

ATHENA'S RULES FOR PREVAILING IN A CRISIS

1. Always do a reality check—from your own perspective and the opponent's. Reality has rough edges, ambiguities, discontinuities, shades of gray, etc. If everything is crystal clear, the opponent behaves just like you would in similar circumstances, and everything seems consistent with your best-case scenario, **YOU ARE PROBABLY BEING DECEIVED!**

2. State your planning assumptions up front, clearly, and explicitly. Make an honest effort to periodically revalidate your assumptions. Ensure you don't confuse estimates with facts or hopes/wishful thinking with viable courses of action (COA). Remember: **ANY COA THAT RELIES ON MORE THAN TWO CONSECUTIVE MIRACLES AND VIOLATES MORE THAN ONE LAW OF PHYSICS ISN'T SUITABLE—EVEN AS A DECEPTION or FEINT.**

3. Don't fall in love with your plan, policy, or assessment of the situation. Don't expect the opponent to cooperate. Have a branch/sequel to address the unexpected. Pay attention to what opponents and friends are saying and doing—especially if words and actions don't match. **DON'T DISCOUNT INDICATORS JUST BECAUSE THEY POINT TO THINGS YOU WOULD NEVER DO. THERE ARE NO UNIVERSAL STANDARDS OF RATIONALITY (OR STUPIDITY).**

4. Put your arm around your intelligence officer and help him/her/it by asking the "right" questions—tell them what you need to know and why. But be realistic. We're yet to develop the technological ability to discern intentions or predict the unpredictable. Don't hesitate to ask how they know what they think they know. **QUESTION THE BONA FIDES OF ANY INFORMATION—NO MATTER HOW COMFORTING, CONVINCING, OR HIGHLY CLASSIFIED.**

5. You don't know what you don't know, and what you don't know can kill you. Create a leadership climate that allows alternative viewpoints to be given a fair hearing. **BEWARE OF GROUP-THINK AND REMEMBER THAT HOPE IS ALMOST NEVER A VIABLE COA. REMEMBER THAT JUST BECAUSE SOMETHING NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE DOES NOT, BY ITSELF, PRECLUDE IT FROM HAPPENING. EVERY PRECEDENT WAS CREATED BY SOMEONE'S ACT OF COURAGE (or terminal stupidity).**

6. Trust your instincts and be ready to pay the price that might incur. Warning and readiness measures are about being safe, not about being right. Don't kill your staff for "crying wolf"—the third time they drag you out of bed at 0200 might be to deal with a real disaster, not "just another exercise".

7. Timely, unambiguous warning is nice to have, but don't count on it. Don't assume or expect that appropriate decisions will automatically follow warning. You have a lot of latitude in your area of responsibility. **DO WHAT'S RIGHT—EVEN IF YOU HAVE TO BET YOUR STARS/POSITION ON IT.**

8. Don't be a victim. It sucks, even if you win. Never allow the initiator to exploit initial success. SURPRISE ONLY DETERMINES HOW THE FIRST BATTLES WILL BE FOUGHT, BUT IT'S UP TO YOU TO REVALIDATE THIS PRINCIPLE EVERY SINGLE TIME. DON'T LET SURPRISE AND DECEPTION DETERMINE FINAL OUTCOMES— unless, of course, you're the initiator.

9. Don't get complacent. HUBRIS KILLS. Surprise is the ultimate asymmetric approach because it exploits weaknesses and capitalizes on vanities.

10. GUILF ISN'T THE OPPOSITE OF VALOR—NOR A GOOD SUBSTITUTE FOR IT—BUT IT SAVES LIVES.

Athena – Goddess of Wisdom and War (Strategy & Tactics)

