest voters, but the other candidates saw a different side of him: he was ruthless and capable of slinging mud. As he rose in the polls, he made more and more enemies.

> *If you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no thought for the after-effect, you may be too exhausted to profit by the peace, while it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing the germs of another war. This is a lesson supported by abundant experience.*
>
> *STRATEGY*, B. H. LIDDELL HART, 1954

On Election Day, Johnson pulled off one of the greatest upsets in American political history, outdistancing his nearest rival by three thousand votes.

Exhausted by the grueling pace he had set, he was hospitalized, but the day after his victory he was back at work--he had something extremely important to do. From his hospital bed, Johnson dictated letters to his rivals in the race. He congratulated them for running a great campaign; he also described his own victory as a fluke, a vote for Roosevelt more than for himself. Learning that Miller was visiting Washington, Johnson telegraphed his connections in the city to chaperone the mayor and treat him like royalty. As soon as Johnson left the hospital, he paid visits to his rivals and acted with almost embarrassing humility. He even befriended Polk's brother, driving him around town to run errands.

A mere eighteen months later, Johnson had to stand for reelection, and these onetime opponents and bitter enemies suddenly turned into the most fervent Johnson believers, donating money, even campaigning on his behalf. And Mayor Miller, the one man who had hated Johnson the most, now became his strongest supporter and remained so for years to come.

Interpretation

For most of us, the conclusion of anything--a project, a campaign, an attempt at persuasion--represents a kind of wall: our work is done, and it is time to tally our gains and losses and move on. Lyndon Johnson looked at the world much differently: an ending was not like a wall but more like a door, leading to the next phase or battle. What mattered to him was not gaining a victory but where it left him, how it opened onto the next round. What good would it do to win the election of 1937 if he were thrown out of office eighteen months later? That would be a devastating setback to his dream of the presidency. If, after the election, he had basked in his moment of triumph, he would have sown the seeds of failure in the next election. He had made too many enemies--if they didn't run against him in 1938, they would stir up trouble while he was away in Washington. So Johnson immediately worked to win these men over, whether with charm, with meaningful gestures, or with clever appeals to their self-interest. He kept his eye on the future, and on the kind of success that would keep him moving forward.

> *It is even possible that the attacker, reinforced by the psychological forces peculiar to attack, will in spite of his exhaustion find it less difficult to go on than to stop--like a horse pulling a load uphill. We believe that this demonstrates without inconsistency how an attacker can overshoot the point at which, if he stopped and assumed the defensive, there would still be a chance of success--that is, of equilibrium. It is therefore important to calculate this point correctly when planning the campaign. An attacker may*

otherwise take on more than he can manage and, as it were, get into debt; a defender must be able to recognize this error if the enemy commits it, and exploit it to the full. In reviewing the whole array of factors a general must weigh before making his decision, we must remember that he can gauge the direction and value of the most important ones only by considering numerous other possibilities--some immediate, some remote. He must guess, *so to speak: guess whether the first shock of battle will steel the enemy's resolve and stiffen his resistance, or whether, like a Bologna flask, it will shatter as soon as its surface is scratched; guess the extent of debilitation and paralysis that the drying-up of the particular sources of supply and the severing of certain lines of communication will cause in the enemy; guess whether the burning pain of the injury he has been dealt will make the enemy collapse with exhaustion or, like a wounded bull, arouse his rage; guess whether the other powers will be frightened or indignant, and whether and which political alliances will be dissolved or formed. When we realize that he must hit upon all this and much more by means of his discreet judgement, as a marks-man hits a target, we must admit that such an accomplishment of the human mind is no small achievement. Thousands of wrong turns running in all directions tempt his perception; and if the range, confusion and complexity of the issues are not enough to overwhelm him, the dangers and responsibilities may. This is why the great majority of generals will prefer to stop well short of their objective rather than risk approaching it too closely, and why those with high courage and an enterprising spirit will often overshoot it and so fail to attain their purpose. Only the man who can achieve great results with limited means has really hit the mark.*

ON WAR, CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ, 1780-1831

Johnson used the same approach in his efforts to win over voters. Instead of trying to persuade people to support him with speeches and fancy words (he was not a good orator anyway), he focused on the feeling he left people with. He knew that persuasion is ultimately a process of the emotions: words can sound nice, but if a politician leaves people suspecting him of being insincere, of merely plugging for votes, they will close off to him and forget him. So Johnson worked to establish an emotional connection with voters, and he would close his conversations with them with a hearty handshake and with a look in his eye, a tremor in his voice, that sealed the bond between them. He left them feeling that they would see him again, and he stirred emotions that would erase any suspicion he might be insincere. The end of the conversation was in fact a kind of beginning, for it stayed in their minds and translated into votes.

Understand: in any venture, your tendency to think in terms of winning or losing, success or failure, is dangerous. Your mind comes to a stop, instead of looking ahead. Emotions dominate the moment: a smug elation in winning, dejection and bitterness in losing. What you need is a more fluid and strategic outlook on life. Nothing ever really ends; how you finish something will influence and even determine what you do next. Some victories are negative--they lead nowhere--and some defeats are positive, working as a wake-up call or lesson. This fluid kind of thinking will force you to put more strategic emphasis on the quality and mood of the ending. It will make you look at your opponents and decide whether you might do better to be generous to them at the end, taking a step back and transforming them into allies, playing on the emotions of the moment. Keeping your eyes on the aftermath of any encounter, you will think more of the feeling you leave people with--a feeling that might translate into a desire to see more of you. By understanding that any victory or defeat is temporary, and that what matters is what you do with them, you will find it easier to keep yourself balanced during the thousands of battles that life entails. The only real ending is death. Everything else is a transition.

> *As Yasuda Ukyo said about offering up the last wine cup, only the end of things is important. One's whole life should be like this. When guests are leaving, the mood of being reluctant to say farewell is essential.*
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> --*Yamamoto Tsunetomo,* Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai *(1659-1720)*

KEYS TO WARFARE

There are three kinds of people in the world. First, there are the dreamers and talkers, who begin their projects with a burst of enthusiasm. But this burst of energy quickly peters out as they encounter the real world and the hard work needed to bring any project to an end. They are emotional creatures who live mainly in the moment; they easily lose interest as something new grabs their attention. Their lives are littered with half-finished projects, including some that barely make it beyond a daydream.

Then there are those who bring whatever they do to a conclusion, either because they have to or because they can manage the effort. But they cross the finish line with distinctly less enthusiasm and energy than they had starting out. This mars the end of the campaign. Because they are impatient to finish, the ending seems hurried and patched together. And it leaves other people feeling slightly unsatisfied; it is not memorable, does not last, has no resonance.

Both of these types begin each project without a firm idea of how to end it. And as the project progresses, inevitably differing from what they had imagined it would be, they become unsure how to get out of it and either give up or simply rush to the end.

> *The great prizefighter Jack Dempsey was once asked, "When you are about to hit a man, do you aim for his chin or his nose?" "Neither," Dempsey replied. "I aim for the back of his head."*
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> QUOTED IN *THE MIND OF WAR*, GRANT T. HAMMOND, 2001

The third group comprises those who understand a primary law of power and strategy: the end of something--a project, a campaign, a conversation--has inordinate importance for people. It resonates in the mind. A war can begin with great fanfare and can bring many victories, but if it ends badly, that is all anyone remembers. Knowing the importance and the emotional resonance of the ending of anything, people of the third type understand that the issue is not simply finishing what they have started but finishing it well--with energy, a clear head, and an eye on the afterglow, the way the event will linger in people's minds. These types invariably begin with a clear plan. When setbacks come, as setbacks will, they are able to stay patient and think rationally. They plan not just to the end but past it, to the aftermath. These are the ones who create things that last--a meaningful peace, a memorable work of art, a long and fruitful career.

The reason it is hard to end things well is simple: endings inspire overpowering emotions. At the end of a bitter conflict, we have a deep desire for peace, an impatience for the truce. If the conflict is bringing us victory, we often succumb to delusions of grandeur or are swept by greed and grab for more than we need. If the conflict has been nasty, anger moves us to finish with a violent, punitive strike. If we lose, we are left with a burning desire for revenge. Emotions like these can ruin all of our prior good work. There is in fact nothing harder in the realm of strategy than keeping our head on straight all the way to the end and past the end--yet nothing is more necessary.

Napoleon Bonaparte was perhaps the greatest general that ever lived. His strategies were marvels of combined flexibility and detail, and he planned all the way to the end. But after defeating the Austrians at Austerlitz and then the Prussians at Jena-Auerstadt--his two greatest victories--he imposed on these nations harsh terms intended to make them weakened satellites of France. Accordingly, in the years after the treaties, both countries harbored a powerful desire for revenge. They secretly built up their armies and waited for the day when Napoleon would be vulnerable. That moment came after his disastrous

retreat from Russia in 1812, when they pounced on him with horrible fervor.

Napoleon had allowed petty emotion--the desire to humiliate, revenge himself, and force obedience--to infect his strategy. Had he stayed focused on his long-term interests, he would have known that it was better to weaken Prussia and Austria psychologically rather than physically--to seduce them with apparently generous terms, transforming them into devoted allies instead of resentful satellites. Many in Prussia had initially seen Napoleon as a great liberator. Had he only kept Prussia as a happy ally, he would have survived the debacle in Russia and there would have been no Waterloo.

Learn the lesson well: brilliant plans and piled-up conquests are not enough. You can become the victim of your own success, letting victory seduce you into going too far, creating hard-bitten enemies, winning the battle but losing the political game after it. What you need is a strategic third eye: the ability to stay focused on the future while operating in the present and ending your actions in a way that will serve your interests for the next round of war. This third eye will help you counteract the emotions that can insidiously infect your clever strategies, particularly anger and the desire for revenge.

> *Victory seems to have been achieved. There remains merely a remnant of the evil resolutely to be eradicated as the time demands. Everything looks easy. Just there, however, lies the danger. If we are not on guard, evil will succeed in escaping by means of concealment, and when it has eluded us new misfortunes will develop from the remaining seeds, for evil does not die easily.*

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

The critical question in war is knowing when to stop, when to make your exit and come to terms. Stop too soon and you lose whatever you might have gained by advancing; you allow too little time for the conflict to show you where it is heading. Stop too late and you sacrifice your gains by exhausting yourself, grabbing more than you can handle, creating an angry and vengeful enemy. The great philosopher of war Carl von Clausewitz analyzed this problem, discussing what he called "the culminating point of victory"--the optimum moment to end the war. To recognize the culminating point of victory, you must know your own resources, how much you can handle, the morale of your soldiers, any signs of a slackening effort. Fail to recognize that moment, keep fighting past it, and you bring on yourself all kinds of unwanted consequences: exhaustion, escalating

cycles of violence, and worse.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Japanese watched as Russia made advances into China and Korea. In 1904, hoping to stem Russian expansion, they launched a surprise attack on the Russian-held town of Port Arthur, on the coast of Manchuria. Since they were clearly the smaller country and had fewer military resources, they hoped that a quick offensive would work in their favor. The strategy--the brainchild of Baron Gentaro Kodama, vice chief of Japan's general staff--was effective: by stealing the initiative, the Japanese were able to bottle up the Russian fleet at Port Arthur while they landed armies in Korea. That allowed them to defeat the Russians in key battles on land and at sea. Momentum was clearly on their side.

In April 1905, however, Kodama began to see great danger in his own success. Japan's manpower and resources were limited; Russia's were vast. Kodama convinced the Japanese leaders to consolidate the gains they had made and sue for peace. The Treaty of Portsmouth, signed later that year, granted Russia more-than-generous terms, but Japan solidified its position: the Russians moved out of Manchuria and Korea and left Port Arthur to Japan. Had the Japanese been carried along by their momentum, they would surely have passed the culminating point of victory and had all their gains wiped out by the inevitable counterattack.

On the other side of the scale, the Americans ended the Gulf War of 1991 too soon, allowing much of the Iraqi army to escape its encirclement. That left Saddam Hussein still strong enough to brutally put down the Shiite and Kurdish uprisings that erupted after his defeat in Kuwait and to hang on to power. The allied forces were held back from completing the victory by their desire not to appear to be beating up on an Arab nation and by the fear of a power vacuum in Iraq. Their failure to finish led to far greater violence in the long run.

Imagine that everything you do has a moment of perfection and fruition. Your goal is to end your project there, at such a peak. Succumb to tiredness, boredom, or impatience for the end and you fall short of that peak. Greed and delusions of grandeur will make you go too far. To conclude at this moment of perfection, you must have the clearest possible sense of your goals, of what you really want. You must also command an in-depth knowledge of your resources--how far can you practicably go? This kind of awareness will give you an intuitive feel for the culminating point.

> *CENTCOM's lightning war* [*Desert Storm*] *was over. It had been billed as a 100-hour blitz, but three years later it was still an unfinished war. Recalled Gordon Brown, the foreign service officer who served as Schwarzkopf's chief*

foreign policy advisor at CENTCOM, "We never did have a plan to terminate the war."

THE GENERAL'S WAR: THE INSIDE STORY OF THE CONFLICT IN THE GULF, MICHAEL R. GORDON AND GENERAL BERNARD E. TRAINOR, 1995

Endings in purely social relationships demand a sense of the culminating point as much as those in war. A conversation or story that goes on too long always ends badly. Overstaying your welcome, boring people with your presence, is the deepest failing: you should leave them wanting more of you, not less. You can accomplish this by bringing the conversation or encounter to an end a moment before the other side expects it. Leave too soon and you may seem timid or rude, but do your departure right, at the peak of enjoyment and liveliness (the culminating point), and you create a devastatingly positive afterglow. People will still be thinking of you long after you are gone. In general, it is always best to end with energy and flair, on a high note.

Victory and defeat are what you make of them; it is how you deal with them that matters. Since defeat is inevitable in life, you must master the art of losing well and strategically. First, think of your own mental outlook, how you absorb defeat psychologically. See it as a temporary setback, something to wake you up and teach you a lesson, and even as you lose, you end on a high note and with an edge: you are mentally prepared to go on the offensive in the next round. So often, those who have success become soft and imprudent; you must welcome defeat as a way to make yourself stronger.

Second, you must see any defeat as a way to demonstrate something positive about yourself and your character to other people. This means standing tall, not showing signs of bitterness or becoming defensive. Early in his term as president, John F. Kennedy embroiled the country in the Bay of Pigs fiasco, a failed invasion of Cuba. While he accepted full responsibility for the debacle, he did not overdo his apologies; instead he went to work on correcting the mistake, making sure it would not happen again. He kept his composure, showing remorse but also strength. In doing so he won public and political support that helped him immensely in his future fights.

Third, if you see that defeat is inevitable, it is often best to go down swinging. That way you end on a high note even as you lose. This helps to rally the troops, giving them hope for the future. At the Battle of the Alamo in 1836, every last American fighting the Mexican army died--but they died heroically, refusing to surrender. The battle became a rallying cry--"Remember the Alamo!"--and an inspired American force under Sam Houston finally defeated

the Mexicans for good. You do not have to experience physical martyrdom, but a display of heroism and energy makes defeat into a moral victory that will soon enough translate into a concrete one. Planting the seeds of future victory in present defeat is strategic brilliance of the highest order.

> *Knowing how to end. Masters of the first rank are recognized by the fact that in matters great and small they know how to find an end perfectly, be it at the end of a melody or a thought; of a tragedy's fifth act or an act of state. The best of the second rank always get restless toward the end, and do not fall into the sea with such proud and calm balance as do, for example, the mountains at Portofino--where the bay of Genoa finishes its melody.*
>
> *THE GAY SCIENCE,* FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, 1882

Finally, since any ending is a kind of beginning of the next phase, it is often wise strategy to end on an ambivalent note. If you are reconciling with an enemy after a fight, subtly hint that you still have a residue of doubt--that the other side must still prove itself to you. When a campaign or project comes to an end, leave people feeling that they cannot foresee what you will do next--keep them in suspense, toying with their attention. By ending on a note of mystery and ambiguity--a mixed signal, an insinuating comment, a touch of doubt--you gain the upper hand for the next round in a most subtle and insidious fashion.

Authority: To conquer is nothing. One must profit from one's success.

--Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

REVERSAL

There can be no value in ending anything badly. There is no reversal.