

# WEAVE A SEAMLESS BLEND OF FACT AND FICTION

## MISPERCEPTION STRATEGIES

*Since no creature can survive without the ability to see or sense what is going on around it, you must make it hard for your enemies to know what is going on around them, including what you are doing. Disturb their focus and you weaken their strategic powers. People's perceptions are filtered through their emotions; they tend to interpret the world according to what they want to see. Feed their expectations, manufacture a reality to match their desires, and they will fool themselves. The best deceptions are based on ambiguity, mixing fact and fiction so that the one cannot be disentangled from the other. Control people's perceptions of reality and you control them.*

## THE FALSE MIRROR

On November 3, 1943, Adolf Hitler had a document distributed to his top generals: Directive 51, which discussed his conviction that the Allies would invade France the following year and explained how to beat them. For years Hitler had depended on a kind of intuition in making his most important strategic decisions, and time and again his instincts had been right; the Allies had tried before to make him believe that an invasion of France was imminent, but each time Hitler had seen through the deception. This time he was not only sure that the invasion was coming, he felt he knew exactly where it would come: the Pas de Calais, the region of France along the English Channel that was the country's closest point to Britain.

*In war-time, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.*

WINSTON CHURCHILL, 1874-1965

The Pas de Calais had a number of major ports, and the Allies would need a port to land their troops. The region was also where Hitler planned to place his V-1 and V-2 rockets, soon to be operational; with these jet-propelled unmanned

missiles so close to London, he could bomb Britain into submission. The English knew he was putting missiles there, and that provided them yet another reason to invade France at the Pas de Calais, before Hitler could begin his bombing campaign.

*Dudley Clarke was always clear--and a little later it will be shewn to have been a pity that others were not equally so--that you can never, by deception, persuade an enemy of anything not according with his own expectations, which usually are not far removed from his hopes. It is only by using your knowledge of them that you are able to hypnotize him, not just into thinking, but doing what you want.*

MASTER OF DECEPTION, DAVID MURE, 1980

In Directive 51, Hitler warned his commanders to expect the Allies to wage a major deception campaign to cloak the time and place of the invasion. The Germans had to see through these deceptions and repel the landing, and despite recent setbacks in the German war effort, Hitler felt supremely confident they could. Several years earlier he had commissioned the construction of the Atlantic Wall, a line of forts up and down the coast from France to Norway, and he had over 10 million soldiers at his disposal, a million of them in France alone. The German armaments industry was churning out ever more and better weapons. Hitler also controlled most of Europe, giving him enormous resources and endless options for moving his troops here and there.

Finally, to invade France the Allies would need a massive armada, which, once assembled, would be impossible to conceal. Hitler had infiltrated agents into all levels of the British military, who supplied him with excellent intelligence--they would forward to him the time and location of the invasion. The Allies would not surprise him. And once he had defeated them on the shores of France, England would have to sue for peace; Roosevelt would certainly lose the upcoming U.S. presidential election. Hitler could then concentrate his entire army against the Soviet Union and finally defeat it. In truth, the invasion of France was the opportunity he craved to turn the war around.

*Themistocles therefore had two urgent and simultaneous problems to solve. He must take effective action, not only to block any projected withdrawal by the Peloponnesian contingents, but also to ensure that they fought where and when he planned that they should; and he must somehow tempt Xerxes into making the one move which might lead to a Greek victory--that is, ordering his fleet to attack in the Salamis channel.... The device Themistocles finally*

*adopted--what Plutarch calls "his celebrated trick with Sicinnus"--is one of the most enigmatic episodes in all Greek history. Evidence for it goes back as far as Aeschylus's Persians, performed only eight years after Salamis.... What seems to have happened was this. At some point during the long argument over final strategy, Themistocles, anticipating defeat, slipped away from the conference and sent for his children's tutor, "the most faithful of his slaves," an Asiatic Greek named Sicinnus. This man was given a carefully prepared message, or letter, to deliver to Xerxes, and sent off across the straits in a small boat, probably just before dawn on 19 September.... The substance of the message was as follows. Themistocles sent it under his own name, as commander of the Athenian contingent: he had, he told Xerxes, changed sides, and was now ardently desirous of a Persian victory. (No real reason is given for this volte-face, though disgust at the attitude of the Peloponnesian contingents would provide a strong enough motive to carry conviction.) The Greek allies were at each other's throats, and would offer no serious opposition--"on the contrary, you will see the pro-Persians amongst them fighting the rest." Furthermore, they were planning a general withdrawal from Salamis under cover of darkness, to be carried out the following night.... If Xerxes struck at once, on the divide-and-rule principle, he could forestall such a move. "Attack them and destroy their naval power, while they are still disorganized and before they have joined forces with their land army" [Plut. Them. 12.4]. The conquest of the Peloponnese would then become a comparatively simple matter. On the other hand, if Xerxes allowed the various Greek contingents to slip through his fingers and disperse homewards, the war might drag on indefinitely, since he would have to deal with each separate city-state in turn. Sicinnus's arguments impressed the Persian admirals, and they duly passed them on to the Great King himself. Xerxes, we are told, believed the report because it "was in itself plausible"--and also because it was just what he wanted to hear: there was trouble brewing in Ionia and the empire, and the sooner this Greek expedition was wound up, the better. Themistocles, always a shrewd judge of human nature, knew very well that after so many days of delay and frustration, the Great King would grasp at anything which seemed to offer a quick solution to his problem.*

*THE GRECO-PERSIAN WARS, PETER GREEN, 1996*

Hitler's commander in Western Europe was Field Marshal Gerd von Runstedt, Germany's most respected general. To further solidify the defensive position in France, Hitler made General Erwin Rommel the commander of the

forces along the French coast. Rommel proceeded to make improvements in the Atlantic Wall, turning it into a "devil's garden" of minefields and fire zones. Rommel and Runstedt also asked for more troops to ensure that the Germans could repel the Allies at the water's edge. But the Fuhrer denied their request.

Hitler had lately come to mistrust his top staff. In the past few years, he had survived several assassination attempts that had clearly originated among his officers. His generals were increasingly arguing with his strategies, and in his mind they had botched several battles in the Russian campaign; he saw many of them as incompetents or traitors. He began to spend less time with his officers and more time holed up in his Bavarian mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden, with his mistress, Eva Braun, and his beloved dog, Biondi. There he pored over maps and intelligence reports, determined to make the important decisions himself and to manage the entire war effort more directly.

This caused a change in his way of thinking: instead of making quick, intuitive choices, he was trying to foresee every possibility and was taking longer to make up his mind. Now he thought Rommel and Runstedt--in their request for more troops to be transferred to France--were being overly cautious and even panicky. He alone would have to foil the Allied invasion; it was up to him to see through his generals' weaknesses and the enemy's deceptions. The only downside to this was that his workload had increased tenfold, and he was more tired than ever. At night he took sleeping pills, by day whatever he could get his hands on to keep him alert.

Early in 1944 key information arrived in Hitler's hands: a German agent in Turkey stole classified documents confirming that the Allies would invade France that year. The documents also indicated plans for an imminent invasion of the Balkans. Hitler was particularly sensitive to any threats to the Balkans, a valuable source of resources for Germany; a loss there would be devastating. The threat of such an attack made it impossible to transfer troops from there to France. Hitler's agents in England also discovered plans to invade Norway, and here Hitler actually reinforced his troops to ward off the threat.

By April, as Hitler pored over intelligence reports, he began to feel increasingly excited: he discerned a pattern in the enemy activity. As he had thought, everything pointed toward an invasion of the Pas de Calais. One sign particularly stood out: indications of an enormous army forming in southeastern England under the command of General George Patton. This army, called FUSAG (First United States Army Group), was clearly positioned for a crossing to the Pas de Calais. Of all the Allies' generals, Hitler feared Patton the most. He had proven his military skill in North Africa and Sicily. He would be the perfect commander for the invasion.

Hitler demanded more information on Patton's army. High-flying reconnaissance planes photographed enormous military camps, docking equipment, thousands of tanks moving through the countryside, a pipeline being built to the coast. When a captured German general who had been imprisoned in England was finally repatriated, he caught glimpses of massive activity in the FUSAG area on his trip from his internment camp to London. Agents in Switzerland reported that every map of the Pas de Calais area had been mysteriously bought up. The pieces of a giant puzzle were coming together.

Now only one question remained: when would it happen? As April turned to May, Hitler was deluged with all kinds of conflicting reports, rumors, and sightings. The information was confusing, taxing his strained mind, but two nuggets of intelligence seemed to clarify the picture. First, a German agent in England reported that the Allies would attack Normandy, southeast of the Pas de Calais, between June 5 and 7. But the Germans had strong indications that this man was operating as a double agent, and his report was clearly part of an Allied disinformation campaign. The attack would probably be coming at the end of June or beginning of July, when the weather was generally more predictable. Then, later in May, a series of more reliable German spies spotted Britain's top general, Sir Bernard Montgomery, in Gibraltar and then in Algiers. Montgomery would certainly command a large part of any invading force. The invasion could not be imminent if he was so far away.

On the night of June 5, Hitler pored over the maps. Maybe he was wrong--maybe the plan was for Normandy all along. He had to consider both options; he would not be fooled in what might be the most decisive battle of his life. The British were tricky; he had to keep his forces mobile in case it was Normandy after all. He would not commit himself until he knew for sure. Reading the weather reports for the Channel--stormy that evening--he took his usual sleeping pill and went to bed.

Early the next morning, Hitler woke to startling news: a massive invasion was under way--in southern Normandy. A large armada had left England in the middle of the night, and hundreds of parachutists had been dropped near the Normandy coast. As the day progressed, the reports became more exact: the Allies had landed on the beaches southeast of Cherbourg.

A critical moment had come. If some of the forces stationed in the Pas de Calais were hurried to the beaches of Normandy, the Allies could be pinned and thrown back into the sea. This was the recommendation of Rommel and Runstedt, who anxiously awaited Hitler's approval. But through the night and into the following day, Hitler hesitated. Then, just as he was on the verge of sending reinforcements to Normandy, he received word of increased Allied

activity in the FUSAG area. Was Normandy in fact a giant diversion? If he moved his reserves there, would Patton immediately cross the Channel to the Pas de Calais? No, Hitler would wait to see if the attack was real. And so the days went by, with Rommel and Runstedt fuming at his indecision.

After several weeks Hitler finally accepted that Normandy was the real destination. But by then he was too late. The Allies had established a beachhead. In August they broke out of Normandy, sending the Germans into full retreat. To Hitler the disaster was yet another indication of the incompetence of those around him. He had no idea how deeply and decisively he had been fooled.

**Interpretation** In trying to deceive Hitler about the Normandy invasions, the Allies were faced with a problem: not only was the Fuhrer suspicious and wary by nature, he knew of previous attempts to mislead him and knew that the Allies would have to try to deceive him again. How could the Allies possibly disguise the actual goal of a vast armada from a man who had reason to believe they would try to mislead him and was scrutinizing their every move?

Fortunately, British intelligence had been able to provide the planners of the D-Day landings, including Prime Minister Winston Churchill, with information that would prove invaluable to them. First, they knew that Hitler was growing paranoid; he was isolated and overworked, his imagination overheated. He was prone to emotional outbursts, and he was suspicious of everyone and everything. Second, they knew of his belief that the Allies would try to invade the Balkans before France and that the landing site in France would be in the Pas de Calais. He almost seemed to want these invasions to happen, as proof of his superior reasoning powers and foresight.

Fooling Hitler into keeping his forces dispersed across Europe and France would give the Allies a slim margin of time in which to establish a beachhead. The key was to present him a picture, composed of many different kinds of evidence, that would tell him the Allies were doing just what he had thought they would. But this picture could not be made up of all kinds of flashing signs pointing to the Balkans and the Pas de Calais--that would reek of deception. Instead they had to create something that had the weight and feel of reality. It had to be subtle, a mix of banal truths with little falsehoods stitched in. If Hitler saw that in its outlines it supported his expectations, his overactive mind would fill in the rest. This is how the Allies wove such a picture.

*At the end of the war, Allied Intelligence Officers discovered in captured files of the German Secret Service the text of two hundred and fifty messages*

*received from agents and other sources before D-Day. Nearly all mentioned July and the Calais sector. One message alone gave the exact date and place of the invasion. It had come from a French colonel in Algiers. The Allies had discovered this officer was working for the Abwehr and he was arrested and subsequently turned round. He too was used to mislead Berlin--used and abused. The Germans were so often deceived by him that they ended by treating all his information as valueless. But they kept in contact, for it is always useful to know what the enemy wants you to believe. Allied Intelligence, with great boldness and truly remarkable perversity, had the colonel announce that the Invasion would take place on the coast of Normandy on the 5th, 6th or 7th June. For the Germans, his message was absolute proof that the invasion was to be on any day except the 5th, 6th or 7th June, and on any part of the coast except Normandy.*

*THE SECRETS OF D-DAY, GILLES PERRAULT, 1965*

By late 1943 the British had secretly identified all of the German agents active in England. The next step was to turn them into unwitting double agents by feeding them false information--about Allied plans for an attack on the Balkans and Norway, say, and the massing of a fictional army--commanded by Patton, the American general Hitler so feared--opposite the Pas de Calais. (This army, FUSAG, existed only in piles of phony paperwork and wireless transmissions that mimicked a normal army.) German agents were allowed to steal FUSAG documents and intercept transmissions--carefully misleading messages but at the same time banal and bureaucratic ones, too banal to be seen as fake. Working with film designers, the Allies built an elaborate set of rubber, plastic, and wood that from German reconnaissance planes would look like an enormous camp of tents, airplanes, and tanks. The German general who saw FUSAG with his own eyes was misled about the direction he was taking toward London: he had actually passed the real army to the west of FUSAG's supposed site, massing for the invasion of Normandy.

*Now Ravana said to himself, "These are all petty weapons. I should really get down to proper business." And he invoked the one called "Maya"--a weapon which created illusions and confused the enemy. With proper incantations and worship, he sent off this weapon and it created an illusion of reviving all the armies and its leaders--Kumbakarna and Indrajit and the others--and bringing them back to the battlefield. Presently Rama found all those who, he thought, were no more, coming on with battle cries and surrounding him. Every man in the enemy's army was again up in arms. They seemed to fall on*

*Rama with victorious cries. This was very confusing and Rama asked Matali, whom he had by now revived, "What is happening now? How are all these coming back? They were dead." Matali explained, "In your original identity you are the creator of illusions in this universe. Please know that Ravana has created phantoms to confuse you. If you make up your mind, you can dispel them immediately." Matali's explanation was a great help. Rama at once invoked a weapon called "Gnana"--which means "wisdom" or "perception." This was a very rare weapon, and he sent it forth. And all the terrifying armies who seemed to have come on in such a great mass suddenly evaporated into thin air.*

#### **THE RAMAYANA, VALMIKI, INDIA, CIRCA FOURTH CENTURY B.C.**

As the date of the invasion drew near, the Allies left clues combining fact and fiction still more intricately. The real time and place of the invasion were planted with an agent whom the Germans completely mistrusted, giving Hitler the feeling that he had seen through a deception when in fact he was staring at the truth. Now, if real information on the timing of the invasion somehow leaked out, Hitler would not know what to believe. The Allies knew that reports on the buying up of Pas de Calais maps in Switzerland would reach Hitler, and this would have its own realistic logic. As for the Montgomery sightings in Gibraltar, little did the German agents know they were seeing a look-alike, a man trained to act like the general. In the end the picture the Allies painted was so real to Hitler that well into July he believed in it, long after D-Day had actually happened. Through such subtle deceptions they had compelled him to keep his forces dispersed--perhaps the decisive factor in the success of the invasion.

In a competitive world, deception is a vital weapon that can give you a constant advantage. You can use it to distract your opponents, send them on goose chases, waste valuable time and resources in defending attacks that never come. But more than likely your concept of deception is wrong. It does not entail elaborate illusions or all sorts of showy distractions. People are too sophisticated to fall for such things. Deception should mirror reality. It can be elaborate, as the British deception around D-Day was, but the effect should be of reality only subtly, slightly altered, not completely transformed.

To mirror reality you must understand its nature. Above all, reality is subjective: we filter events through our emotions and preconceptions, seeing what we want to see. Your false mirror must conform to people's desires and expectations, lulling them to sleep. (If the Allies had wanted to attack the Pas de



Calais, as Hitler suspected, and tried to convince Hitler the attack was coming to Normandy, that would have been a great deal harder than playing on his preexisting belief.) Your false mirror must incorporate things that are visibly true. It must seem somewhat banal, like life itself. It can have contradictory elements, as the D-Day deception did; reality is often contradictory. In the end, like an Escher painting, you must blend truth and illusion to the point where they become indistinguishable, and your false mirror is taken for reality.

*What we wish, we readily believe, and what we ourselves think, we imagine others think also.*

*--Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.)*

## KEYS TO WARFARE

In the early history of warfare, military leaders were faced with the following predicament: The success of any war effort depended on the ability to know as much about the other side--its intentions, its strengths and weaknesses--as possible. But the enemy would never willingly disclose this information. In addition, the enemy often came from an alien culture, with its peculiar ways of thinking and behaving. A general could not really know what was going on in the mind of the opposing general. From the outside the enemy represented something of an impenetrable mystery. And yet, lacking some understanding of the other side, a general would be operating in the dark.

The only solution was to scrutinize the enemy for outward signs of what was going on within. A strategist might count the cooking fires in the enemy camp, for example, and the changes in that number over time; that would show the army's size and whether it was increasing as reserves arrived or decreasing as it was split, or perhaps as soldiers deserted. To see where the army was heading, or whether it was readying for battle, he would look for signs of movement or changes in its formation. He would try to get agents and spies to report on its activities from within. A leader who picked up enough of these signs and deciphered them correctly could piece together a reasonably clear picture.

The leader also knew that just as he was watching the other side, the other side was doing the same with him. In pondering this back-and-forth game of reading appearances, certain enlightened strategists in cultures around the world had a similar epiphany: Why not deliberately distort the signs the enemy was looking at? Why not mislead by playing with appearances? If the enemy is counting our cooking fires, just as we are counting theirs, why not light more

fires, or fewer, to create a false impression of our strength? If they are following our army's every move, why not move it in deceptive patterns or send part of it in a direction as a decoy? If the enemy has sent spies and agents into our ranks, why not feed them false information? An enemy that thinks it knows our size and intentions, and is unaware that it has been misled, will act on its false knowledge and commit all kinds of mistakes. It will move its men to fight an enemy that is not there. It will fight with shadows.

Thinking in this way, these ancient strategists created the art of organized deception, an art that would eventually filter beyond warfare into politics and society at large. In essence, military deception is about subtly manipulating and distorting signs of our identity and purpose to control the enemy's vision of reality and get them to act on their misperceptions. It is the art of managing appearances, and it can create a decisive advantage for whichever side uses it better.

*The real impact of such a strategy is the dissipation of resources, the creation of both self-fulfilling and suicidal prophecies, and the destruction of truth and trust. It maximizes confusion and disorder and destroys the organization's resilience, adaptability, core values, and ability to respond. The key to such a strategy, says [Colonel John] Boyd, is less deception (the creation of a false order) and more ambiguity (confusion about reality itself). You want to combine fact and fiction to create ambiguity for an adversary, for the combination creates more problems, requires longer to sort out, and calls more into question than merely inserting false information. As an example, he recalled the story of a group of Germans after the Normandy invasion who had stolen some American uniforms and jeeps. They went around the French countryside changing all the road signs to confuse the allies as they advanced through the area. Soon, the Americans figured out that the directions had been reversed and simply did the opposite of whatever the signs indicated. How much more effective it would have been if the Germans had changed only a portion of the signs, a third to a half, and created even more problems for the Americans. Creating ambiguity about the signs' accuracy and prolonging the time it would take to discover the problem would have been far more effective than changing all the signs in a consistent fashion.*

THE MIND OF WAR, GRANT T. HAMMOND, 2001

In war, where the stakes are so high, there is no moral taint in using deception. It is simply an added weapon to create an advantage, much as some animals use camouflage and other tricks to help them survive. To refuse this

weapon is a form of unilateral disarmament, giving the other side a clearer view of the field--an advantage that can translate into victory. And there is no morality or goodness in losing a war.

We face a similar dynamic in our daily battles in life. We are social creatures, and our happiness, even our survival, depends on our ability to understand what other people are intending and thinking. But because we cannot get inside their heads, we are forced to read the signs in their outward behavior. We ponder their past actions as indications of what they might do in the future. We examine their words, their looks, the tone in their voice, certain actions that seem laden with significance. Everything a person does in the social realm is a sign of some sort. At the same time, we are aware that a thousand pairs of eyes are in turn watching us, reading us, and trying to sense our intentions.

It is a never-ending battle over appearance and perception. If other people can read what we are up to, predict what we are going to do, while we have no clue about them, they have a constant advantage over us that they cannot help but exploit. That is why, in the social realm, we learn from an early age to use deception--we tell others what they want to hear, concealing our real thoughts, hedging with the truth, misleading to make a better impression. Many of these deceptions are entirely unconscious.

Since appearances are critical and deception is inevitable, what you want is to elevate your game--to make your deceptions more conscious and skillful. You need the power to cloak your maneuvers, to keep people off balance by controlling the perceptions they have of you and the signs you give out. In this sense there is a lot you can learn from the military arts of deception, which are based on timeless laws of psychology and are infinitely applicable to the battles of daily life.

To master this art, you must embrace its necessity and find creative pleasure in manipulating appearances--as if you were directing a film. The following are the six main forms of military deception, each with its own advantage.

**The false front.** This is the oldest form of military deception. It originally involved making the enemy believe that one was weaker than in fact was the case. A leader would feign a retreat, say, baiting a trap for the enemy to rush into, luring it into an ambush. This was a favorite tactic of Sun-tzu's. The *appearance* of weakness often brings out people's aggressive side, making them drop strategy and prudence for an emotional and violent attack. When Napoleon found himself outnumbered and in a vulnerable strategic position before the

Battle of Austerlitz, he deliberately showed signs of being panicked, indecisive, and scared. The enemy armies abandoned their strong position to attack him and rushed into a trap. It was his greatest victory.

*And the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not fear or be dismayed; take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai; see, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land; and you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king; only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves; lay an ambush against the city, behind it."...So Joshua arose, and all the fighting men, to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor, and sent them forth by night. And he commanded them, "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind it; do not go very far from the city, but hold yourselves all in readiness; and I, and all the people who are with me, will approach the city. And when they come out against us, as before, we shall flee before them; and they will come out after us, till we have drawn them away from the city; for they will say, 'They are fleeing from us, as before.' So we will flee from them; then you shall rise up from the ambush, and seize the city; for the Lord your God will give it into your hand. And when you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire, doing as the Lord has bidden; see, I have commanded you.".....And when the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the men of the city, made haste and went out early to the descent toward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle; but he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel made a pretense of being beaten before them, and fled in the direction of the wilderness. So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn away from the city. There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, who did not go out after Israel; they left the city open, and pursued Israel.... And the ambush rose quickly out of their place, and...they ran and entered the city and took it; and they made haste to set the city on fire. So when the men of Ai looked back, behold, the smoke of the city went up to heaven; and they had no power to flee this way or that, for the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers. And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city went up, then they turned back and smote the men of Ai.*

JOSHUA 8: 1-9, 14-23

Controlling the front you present to the world is the most critical deceptive skill. People respond most directly to what they see, to what is most visible to

their eyes. If you seem clever--if you seem deceptive--their guard will be up and it will be impossible to mislead them. Instead you need to present a front that does the opposite--disarms suspicions. The best front here is weakness, which will make the other side feel superior to you, so that they either ignore you (and being ignored is very valuable at times) or are baited into an aggressive action at the wrong moment. Once it is too late, once they are committed, they can find out the hard way that you are not so weak after all.

In the battles of daily life, making people think they are better than you are--smarter, stronger, more competent--is often wise. It gives you breathing space to lay your plans, to manipulate. In a variation on this strategy, the front of virtue, honesty, and uprightness is often the perfect cover in a political world. These qualities may not seem weak but serve the same function: they disarm people's suspicions. In that situation, though, it is important not to get caught doing something underhanded. Appearing as a hypocrite will set you far back in the deception game.

In general, as strategists advocated in the days of ancient China, you should present a face to the world that promises the opposite of what you are actually planning. If you are getting ready to attack, seem unprepared for a fight or too comfortable and relaxed to be plotting war. Appear calm and friendly. Doing this will help you gain control over your appearance and sharpen your ability to keep your opponents in the dark.

**The decoy attack.** This is another ruse dating back to ancient times, and it remains perhaps the military's most common deceptive ploy. It began as a solution to a problem: if the enemy knew you were going to attack point A, they would put all their defenses there and make your job too difficult. But to deceive them on that score was not easy: even if before battle you were able to disguise your intentions and fool them out of concentrating their forces at point A, the minute they actually saw your army headed there, they would rush to its defense. The only answer was to march your army toward point B or, better, to send part of your army in that direction while holding troops in reserve for your real objective. The enemy would now have to move some or all of its army to defend point B. Do the same with points C and D and the enemy would have to disperse all over the map.

The key to this tactic is that instead of relying on words or rumors or planted information, the army really moves. It makes a concrete action. The enemy forces cannot afford to guess whether a deception is in the works: if they guess

wrong, the consequences are disastrous. They have to move to cover point B, no matter what. It is in any case almost impossible to doubt the reality of actual troop movements, with all the time and energy those involve. So the decoy attack keeps the enemy dispersed and ignorant of your intentions--the ultimate dream of any general.

The decoy attack is also a critical strategy in daily life, where you must retain the power to hide your intentions. To keep people from defending the points you want to attack, you must follow the military model and make real gestures toward a goal that does not interest you. You must seem to be investing time and energy to attack that point, as opposed to simply trying to signal the intention with words. Actions carry such weight and seem so real that people will naturally assume that is your real goal. Their attention is distracted from your actual objective; their defenses are dispersed and weakened.

*The principle is also employed in less tortuous circumstances, but with the same purpose of getting an individual to act naturally in a role because, in fact, he does not know that he is playing a false one. For example, take the design of the "Man Who Never Was" operation during World War II--wherein a high-level courier carrying secret papers containing misdirections regarding the Mediterranean invasion was to be washed up on the coast of Spain. After the "Major" was dropped in Spanish waters, the British attache in Spain was "confidentially" told that papers of great importance had been lost, and that he should discreetly determine whether the courier's briefcase had been recovered. The attache was thus able to act out his part in the fake-out in a very convincing manner by virtue of the fact that for him it wasn't an act.*

*THE SECRETS OF D DAY, GILLES PERRAULT, 1965*

**Camouflage.** The ability to blend into the environment is one of the most terrifying forms of military deception. In modern times Asian armies have proven particularly adept in this art: at the battles of Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima during World War II, American soldiers were astounded at the ability of their Japanese foes to blend into the various terrains of the Pacific theater. By sewing grass, leaves, twigs, and foliage to their uniforms and helmets, the Japanese would merge with the forest--but the forest would incrementally advance, undetected until it was too late. Nor could the Americans pinpoint the Japanese guns, for their barrels were concealed in natural rock crevices or were hidden

under removable camouflage covers. The North Vietnamese were equally brilliant at camouflage, reinforcing their skills by the use of tunnels and underground chambers that allowed armed men to pop up seemingly anywhere. Worse, in a different kind of camouflage, they could blend into the civilian population. Preventing your enemies from seeing you until it is too late is a devastating way to control their perceptions.

The camouflage strategy can be applied to daily life in two ways. First, it is always good to be able to blend into the social landscape, to avoid calling attention to yourself unless you choose to do so. When you talk and act like everyone else, mimicking their belief systems, when you blend into the crowd, you make it impossible for people to read anything particular in your behavior. (Appearances are all that count here--dress and talk like a businessman and you must *be* a businessman.) That gives you great room to move and plot without being noticed. Like a grasshopper on a leaf, you cannot be picked from your context--an excellent defense in times of weakness. Second, if you are preparing an attack of some sort and begin by blending into the environment, showing no sign of activity, your attack will seem to come out of nowhere, doubling its power.

**The hypnotic pattern:** According to Machiavelli, human beings naturally tend to think in terms of patterns. They like to see events conforming to their expectations by fitting into a pattern or scheme, for schemes, whatever their actual content, comfort us by suggesting that the chaos of life is predictable. This mental habit offers excellent ground for deception, using a strategy that Machiavelli calls "acclimatization"--deliberately creating some pattern to make your enemies believe that your next action will follow true to form. Having lulled them into complacency, you now have room to work against their expectations, break the pattern, and take them by surprise.

In the Six-Day War of 1967, the Israelis submitted their Arab enemies to a devastating and lightning-fast defeat. In doing so they confirmed all their preexisting military beliefs: the Arabs were undisciplined, their weaponry was outdated, and their strategies were stale. Six years later the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat exploited these prejudices in signaling that his army was in disarray and still humbled by its defeat in 1967, and that he was squabbling with his Soviet patrons. When Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on Yom Kippur in 1973, the Israelis were caught almost totally by surprise. Sadat had tricked them into letting down their guard.

Betrayer's masterpiece. --*To express to a fellow conspirator the grievous suspicion that one is going to be betrayed by him, and to do so at precisely the moment one is oneself engaged in betrayal, is a masterpiece of malice, because it keeps the other occupied with himself and compels him for a time to behave very openly and unsuspectingly, thus giving the actual betrayer full freedom of action.*

HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN, FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, 1878

This tactic can be extended indefinitely. Once people feel you have deceived them, they will expect you to mislead them again, but they usually think you'll try something different next time. No one, they will tell themselves, is so stupid as to repeat the exact same trick on the same person. That, of course, is just when to repeat it, following the principle of always working against your enemy's expectations. Remember the example of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter": hide something in the most obvious place, because that is where no one will look.

**Planted information.** People are much more likely to believe something they see with their own eyes than something they are told. They are more likely to believe something they discover than something pushed at them. If you plant the false information you desire them to have--with third parties, in neutral territory--when they pick up the clues, they have the impression *they* are the ones discovering the truth. The more you can make them dig for their information, the more deeply they will delude themselves.

During World War I, in addition to the infamous standoff on the Western Front, the Germans and the British fought a lesser-known battle for control of East Africa, where both sides had colonies. The man in charge of English intelligence in the area was Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, and his main rival on the German side was an educated Arab. Meinertzhagen's job included feeding the Germans misinformation, and he tried hard to deceive this Arab, but nothing seemed to work--the two men were equals at the game. Finally Meinertzhagen sent his opponent a letter. He thanked the Arab for his services as a double agent and for the valuable information he had supplied to the British. He enclosed a large sum of money and entrusted the letter's delivery to his most incompetent agent. Sure enough, the Germans captured this agent en route and found the letter. The agent, under torture, assured them that his mission was genuine--because he believed it was; Meinertzhagen had kept him out of the



loop. The agent was not acting, so he was more than believable. The Germans quietly had the Arab shot.

*Agamemnon had sent Odysseus on a foraging expedition to Thrace, and when he came back empty-handed, Palamedes son of Nauplius upbraided him for his sloth and cowardice. "It was not my fault," cried Odysseus, "that no corn could be found. If Agamemnon had sent you in my stead, you would have had no greater success." Thus challenged, Palamedes set sail at once and presently reappeared with a ship-load of grain.... After days of tortuous thought, Odysseus at last hit upon a plan by which he might be revenged on Palamedes; for his honour was wounded. He sent word to Agamemnon: "The gods have warned me in a dream that treachery is afoot: the camp must be moved for a day and a night." When Agamemnon gave immediate orders to have this done, Odysseus secretly buried a sackfull of gold at the place where Palamedes's tent had been pitched. He then forced a Phrygian prisoner to write a letter, as if from Priam to Palamedes, which read: "The gold that I have sent is the price you asked for betraying the Greek camp." Having then ordered the prisoner to hand Palamedes this letter, Odysseus had him killed just outside the camp, before he could deliver it. Next day, when the army returned to the old site, someone found the prisoner's corpse and took the letter to Agamemnon. Palamedes was court-martialled and, when he hotly denied having received gold from Priam or anyone else, Odysseus suggested that his tent should be searched. The gold was discovered, and the whole army stoned Palamedes to death as a traitor.*

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

No matter how good a liar you are, when you deceive, it is hard to be completely natural. Your tendency is to try so hard to seem natural and sincere that it stands out and can be read. That is why it is so effective to spread your deceptions through people whom you keep ignorant of the truth--people who believe the lie themselves. When working with double agents of this kind, it is always wise to initially feed them some true information--this will establish the credibility of the intelligence they pass along. After that they will be the perfect conduits for your lies.

**Shadows within shadows.** Deceptive maneuvers are like shadows deliberately cast: the enemy responds to them as if they were solid and real, which in and of

itself is a mistake. In a sophisticated, competitive world, however, both sides know the game, and the alert enemy will not necessarily grasp at the shadow you have thrown. So you have to take the art of deception to a level higher, casting shadows *within* shadows, making it impossible for your enemies to distinguish between fact and fiction. You make everything so ambiguous and uncertain, spread so much fog, that even if you are suspected of deceit, it does not matter--the truth cannot be unraveled from the lies, and all their suspicion gives them is torment. Meanwhile, as they strain to figure out what you are up to, they waste valuable time and resources.

During the World War II desert battles in North Africa, the English lieutenant Dudley Clarke ran a campaign to deceive the Germans. One of his tactics was to use props--dummy tanks and artillery--to make it impossible for the Germans to figure out the size and location of the English army. From high-flying reconnaissance aircraft, these dummy weapons would photograph like the real thing. A prop that worked particularly well was the fake airplane made of wood; Clarke dotted bogus landing fields filled up with rows of these around the landscape. At one point a worried officer told him that intelligence had been intercepted revealing that the Germans had figured out a way to distinguish the fake planes from the real ones: they simply looked for the wooden struts holding up the wings of the dummy planes (enlarged photos could reveal this). They would now have to stop using the dummies, said the officer. But Clarke, one of the great geniuses of modern deception, had a better idea: he decided to put struts under the wings of real aircraft as well as phony ones. With the original deception, the Germans were confused but could eventually uncover the truth. Now, however, Clarke took the game to a higher level: the enemy could not distinguish the real from the fake in general, which was even more disconcerting.

If you are trying to mislead your enemies, it is often better to concoct something ambiguous and hard to read, as opposed to an outright deception--that deception can be uncovered and enemies can turn their discovery to their advantage, especially if you think they are still fooled and act under that belief. You are the one doubly deceived. By creating something that is simply ambiguous, though, by making everything blurry, there is no deception to uncover. They are simply lost in a mist of uncertainty, where truth and falsehood, good and bad, all merge into one, and it is impossible to get one's bearings straight.

**Image:**

Fog. It makes the  
shape and color of objects  
impossible to know. Learn to  
create enough of it and you  
free yourself of the enemy's  
intrusive gaze; you have room to  
maneuver. You know where you are  
headed, while the enemy  
goes astray, deeper  
and deeper into  
the fog.

**Authority: One who is good at combating the enemy fools it with inscrutable moves, confuses it with false intelligence, makes it relax by concealing one's strength,...deafens its ears by jumbling one's orders and signals, blinds its eyes by converting one's banners and insignias,...confounds its battle plan by providing distorted facts.**

--*Tou Bi Fu Tan*, A Scholar's Dilettante Remarks on War (16th century A.D.)

*Appearance and intention inevitably ensnare people when artfully used, even if people sense that there is an ulterior intention behind the overt appearance. When you set up ploys and opponents fall for them, then you win by letting them act on your ruse. As for those who do not fall for a ploy, when you see they won't fall for the open trap, you have another set. Then even if opponents haven't fallen for your original ploy, in effect they actually have.*

*FAMILY BOOK ON THE ART OF WAR, YAGYU MUNENORI, 1571-1646*

## **REVERSAL**

To be caught in a deception is dangerous. If you don't know that your cover is blown, now, suddenly, your enemies have more information than you do and you become their tool. If the discovery of your deceit is public, on the other hand, your reputation takes a blow, or worse: the punishments for spying are severe. You must use deception with utmost caution, then, employing the least amount of people as possible, to avoid the inevitable leaks. You should always leave yourself an escape route, a cover story to protect you should you be exposed. Be careful not to fall in love with the power that deception brings; the use of it must always be subordinate to your overall strategy and kept under control. If you become known as a deceiver, try being straightforward and honest for a change. That will confuse people--because they won't know how to read you, your

honesty will become a higher form of deception.