ENVELOP THE ENEMY

THE ANNIHILATION STRATEGY

People will use any kind of gap in your defenses to attack you or revenge themselves on you. So offer no gaps. The secret is to envelop your opponents--create relentless pressure on them from all sides, dominate their attention, and close off their access to the outside world. Make your attacks unpredictable to create a vaporous feeling of vulnerability. Finally, as you sense their weakening resolve, crush their willpower by tightening the noose. The best encirclements are psychological--you have surrounded their minds.

THE HORNS OF THE BEAST

In December 1878 the British declared war on the Zulus, the warrior tribe of present-day South Africa. The rather flimsy pretext was border troubles between Zululand and the British state of Natal; the real aim was to destroy the Zulu army, the last remaining native force threatening British interests in the area, and to absorb Zulu territories into a British-run confederation of states. The British commander, Lieutenant General Lord Chelmsford, drafted a plan to invade Zululand with three columns, the central one aimed at the capital of Ulundi, the heart of the kingdom.

> *Legend has it that Shaka altered the nature of fighting in the region for ever, by inventing a heavy, broad-bladed spear designed to withstand the stresses of close-quarter combat. Perhaps he did: certainly both Zulu sources and the accounts of white travellers and officials in the nineteenth century credit him with this achievement.... His military innovations made an impact on Zulu folklore, if nothing else, for Shaka certainly developed fighting techniques to an unprecedented degree, and there is a wealth of stories concerning his prowess as a warrior: he may, indeed, have been one of the great military geniuses of his age. In place of the loose skirmishing tactics with light throwing spears, Shaka trained his warriors to advance rapidly in tight formations and engage hand-to-hand, battering the enemy with larger war-shields, then skewering their foes with the new spear as they were thrown off balance. If the results are anything to judge by, Shaka's capacity for conquest must have been dramatic. By 1824 the Zulus had eclipsed all their rivals, and*

had extended their influence over an area many times larger than their original homeland.

THE ANATOMY OF THE ZULU ARMY, IAN KNIGHT, 1995

Many Englishmen in Natal were thrilled at the prospect of war and at the potential benefits of taking over Zululand, but no one was as excited as forty-eight-year-old Colonel Anthony William Durnford. For years Durnford had bounced from one lonely British Empire outpost to another, finally ending up in Natal. In all his years of military service, Durnford had not once seen action. He yearned to prove his valor and worth as a soldier, but he was approaching the age when such youthful dreams could no longer be fulfilled. Now, suddenly, the impending war was sending the opportunity his way.

Eager to impress, Durnford volunteered to organize an elite force of native soldiers from Natal to fight alongside the British. His offer was accepted, but as the British invaded Zululand in early January 1879, he found himself cut out of the main action. Lord Chelmsford did not trust him, thinking his hunger for glory made him impetuous; also, for someone with no battle experience, he was old. So Durnford and his company were stationed at Rorke's Drift, in western Zululand, to help monitor the border areas with Natal. Dutifully but bitterly, Durnford followed his orders.

In the first days after the invasion, the British failed to locate the main Zulu army, only trickles of men here and there. They were growing frustrated. On January 21, Chelmsford took half of the central column, which was encamped at the foot of a mountain called Isandlwana, and led it east in search of the Zulus. Once he had found the enemy, he would bring the rest of his army forward--but the elusive Zulus might attack the camp while he was away, and the men at Rorke's Drift were the closest reserves. Needing to reinforce Isandlwana, he sent word to Durnford to bring his company there. As colonel, Durnford would now be the highest-ranking officer at the camp, but Chelmsford could not worry about Durnford's leadership qualities--the impending battle was the only thing on his mind.

Early on the morning of January 22, Durnford received the news he had been waiting for all his life. Barely able to contain his excitement, he lead his four hundred men east to Isandlwana, arriving at the camp at around 10:00 A.M. Surveying the land, he understood why Chelmsford had put his main camp here: to the east and south were miles of rolling grassland--Zulus approaching from that direction would be seen well in advance. To the north was Isandlwana, and beyond it the plains of Nqutu. This side was a little less secure, but scouts had been placed at key points in the plains and at the mountain passes; attack from

that direction would almost certainly be detected in time.

Shortly after his arrival, Durnford received a report that a seemingly large Zulu force had been spotted on the plains of Nqutu heading east, perhaps to attack Chelmsford's half of the central column from the rear. Chelmsford had left explicit orders to keep the 1,800 men at Isandlwana together. In case of attack, they had enough firepower to defeat the entire Zulu army--as long as they stayed concentrated and kept their lines in order. But to Durnford it was more important to find the main Zulu force. The British soldiers were beginning to grow edgy, not knowing where this vaporous enemy was. The Zulus had no cavalry, and many of them fought with spears; once their hiding place was uncovered, the rest would be easy--the superior weaponry and discipline of the British soldiers would prevail. Durnford thought Chelmsford was too cautious. As senior officer at the camp, he decided to disobey orders and lead his 400 men northeast, parallel to the plains of Nqutu, to find out what the Zulus were up to.

As Durnford marched out of the camp, a scout on the plains of Nqutu saw a few Zulus herding cattle some four miles away. He gave chase on his horse, but the Zulus disappeared into thin air. Riding to the point where they had vanished, he stopped his horse just in time: below him lay a wide, deep ravine, completely hidden from the surface of the plains, and crowded into the ravine, as far as he could see in both directions, were Zulu warriors in full war regalia, an eerie intensity in their eyes. They seemed to have been meditating on the imminent battle. For a second the horseman was too stunned to move, but as hundreds of spears were suddenly aimed at him, he turned and galloped away. The Zulus quickly rose and began clambering out of the ravine.

Soon the other scouts on the plains saw the same terrifying sight: a wide line of Zulus filling the horizon, some 20,000 men strong. Even from a distance, it was clear that they were moving in formation, each end of their line coming forward in a shape resembling horns. The scouts quickly brought word to the camp that the Zulus were coming. By the time Durnford received the news, he could look up to the ridge above him and see a line of Zulus streaming down the slope. He quickly formed his own men into lines to fight them off while retreating to the camp. The Zulus maneuvered with incredible precision. What Durnford could not see was that the men in the left tip of the horn were moving through the tall grass toward the rear of the camp, to link up with the other end of the horn and complete the encirclement.

The Zulus facing Durnford and his men seemed to grow out of the earth, emerging from behind boulders or from out of the grass in ever-greater numbers. A knot of five or six of them would suddenly charge, throwing spears or firing rifles, then disappear back into the grass. Whenever the British stopped to

reload, the Zulus would advance ever closer, occasionally one reaching Durnford's lines and disemboweling a British soldier with the powerful Zulu spear, which made an unbearable sucking sound as it went in and out.

> *The careful use by the Zulus of cover during their advance was observed time and again by the British. Another anonymous survivor of Isandlwana noted that as the Zulus crested the Nyoni ridge and came within sight of camp, they "appeared almost to grow out of the earth. From rock and bush on the heights above started scores of men; some with rifles, others with shields and assegais." Lieutenant Edward Hutton of the 60th left a rather more complete description of the Zulu army deploying for the attack at Gingindlovu: "The dark masses of men, in open order and under admirable discipline, followed each other in quick succession, running at a steady pace through the long grass. Having moved steadily round so as exactly to face our front, the larger portion of the Zulus broke into three lines, in knots and groups of from five to ten men, and advanced towards us....* [*They*] *continued to advance, still at a run, until they were about 800 yards from us, when they began to open fire. In spite of the excitement of the moment we could not but admire the perfect manner in which these Zulus skirmished. A knot of five or six would rise and dart through the long grass, dodging from side to side with heads down, rifles and shields kept low and out of sight. They would then suddenly sink into the long grass, and nothing but puffs of curling smoke would show their whereabouts. Then they advance again...." The speed of this final advance was terrifying. When the British gave the order to cease firing and fall back at Isandlwana, the Zulus were pinned down some two or three hundred yards from the British position. Lieutenant Curling of the Artillery noted that in the time it took for his experienced men to limber his guns, the Zulus had rushed in so quickly that one gunner had actually been stabbed as he mounted the axle-tree seat. A Zulu veteran of the battle, uMhoti of the uKhandempemvu, thought the final charge so swift that "like a flame the whole Zulu force sprang to its feet and darted upon them."*
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> *THE ANATOMY OF THE ZULU ARMY*, IAN KNIGHT, 1995

Durnford managed to get his men back into camp. The British were surrounded, but they closed ranks and fired away, killing scores of Zulus and keeping them at bay. It was like target practice: as Durnford had predicted, their superior weaponry was making the difference. He looked around; the fight had turned into a stalemate, and his soldiers were responding with relative confidence. Almost imperceptibly, though, Durnford noticed a slight slackening

in their fire. Soldiers were running out of ammunition, and in the time it took them to open a new crate and reload, the Zulus would tighten the circle and a wave of fear would ripple through the men as here and there a soldier in the front lines would be impaled. The Zulus fought with an intensity the British had never seen; rushing forward as if bullets could not harm them, they seemed to be in a trance.

Suddenly, sensing the turning point in the battle, the Zulus began to rattle their spears against their shields and emit their war cry: *"Usuthu!"* It was a terrifying din. At the northern end of the camp, a group of British soldiers gave way--just a few, panicking at the sight and sound of the Zulus, now only a few yards distant, but the Zulus poured through the gap. As if on cue, those in the circle between the two horns rained spears on the British, killing many and making havoc of their lines. From out of nowhere, a reserve force rushed forward, fanning around the circle and doubling its squeezing power. Durnford tried to maintain order, but it was too late: in a matter of seconds, panic. Now it was every man for himself.

Durnford ran to the one gap in the encirclement and tried to keep it open so that his remaining men could retreat to Rorke's Drift. Minutes later he was impaled by a Zulu spear. Soon the battle at Isandlwana was over. A few hundred managed to escape through the gap that Durnford had died in securing; the rest, over fourteen hundred men, were killed.

After such a devastating defeat, the British forces quickly retreated out of Zululand. For the time being, the war was indeed over, but not as the British had expected.

Interpretation

A few months after the defeat at Isandlwana, the British mounted a larger invasion and finally defeated the Zulus. But the lesson of Isandlwana remains instructive, particularly considering the incredible discrepancy in technology.

The Zulu way of fighting had been perfected earlier in the nineteenth century by King Shaka Zulu, who by the 1820s had transformed what had been a relatively minor tribe into the region's greatest fighting force. Shaka invented the heavy, broad-bladed Zulu spear, the assegai, that was so devastating in battle. He imposed a rigorous discipline, training the Zulus to advance and encircle their enemies with machinelike precision. The circle was extremely important in Zulu culture--as a symbol of their national unity, a motif in their artwork, and their dominant pattern in warfare. The Zulus could not fight for extended periods, since their culture required lengthy cleansing rituals after the shedding of blood in battle. During these rituals they were completely vulnerable to attack--no Zulu

could fight again, or even rejoin the tribe, until he had been cleansed. The immense Zulu army was also costly to maintain in the field. Once mobilized, then, the army not only had to defeat its enemies in battle, it had to annihilate every last one of them, eliminating the possibility of a counterattack during the vulnerable cleansing period and allowing a speedy demobilization. Encirclement was the Zulu method of obtaining this complete kind of victory.

Before any battle, the Zulus would scout the terrain for places to hide. As one looks out over the grasslands and plains of South Africa, they seem to offer wide visibility, but they often conceal ravines and gullies undetectable from any distance. Even up close, grasses and boulders provide excellent coverage. The Zulus would move quickly to their hiding places, their feet tough as leather from years of running over the grasslands. They would send out scouting parties as distractions to hide the movements of the main force.

Once they emerged from their hiding place and headed into battle, the Zulus would form what they called the "horns, chest, and loins." The chest was the central part of the line, which would hold and pin the enemy force. Meanwhile the horns to either side would encircle it, moving in to the sides and rear. Often the tip of one horn would stay hidden behind tall grass or boulders; when it emerged to complete the encirclement it would at the same time give the enemy a nasty psychological shock. The loins were a reserve force kept back to be thrown in for the coup de grace. These men often actually stood with their backs to the battle, so as not to grow overly excited and rush in before the right moment.

Years after Isandlwana a commission laid the blame for the disaster on Durnford, but in reality it was not his fault. It was true that the British had let themselves be surrounded, but they managed to form lines in decent order and fought back bravely and well. What destroyed them was what destroyed every opponent of the Zulus: the terror created by the precision of their movements, the feeling of being encircled in an ever-tightening space, the occasional sight of a fellow soldier succumbing to the horrible Zulu spear, the war cries, the spears that rained down at the moment of greatest weakness, the nightmarish sight of a reserve force suddenly joining the circle. For all the superiority of their weaponry, the British collapsed under this calculated psychological pressure.

> *As soon as it grew light, Hannibal sent forward the Balearics and the other light infantry. He then crossed the river in person and as each division was brought across he assigned it its place in the line. The Gaulish and Spanish horse he posted near the bank on the left wing in front of the Roman cavalry; the right wing was assigned to the Numidian troopers. The centre consisted of*

a strong force of infantry, the Gauls and Spaniards in the middle, the Africans at either end of them.... These nations, more than any other, inspired terror by the vastness of their stature and their frightful appearance: the Gauls were naked above the waist, the Spaniards had taken up their position wearing white tunics embroidered with purple, of dazzling brilliancy. The total number of infantry in the field [*at Cannae*] *was 40,000, and there were 10,000 cavalry. Hasdrubal was in command of the left wing, Marhabal of the right; Hannibal himself with his brother Mago commanded the centre. It was a great convenience to both armies that the sun shone obliquely on them, whether it was that they purposely so placed themselves, or whether it happened by accident, since the Romans faced the north, the Carthaginians the south. The wind, called by the inhabitants the Vulturnus, was against the Romans, and blew great clouds of dust into their faces, making it impossible for them to see in front of them. When the battle* [*at Cannae*] *was raised, the auxiliaries ran forward, and the battle began with the light infantry. Then the Gauls and Spaniards on the left engaged the Roman cavalry on the right; the battle was not at all like a cavalry fight, for there was no room for maneuvering, the river on the one side and the infantry on the other hemming them in, compelled them to fight face to face. Each side tried to force their way straight forward, till at last the horses were standing in a closely pressed mass, and the riders seized their opponents and tried to drag them from their horses. It had become mainly a struggle of infantry, fierce but short, and the Roman cavalry was repulsed and fled. Just as this battle of the cavalry was finished, the infantry became engaged, and as long as the Gauls and Spaniards kept their ranks unbroken, both sides were equally matched in strength and courage. At length after long and repeated efforts the Romans closed up their ranks, echeloned their front, and by the sheer weight of their deep column bore down the division of the enemy which was stationed in front of Hannibal's line, and was too thin and weak to resist the pressure. Without a moment's pause they followed up their broken and hastily retreating foe till they took to headlong flight. Cutting their way through to the mass of fugitives, who offered no resistance, they penetrated as far as the Africans who were stationed on both wings, somewhat further back than the Gauls and Spaniards who had formed the advanced centre. As the latter fell back, the whole front became level, and as they continued to give ground, it became concave and crescent-shaped, the Africans at either end forming the horns. As the Romans rushed on incautiously between them, they were enfiladed by the two wings, which extended and closed round them in the rear. On this, the Romans, who had fought one battle to no purpose, left the*

Gauls and Spaniards, whose rear they had been slaughtering, and commenced a fresh struggle with the Africans. The contest was a very one-sided one, for not only were they hemmed in on all sides, but wearied with the previous fighting they were meeting fresh and vigorous opponents.

THE HISTORY OF ROME, LIVY, 59 B.C.-A.D. 17

We humans are extremely clever creatures: in disaster or setback, we often find a way to adapt, to turn the situation around. We look for any gap and often find it; we thrive on hope, craftiness, and will. The history of war is littered with stories of dramatic adjustments and reversals, except in one place: the envelopment. Whether physical or psychological, this is the only true exception to the possibility of turning things around.

When properly executed, this strategy gives your opponents no gaps to exploit, no hope. They are surrounded, and the circle is tightening. In the abstract space of social and political warfare, encirclement can be any maneuver that gives your opponents the feeling of being attacked from all sides, being pushed into a corner and denied hope of making a counterattack. Feeling surrounded, their willpower will weaken. Like the Zulus, keep a force in reserve, the loins to work with your horns--you hit them with these forces when you sense their weakness growing. Let the hopelessness of their situation encircle their minds.

You must make your opponent acknowledge defeat from the bottom of his heart.

--Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645)

KEYS TO WARFARE

Thousands of years ago, we humans lived a nomadic life, wandering across deserts and plains, hunting and gathering. Then we shifted into living in settlements and cultivating our food. The change brought us comfort and control, but in a part of our spirit we remain nomads: we cannot help but associate the room to roam and wander with a feeling of freedom. To a cat, tight, enclosed spaces may mean comfort, but to us they conjure suffocation. Over the centuries this reflex has become more psychological: the feeling that we have options in a situation, a future with prospects, translates into something like the feeling of open space. Our minds thrive on the sense that there is possibility and strategic room to maneuver.

Conversely, the sense of psychological enclosure is deeply disturbing to us, often making us overreact. When someone or something encircles us--narrowing

our options, besieging us from all sides--we lose control of our emotions and make the kinds of mistakes that render the situation more hopeless. In history's great military sieges, the greater danger almost always comes from the panic and confusion within. Unable to see what is happening beyond the siege, losing contact with the outside world, the defenders also lose their grip on reality. An animal that cannot observe the world around it is doomed. When all you can see are Zulus closing in, you succumb to panic and confusion.

The battles of daily life occur not on a map but in a kind of abstract space defined by people's ability to maneuver, act against you, limit your power, and cut into your time to respond. Give your opponents any room in this abstract or psychological space and they will exploit it, no matter how powerful you are or how brilliant your strategies--so make them feel surrounded. Shrink their possibilities of action and close off their escape routes. Just as the inhabitants of a city under siege may slowly lose their minds, your opponents will be maddened by their lack of room to maneuver against you.

There are many ways to envelop your opponents, but perhaps the simplest is to put whatever strength or advantage you naturally have to maximum use in a strategy of enclosure.

In his struggle to gain control of the chaotic American oil industry in the 1870s, John D. Rockefeller--founder and president of Standard Oil--worked first to gain a monopoly on the railroads, which were then oil's main transport. Next he moved to gain control over the pipelines that connected the refineries to the railroads. Independent oil producers responded by banding together to fund a pipeline of their own that would run from Pennsylvania to the coast, bypassing the need for railroads and Rockefeller's network of pipelines. Rockefeller tried buying up the land that lay in the path of the project, being built by a company called Tidewater, but his opponents worked around him, building a zigzag pipeline all the way to the sea.

Rockefeller was faced with a classic paradigm in war: a motivated enemy was utilizing every gap in his defenses to avoid his control, adjusting and learning how to fight him along the way. His solution was an enveloping maneuver. First, Rockefeller built his own pipeline to the sea, a larger one than Tidewater's. Then he began a campaign to buy up stock in the Tidewater company, gaining a minority interest in it and working from within to damage its credit and stir dissension. He initiated a price war, undermining interest in the Tidewater pipeline. And he purchased refineries before they could become Tidewater clients. By 1882 his envelopment was complete: Tidewater was forced to work out a deal that gave Standard Oil even more control over the shipping of oil than it had had before this war.

Rockefeller's method was to create relentless pressure from as many directions as possible. The result was confusion on the part of the independent oil producers--they could not tell how far his control extended, but it seemed enormous. They still had options at the point when they surrendered, but they had been worn down and made to believe the fight was hopeless. The Tidewater envelopment was made possible by the immense resources at Rockefeller's disposal, but he used these resources not just practically but psychologically, generating an impression of himself as a relentless foe who would leave no gaps for the enemy to sneak through. He won not only by how much he spent but by his use of his resources to create psychological pressure.

To envelop your enemies, you must use whatever you have in abundance. If you have a large army, use it to create the appearance that your forces are everywhere, an encircling pressure. That is how Toussaint l'Ouverture ended slavery in what today is called Haiti, at the end of the eighteenth century, and liberated the island from France: he used his greater numbers to create the feeling among the whites on the island that they were hopelessly engulfed by a hostile force. No minority can withstand such a feeling for long.

> *That night Ren Fu stationed the* [*Song army*] *troops by the Haoshui River, while Zhu Guan and Wu Ying made camp on a tributary of the river. They were about five* li *apart. Scouts reported that the Xia forces were inferior in number and seemed rather fearful. At this Ren Fu lost his vigilance and grew contemptuous of the men of Xia. He did not stop his officers and men from pursuing the Xia army and capturing its abandoned provisions. Geng Fu reminded him that the men of Xia had always been deceptive and advised him to bring the troops under discipline and advance slowly in a regular formation. Scouts should also be dispatched to probe further into the surrounding areas in order to find out what tricks the enemy was up to. However, Ren Fu ignored this advice. He made arrangements with Zhu Guan to proceed by separate routes to pursue the enemy and join forces at the mouth of Haoshui River the next day. The Xia horsemen feigned defeat, emerging now and then four or five* li *in front of the Song army. Ren Fu and Zhu Guan marched swiftly in a hot pursuit, eventually arriving to the north of the city of Longgan. There the Xia soldiers suddenly vanished from sight. Ren Fu realized at last that he had been deceived and decided to pull the troops out of the mountainous region. The next day Ren Fu led his men to move westward along the Haoshui River. They finally got out of the Liupan Mountains and proceeded towards the city of Yangmulong. At this juncture Ren Fu got reports of enemy activity in the vicinity. He had to call the troops*

to a halt about five li *from the city and array them in a defensive formation. Just then, several large wooden boxes were discovered lying by the road. The boxes were tightly sealed and rustling sound came from within. Curiously, Ren Fu ordered the boxes to be opened. All of a sudden, dozens of pigeons fluttered out of the boxes and flew high into the sky, with loud tinkling sounds coming from the small bells attached to their claws. All the Song soldiers looked up in astonishment, when large hosts of Xia soldiers appeared in every direction to form a complete encirclement. On hearing the pigeon bells, Yuanhao knew that the Song army had entered his ambush ring. Thereupon he sent an assistant general with fifty thousand men to surround and assault the band of troops led by Zhu Guan and led the other half of his troops in person to attack Ren Fu, whom he considered a tougher opponent than Zhu Guan.... The Song soldiers failed to penetrate the encirclement and were compelled to continue the tangled fight. Many were killed and some even threw themselves down the precipice in despair. Ren Fu himself was hit by over a dozen arrows. One of his guards urged him to surrender, which seemed the only way to save his life and the remnants of his men. But Ren Fu sighed and said, "I am a general of the Song and shall pay for this defeat with my life." With this he brandished his mace and fought fiercely until he was mortally injured on the face by a spear. Then he took his own life by strangling himself. All of Ren Fu's subordinate officers died in combat, and his army was completely wiped out.*

THE WILES OF WAR: 36 MILITARY STRATEGIES FROM ANCIENT CHINA, TRANSLATED BY SUN HAICHEN, 1991

Remember: the power of envelopment is ultimately psychological. Making the other side *feel* vulnerable to attack on many sides is as good as enveloping them physically.

In the Ismaili Shiite sect during the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D., a group later known as the Assassins developed the strategy of killing key Islamic leaders who had tried to persecute the sect. Their method was to infiltrate an Assassin into the target's inner circle, perhaps even joining his bodyguard. Patient and efficient, the Assassins were able over the years to instill the fear that they could strike at any time and at any person. No caliph or vizier felt secure. The technique was a masterpiece of economy, for in the end the Assassins actually killed quite a few people, yet the threat they posed gave the Ismailis great political power.

A few well-timed blows to make your enemies feel vulnerable in multiple ways and from multiple directions will do the same thing for you. Often, in fact,

less is more here: too many blows will give you a shape, a personality--something for the other side to respond to and develop a strategy to combat. Instead seem vaporous. Make your maneuvers impossible to anticipate. Your psychological encirclement will be all the more sinister and complete.

The best encirclements are those that prey on the enemy's preexisting, inherent vulnerabilities. Be attentive, then, to signs of arrogance, rashness, or other psychological weakness. Once Winston Churchill saw the paranoid streak in Adolf Hitler, he worked to create the impression that the Axis might be attacked from anywhere--the Balkans, Italy, western France. Churchill's resources were meager; he could only hint at these possibilities through deception. But that was enough: a man like Hitler could not bear the thought of being vulnerable from any direction. By 1942 his forces were stretched across vast parts of Europe, and Churchill's ploys made him stretch them even thinner. At one point a mere feint at the Balkans made him hold back forces from the invasion of Russia, which in the end cost him dearly. Feed the fears of the paranoid and they will start to imagine attacks you hadn't even thought of; their overheated brains will do much of the encirclement for you.

When the Carthaginian general Hannibal was planning what turned out to be perhaps the most devastating envelopment in history--his victory at the Battle of Cannae in 216 B.C.--he heard from his spies that one of the opposing Roman generals, Varro, was a hothead, arrogant and contemptuous. Hannibal was outnumbered two to one, but he made two strategic decisions that turned this around. First, he lured the Romans onto tight terrain, where their greater numbers would find it hard to maneuver. Second, he weakened the center of his lines, placing his best troops and cavalry at the lines' outer ends. Led by the rash Varro, the Romans charged into the center, which gave way. The Romans pushed farther and farther. Then, just as the Zulus would encircle the British within two horns, the outer ends of the Carthaginian line pushed inward, enclosing the Romans in a tight and fatal embrace.

The impetuous, violent, and arrogant are particularly easy to lure into the traps of envelopment strategies: play weak or dumb and they will charge ahead without stopping to think where they're going. But any emotional weakness on the opponent's part, or any great desire or unrealized wish, can be made an ingredient of encirclement.

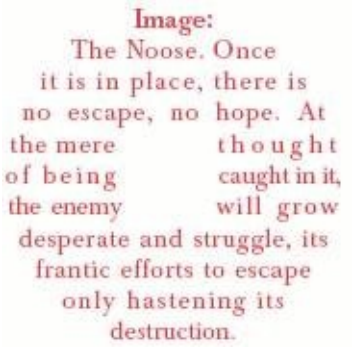
That is how the Iranians enveloped the administration of President Ronald Reagan in 1985-86, in what became known as the Iran-Contra Affair. America was leading an international embargo on the sale of weapons to Iran. In fighting this boycott, the Iranians saw two American weaknesses: first, Congress had cut off U.S. funding for the war of the Contras against the Sandinista government in

Nicaragua--a cause dear to the Reagan government--and second, the administration was deeply disturbed about the growing number of Americans held hostage in the Middle East. Playing on these desires, the Iranians were able to lure the Americans into a Cannae-like trap: they would work for the release of hostages and secretly fund the Contras, in exchange for weapons.

It seemed too good to resist, but as the Americans entered further into this web of duplicity (backroom deals, secret meetings), they could sense their room to maneuver slowly narrowing: the Iranians were able to ask for more in exchange for less. In the end they got plenty of weapons, while the Americans got only a handful of hostages and not enough money to make a difference in Nicaragua. Worse, the Iranians openly told other diplomats about these "secret" dealings, closing their encirclement by ensuring that it would be revealed to the American public. For the government officials who had been involved in the affair, there was no possible escape route from the mess they had been drawn into. Feeling intense pressure from all sides as news of the deal became public, their attempts to cover it up or explain it away only made the situation worse.

In luring your enemies into such a trap, always try to make them feel as if they are in control of the situation. They will advance as far as you want them to. Many of the Americans involved in Iran-Contra believed they were the ones conning the naive Iranians.

Finally, do not simply work to envelop your opponents' forces or immediate emotions, but rather envelop their whole strategy--indeed, their whole conceptual framework. This ultimate form of envelopment involves first studying the rigid, predictable parts of your opponents' strategy, then crafting a novel strategy of your own that goes outside their experience. Taking on the armies of Islam, Russia, Poland, Hungary, and the Teutonic Order, the Mongols did not merely defeat them, they annihilated them--by inventing a new brand of mobile warfare to use against an enemy mired in centuries-old methods of fighting. This kind of strategic mismatch can lead to victory not just in any given battle but in large-scale campaigns--the ultimate goal in any form of war.



Authority: Place a monkey in a cage, and it is the same as a pig, not because it isn't clever and quick, but because it has no place to freely exercise its capabilities.

--Huainanzi *(second century B.C.*)

REVERSAL

The danger of envelopment is that unless it is completely successful, it may leave you in a vulnerable position. You have announced your plans. The enemy knows that you are trying to annihilate it, and unless you can quickly deliver your knockout punch, it will work furiously not only to defend itself but to destroy you--for now your destruction is its only safeguard. Some armies that have failed in their envelopments have found themselves later encircled by their enemies. Use this strategy only when you have a reasonable chance of bringing it to the conclusion you desire.