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**A NEW WAY TO LOOK AT AN OLD WAR:  
A STRATEGIC STUDY OF THE SECOND PUNIC WAR**

**BY**

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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## ABSTRACT

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Many scholars have examined the history of the Second Punic War fought by the Romans and Carthaginians from 218 to 202 B.C. These histories include detailed accounts of some of the most famous battles of ancient times. Modern students of military science study these battles so that they will be better able to identify and use the principles employed by past great captains to plan and conduct a future battle or campaign. However, while these accounts are rich in operational art, few historians study the strategic elements of that protracted war.

This study begins with a brief recap of Second Punic War up to the Battle of Cannae. Then it analyzes the strategic elements of the war after the Battle of Cannae - focusing on the ends, ways, and means of both sides. During the course of the analysis, other current military principles are identified: decisive point, theater of operation, center of gravity, culminating point, and interior lines.



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## **A New Way to Look at an Old War: A Strategic Study of the Second Punic War**

Many scholars have examined the history of the Second Punic War fought by the Romans and Carthaginians from 218 to 202 B.C. These histories include detailed accounts of some of the most famous battles of the ancient world.<sup>1</sup> Modern students of military science study these battles so that they will be better able to identify and use the principles employed by past great captains to plan and conduct future battles or campaigns. However, while these accounts are rich in operational art, few historians study the strategic elements of that protracted war.<sup>2</sup> This oversight is unfortunate, since the Second Punic War provides many lessons and reinforces several principles for the student of military strategy and doctrine.

This paper will study the strategic elements of the Second Punic War in terms of the ends, ways and means of both sides, after the Battle of Cannae. The *ends* specify the Commander's vision and intent. The *ways* secure national objectives thereby achieving the ends. And the *means* are the forces employed to carry out the ways.<sup>3</sup> During the course of this analysis, other current military principles will be identified: decisive point, theater of operation, center of gravity, culminating point, and interior lines. The study begins with a brief recounting of the War up to the Battle of Cannae.



### *Historical Background*

By 264 B.C., the citizens of Rome controlled most of the central and southern Italian peninsula through negotiation or subjugation. Carthage (present day Tunis, Tunisia) was a naval power and had a trade empire that spread across the northern coast of Africa and dominated the western Mediterranean Sea. Eventually, the two ancient superpowers of Carthage and Rome vied for control of the Mediterranean in a series of protracted wars, afterward called the Punic Wars. Rome, concerned about the territorial expansion of Carthage, initiated the First Punic War to gain total control of the island of Sicily. They recognized the island was an ideal base from which Carthage could attack Italy.<sup>4</sup> It also had ideal ports to interdict shipping and communication lanes around north Africa or between Rome and southern Italy. Neither power wanted this decisive point to be controlled by the other. Rome won the war in 241 B.C. after developing superior naval tactics and practically destroying the Carthaginian fleet.<sup>5</sup> As a result, they gained control over Sicily. Rome also gained control of the islands of Sardinia and Corsica in the years immediately after the war, while Carthage was distracted in its efforts to subdue its own rebellious unpaid mercenary army. When Carthage protested Rome's action, Rome declared war on Carthage. Carthage, unable to fight a war with Rome at the time, sued for peace and accepted Rome's terms, which included an increase in its already high tribute or war tax.<sup>6</sup> By gaining control of Sardinia and Corsica, Rome gained unquestioned supremacy over the Western Mediterranean Sea.

The army's rebellion having been quelled, the leading Carthaginian general, Hamilcar Barca, led the army overland to the Iberian peninsula. Carthage needed to regain control of Iberian resources, such as silver, to pay the heavy tribute Carthage owed Rome, to replenish the Carthaginian treasury, and to rebuild its mercenary army.<sup>7</sup> Carthage never rebuilt its navy to challenge Rome's naval supremacy. Carthage learned from the First Punic War that Roman naval tactics were superior and that Rome could and would outbuild her.<sup>8</sup> However, Carthage did retain shipping to support and protect her commercial interests. This allowed her to conduct naval raids in the Second Punic War.

Rome and Carthage had their own reasons to enter a second war. As the vanquished party in the First Punic War, Carthage wanted to reestablish a parity of power with Rome. On the other hand, Rome's objective was the complete elimination of Carthage as a world power. These objectives developed during the intervening war years as Rome monitored Carthaginian intentions in Spain and then made Carthage agree to limit their expansion to the Ebro River in 226 B.C. Rome had no legal justification to interfere in Spain. The fact that Rome sought to limit Carthaginian growth in Spain indicates that they continued to see Carthage as a threat, but not as an equal power. The Carthaginians recognized, through Rome's assumption of control of Sardinia and Corsica and the Ebro agreement, that Rome would continue to take what they could and thus limit Carthaginian power. Carthage feared Rome would take the offensive against them unless forced to acknowledge Carthage as an equal.<sup>9</sup> Probably seeing war as inevitable, each wanted to complete their territorial expansion before facing the other. By 219 B.C.,

Carthage had complete control of the southern Iberian peninsula. Rome had gained control of the entire Italian peninsula. Both sides were thus ready for another confrontation. The city of Saguntum provided the pretext.

Hannibal was Hamilcar Barca's oldest son. In 221 B.C., seven years after Hamilcar's death, the army in Spain elected Hannibal commander-in-chief. The Carthaginian government ratified this choice. Two years later Hannibal attacked and captured Saguntum after an eight-month siege. This city was an ally of Rome, but it lay within the Carthaginian territory agreed upon by Rome. Hannibal's attack on the city was a punitive measure taken after Saguntum clashed with a neighboring tribe under his protection. Rome protested the action and offered the Carthaginian government a choice: turn Hannibal over to Rome for punishment or wage war. Carthage, emboldened by the booty obtained by Hannibal from Saguntum, chose war. Each side used the winter months to prepare their armies and formulate their plans.<sup>10</sup>

To force Rome to recognize Carthage as an equal power and to protect Carthage's interests in Spain, Hannibal decided to take an army into Italy. If he could defeat Roman armies and create discord between Rome and her Italian allies, those allies would turn to and support him. Rome would then be isolated from the rest of Italy. It would then be Rome's turn to sue for peace on terms favorable to Carthage.<sup>11</sup> Hannibal's plan was to take part of his army overland across the northern Iberian peninsula, the Pyrenees Mountains, southern Gaul, and the Alps into northern Italy. Since Rome controlled the seas, Hannibal had to use this overland route. Hannibal had to prepare his army for a long march and he anticipated hard fighting against the tribes that lived along the route.

He also had to insure the defense of the city of Carthage, along with the defense of the Iberian peninsula under Carthaginian control. The latter was very important, since Spanish wealth and tribesmen furnished the physical strength of the Carthaginian army. They also allowed the wealthy Carthaginian merchants and farmers to conduct the war with little impact on their own lives. As long as the war did not directly affect them, they were willing for their military to fight it. Hannibal spent the winter of 219 B.C. making plans and sending messengers into the areas he would cross in order to gain geographic, military, and political intelligence. He also attempted to gain support from the tribes he would encounter. Hannibal left an army in Spain under the command of his brother and started his march in May of 218 B.C.<sup>12</sup> His initial objective in northern Italy was the Po River Valley where Rome had only recently subdued most of the tribes of Gauls. He made the trip of 1000 miles, with heavy losses, in five months. When he arrived, he was able to reconstitute his army with some of the Gaulish tribesman hostile to Rome.<sup>13</sup>

The Romans also made their war plans. In the spring of 218 B.C., one consul was to take an army to meet Hannibal in Spain and tie him up there. Another army was to sail from Sicily to Africa to attack the city of Carthage.<sup>14</sup> But, Hannibal moved earlier and faster than anticipated. One Roman army diverted to Gaul instead of northern Spain, but it was too late to stop him. The second army, which was still in Sicily, was redirected to northern Italy to attack and destroy the invading force. This army had not yet sailed for Africa because two raiding squadrons of Carthaginian ships had disrupted the flow of supplies.<sup>15</sup>

Hannibal's Italian campaign is famous. In the first two years of the war, he destroyed Roman armies in the battles of Ticinus, Trebia, Lake Trasimene, and Gerunium. These victories kept the Gauls of northern Italy on his side. However, he failed to achieve the desired effect on Rome's Italian allies; they did not abandon Rome.

These victories and his better treatment of Italian prisoners of war (he released them instead of holding them for ransom) still failed to make the Carthaginian yoke more attractive than an alliance with Rome.<sup>16</sup> A military genius, Hannibal won many battles. But his strategic plan was still unsuccessful. In the Iberian theater, Hannibal's brothers were not as militarily successful. Within two months of their arrival, the Roman army destroyed the force Hannibal left north of the Ebro river to protect his overland line of communication. The Romans then crossed the Ebro river. As they engaged the Carthaginians, they tried to persuade the Spanish to join them against the Carthaginians. So the Carthaginian army had to fight the Romans and put down revolts of tribesmen.<sup>17</sup> Hard pressed, they were not able to send reinforcements to Hannibal.

### *Roman Strategy After Cannae*

#### Ends

The culminating point for Hannibal occurred in 216 B.C. after he won a major engagement at the battle of Cannae. Although Hannibal destroyed yet another Roman army, he did not break the fighting spirit of the citizens of Rome. Some Italian communities did turn against Rome, but most remained faithful. The Romans were tenacious, patient and committed to fighting a total war. They held fast to their ultimate

strategic objective or *end*--the elimination of Carthage as a major power. However, as the war progressed, they adjusted some of their *ways* and *means* to accomplish that objective.

Quintus Fabius, a Roman Consul and general, recognized after the battle of Lake Trasimene that the best way of dealing with Hannibal was not to meet him in open combat. Hannibal was a master of operational art and tactical maneuver. He consistently used surprise, deception, the terrain, and the weather to his advantage. He was a well-trained and highly experienced general. The Romans, on the other hand, gave command of their armies to Consuls elected annually to govern Rome. Most Consuls were no match for Hannibal on a battlefield. Quintus Fabius recognized this truth and determined it would be better to "adhere strictly to a policy of careful observation while avoiding large engagements."<sup>18</sup> But this position was not popular.<sup>19</sup> Rome broke away from the Fabian strategy and engaged Hannibal's forces in open combat several more times. The Battle at Cannae was the last major battle in the Italian theater. Rome lost this battle despite its numerically superior force. Cannae made the Romans reevaluate how they were dealing with Hannibal and the Carthaginians.

### Ways

The Romans finally adopted the Fabian strategy: no longer did they seek to expel Hannibal from Italy; they simply sought to limit his scope of influence. They decided to wage a war of attrition; they would wear down Carthaginian patience and prevent defection of Roman allies. They recognized that while Hannibal's strong cavalry gave him the advantage on a field of battle, it was of no use in siege warfare. The Roman army could follow and harass elements of Hannibal's army, but otherwise stay behind the

safe walls of fortified camps. Further, Hannibal lacked the numerical strength necessary to garrison the cities that came over to his side. He could not leave behind a sufficiently large occupying force to defend the city against the Roman army or to keep hostile cities under his control. For example, in the summer of 215 B.C. Fabius recaptured three towns garrisoned by Hannibal's forces. Likewise, Hannibal's lack of numbers allowed the Romans freedom of movement. Roman forces could operate simultaneously in different parts of central and southern Italy using available roads and fortresses. They could besiege and recapture cities and steadily reduce the Carthaginian army while Hannibal's major force was engaged elsewhere. Additionally, the Romans often forced Hannibal to break-off an offensive elsewhere to return and defend an ally. When Rome retook control of an Italian city, they exacted retribution from those who had aligned themselves with the Carthaginians. They imposed the severe punishments of death, slavery, and pillaging to scare other would-be traitors.<sup>20</sup>

While the Romans avoided major confrontations with Hannibal, they increased their efforts to seize control of the southern Iberian peninsula from Carthage. Although the war in Italy was not going well for the Romans, they had won a naval battle off the coast of Spain in 218-217 B.C. This gave them enough encouragement to send more troops to Spain to continue the effort there.<sup>21</sup> Today's student of military doctrine would recognize that the Carthaginian center of gravity was her mercenary army in Spain: the Iberian base allowed them to use the peoples and materials of Spain for recruits and funding. Spain furnished the physical strength of the Carthaginian army and allowed the wealthy Carthaginian merchants and farmers to finance the war with little impact on their

own lives. By engaging the Carthaginians in Spain, Rome tied these forces down and prevented them from reinforcing Hannibal in Italy. Over time, as Roman control of Spanish territory increased, Carthage lost this source of man-power and the financial resources to acquire mercenaries elsewhere.

Another way for Rome to achieve its ends was to retain command of the seas. Rome had been using its naval superiority to good advantage up to this point by cutting off aid to Hannibal.<sup>22</sup> Control of the sea gave Rome easy access to Spain to prevent Spanish resources from reaching Hannibal and deprive the Carthaginians access to these resources. The navy also prevented reinforcements from reaching Hannibal from his ally in Macedon or from Carthage itself. Finally, Roman sea power kept the sea lines of supply open to the eastern Mediterranean and the grain-producing island of Sicily.

#### Means

The Roman army was a citizen army, so military service was an honor. Roman allies furnish quotas of soldiers instead of paying taxes, and these Roman and Allied legions served together as part of a well-trained infantry. Rome depended on her allies for cavalry.<sup>23</sup> While Rome lost some twenty percent of her male population over the age of seventeen in battles against Hannibal, remaining citizen-soldiers retained the will to fight a total war.<sup>24</sup> Rome drafted all males over the age of 17 and offered prisoners and slaves a chance for freedom in exchange for service.<sup>25</sup> They were augmented by loyal allied forces. To maintain the fleet, they drained the resources of the people, doubled the tributes or war taxes previously imposed on the vanquished, and used inflation to debase currency.<sup>26</sup>



### *Carthaginian Strategy After Cannae*

Hannibal's plan to break Rome's military power and weaken its political influence over Italy was only partially successful. At the Battle of Cannae he had brought the Roman military to its lowest point; finally the Italian confederation was cracking. A few communities and the second largest city on the peninsula, Capua, broke away from Rome.<sup>27</sup> Hannibal's intelligence network informed him that some Italian cities were resentful of Rome's supremacy. They were jealous that Rome exercised hegemony over Italy, decided foreign policy for the whole confederation, and was the only city to acquire provinces as a result of the First Punic War.<sup>28</sup> However, the majority did not see the Semitic invaders with their different language, dress and customs as an attractive alternative to Roman domination.<sup>29</sup> In retrospect, it comes as no surprise that Hannibal did not gain enough support from the anti-Roman factions in central and southern Italy to make Rome capitulate. While he retained this capitulation as his strategic objective, he considered other ways to accomplish it.

#### Ways

Rome was already fighting Carthage in two theaters. Hannibal decided to extend the war to new areas and threaten Italy on all sides. Initially he had sought to isolate Rome. Now he wanted to surround Italy with hostile elements.<sup>30</sup>

Hannibal was a thorn in Rome's side. He was decidedly threatening the confederation. He resolved to continue to detach Italian cities from the confederation to seek their support. Since news of his victory at Cannae did get some cities to come over

to his side, perhaps he could get more-especially a sea port to open a line of supply with Africa.<sup>31</sup> To gain Italian allies, he placed few requirements on them to make his guardianship more attractive to others.<sup>32</sup> He also took Italian towns through surrender or treachery, while ravaging the countryside. He forced Rome to abandon the fairest and most fertile regions to meet his own provisioning requirements. If Roman allies perceived that Rome was too weak to defend them or stop him, there was still the chance that these cities would turn to him.

In addition to the Italian theater, Rome's army fighting on the Iberian peninsula required resources. Hannibal sent some of the spoils from Cannae to Carthage to bolster their commitment to the war. He also directed Carthage to send reinforcements to Spain to retain Carthaginian control of that theater.<sup>33</sup>

Looking elsewhere for assistance, Hannibal formed an alliance with the King of Macedon to gain reinforcements. This alliance never bore fruit; Rome's fleet confined the Macedonians to the eastern side of the Adriatic sea, keeping them out of the war in Italy. The war with the Macedonians did tie up a portion of the Roman navy and some army forces for ten years, until the truce in 205 B.C.<sup>34</sup>

Lastly, Carthage instigated dissent in the islands of Sicily and Sardinia and sent armies and fleets to Sicily. However, they lost these forces through death, incompetence, and pestilence.<sup>35</sup> Although Carthage failed to regain control of these islands, the rebellions and Carthaginian activity there tied up some Roman resources for five years. Hannibal thus had both sides engaged in three theaters of operation: Spain, Italy, and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia.

## Means

The mercenary armies of Carthage were a combined force of Carthaginian and Numidian cavalry from North Africa; infantry from Spain, Libya, southern France and northern Italy; and slingers from the Balearic Islands. Their forces represented a wide variety of languages, customs, fighting styles, and weapons.<sup>36</sup> The Carthaginians themselves were merchants and farmers, unwilling to sacrifice for war. When they did send reinforcements to Spain or Italy, it was always too little and much too late. Part of the delay in supporting those theaters of operation was the lack of Carthaginian control of the sea and access to ports. Even if Carthaginian ships could have gotten past the Roman fleet, Hannibal never had a reliable port of entry for reinforcements. Also, it was difficult for Carthage to reinforce the Spanish theater after Rome gained control of the eastern coast of Spain and Carthage's primary port in 217 B.C.<sup>37</sup>

### *Hannibal's Strategy After 207 B.C.*

The war was not going well for Carthage on the Iberian peninsula. In the years between 215 and 207 B.C., the two antagonists slogged back and forth in a virtual stalemate. By 213 B.C., Rome had taken Saguntum, and one-third of Carthaginian Spain was in Roman hands.<sup>38</sup> This was possible not only because of reinforcements from Rome, but also because of the large numbers of Iberians recruited into the two Roman armies operating in Spain. However, Carthage also sent reinforcements to Spain on several occasions. Perhaps the highlight of Carthaginian success came in the summer of 212 B.C. when the Carthaginians defeated the two Roman armies in separate actions. This

forced the Romans to move north of the Ebro river and consolidate their forces.<sup>39</sup>

However, the back-to-back victories were only a brief come-back after the defeats of the previous years. It was the last successful year Carthage enjoyed in Spain. To replace her losses, Rome sent another legion to reconstitute her army and sent the young Publius Cornelius Scipio to command them in 211 B.C.<sup>40</sup> Scipio was an apt pupil of his enemy, Hannibal, and would prove to be Hannibal's equal. In fact, he became the instrument of his defeat in the last battle of the Second Punic War. When Scipio arrived in Spain, he trained his troops rigorously. Then in the summer of 209 B.C. he attacked and conquered the main Carthaginian city, Nova Carthago.<sup>41</sup> The following year, in 208 B.C., Scipio moved south and attacked Hasdrubal, the brother of Hannibal. Hasdrubal withdrew and kept going, abandoning Spain and leading his army across the Pyrenees, southern Gaul, and the Alps into Italy.<sup>42</sup> He planned to join forces with his brother in southern Italy. However, the Romans, enjoying an economy of force and interior lines, attacked and destroyed Hasdrubal's army. Hasdrubal was killed in the Battle of Metaurus in 207 B.C.<sup>43</sup>

Ends

Following his brother's death, Hannibal recognized that he would receive no help from Spain and that Carthage would soon lose all Spanish resources. His original objective was no longer possible, so he had to reassess the situation. For years his army had lived off the land with almost no reinforcements, since the Carthaginians had sent most of their aid to Spain or Sicily. Additionally, he recognized his plan to woo Italian allies to his side to defeat Rome had failed. He lost the Italian allies he made or cities he took when he moved his army for better foraging. Therefore Hannibal had to abandon his

plan to bring Rome to her knees. Instead of a peace with terms favorable to Carthage, he now sought terms that would not ruin Carthage.<sup>44</sup> Beleaguered, his new aim was simply to preserve Carthage.

#### Ways

Although robbed of his operational momentum by the Fabian strategy, Hannibal still sought to make the Carthaginian presence in Italy the key to peace. Since Rome could not readily expel the Carthaginians from Italy, she might make peace to free her land of the invader. In 205 B.C., Carthage sent the remnants of her forces from Spain to northern Italy. Two Carthaginian forces wreaking havoc on the Italian countryside would surely impel the Romans to sue for peace. Carthage hoped to force this peace before the Romans could mount an invasion of Africa.<sup>45</sup>

#### Means

Two Carthaginian armies were now in Italy: Hannibal in southern Italy and another force under Mago in northern Italy. The latter force was able to recruit from the neighboring Gauls; they enjoyed some success, such as taking the city of Genoa.<sup>46</sup> However, without sea power, neither army could expect reinforcements from Carthage.

#### *Strategy of Rome After 205 B.C.*

Carthage did send a new army into Spain in 207 B.C. to reinforce its remaining force on the Iberian peninsula. However, that same year, Scipio attacked and destroyed it. With no significant Carthaginian force remaining in Spain, by 206 B.C. Scipio was able to bring all of the Iberian peninsula under Roman control. Now Rome could use the rich

natural resources of that land to finance the conclusion of the war with Carthage. In 205 B.C., Scipio returned to Rome.<sup>47</sup>

#### Ends

One theater of operations having closed, the time was ripe to open another. It was time to take the war to Carthage and finally accomplish Rome's objective--the complete elimination of Carthage as a world power.

#### Ways

Carthaginian forces in Italy, while destructive, were no threat to the city of Rome. Rome was strong enough to oppose these two Carthaginian armies and to invade Africa as well. An invasion would threaten the city of Carthage. Carthage would then have no choice but to sue for peace: As the indisputable and humiliated loser of this protracted war, she would have to accept terms that would make her a bit player on the world stage.

Roman naval superiority would support the invasion by protecting the sea lines of supply and communication between Italy, Sicily, and the invasion force. They would continue to preclude Carthaginian reinforcements from reaching Mago and Hannibal, while bringing Roman reinforcements to Africa as needed.

#### Means

Scipio asked for and received a force to invade Africa. Volunteers, 7,000 strong, also joined him in this effort.<sup>48</sup> And allies paid for the ships necessary to transport the force. Scipio sailed for Africa in 205 B.C. There he allied himself with Masinissa, a Numidian who brought cavalry to the Roman effort.<sup>49</sup>

### *The War Ends in Africa*

In 204 B.C., Scipio ambushed and destroyed a force of Carthaginian cavalry. 203 B.C. was a bitter year for Carthage: They fought two different battles with Scipio at Utica, where large numbers of Carthaginians and their Numidian allies were killed.<sup>50</sup> In the fall, the Peace Party of the Carthaginian government negotiated a peace treaty, accepting terms that included the withdrawal of Carthaginian forces from Italy. Carthage then recalled Hannibal and the northern army.<sup>51</sup> Following Hannibal's arrival in Carthage, the War Party gained enough strength to repudiate the treaty and its harsh terms. In 202 B.C. after Hannibal had rested and reorganized his troops and recruits, he faced Scipio on the field of battle. Prior to the battle, Hannibal met with Scipio to seek a less harsh peace for Carthage, pointing out that the Romans could lose their advantage if they lost the coming battle. Scipio refused to accept terms that were less than those already approved by the government of Rome.<sup>52</sup> Both sides fought hard at the Battle of Zama; however, the Romans, with their stronger cavalry, emerged victorious. Carthage had to accept terms for peace that reduced her to a third-rate power. The seeds for the third and final Punic War had been sown. The complete destruction of the city of Carthage was only a matter of time.

### *Summary and Conclusion*

Over two thousand years have passed since Hannibal and Scipio faced each other at the battle of Zama. Scipio learned a great deal from Hannibal about maneuver,

surprise, deception, uses of weather and terrain, and the use of cavalry. He used that knowledge to defeat his enemy and finally achieve Roman's strategic objective-- elimination of Carthage as a world power. Modern students of tactics and the operational art of war still study these great captains as they prepare for success in battle. This analysis shows that students of strategy as well should study the Second Punic War, just as students of tactics study Hannibal. Analysis of the strategies of both sides in the Second Punic War reveals the importance of several strategic principles: theater of operation, center of gravity, decisive point, culminating point, and interior lines.

#### Theater of Operation

Hannibal sought to destroy Rome by forcing it to contend with several major threats. He tried to bring the Macedonians into the war as well as the inhabitants of the islands off the western coast of Italy. What he failed to realize was that by opening up multiple theaters of operation, he would also be stretching Carthaginian resources and thereby diluting his unity of effort. With little ability to communicate across the distances over which he was operating and with Romans naval superiority, Hannibal could not direct or synchronize his efforts in the other theaters. Rome also did not have one overall commander-in-chief to direct the theater of war and synchronize events. However, she did have uninterrupted lines of communication to allow her to provide reinforcements where they were needed.

#### Center of Gravity

Rome must have recognized that the forces in Spain were the Carthaginian center of gravity, since they placed most of their effort in that theater. They knew that by



destroying this force, they would wrest control of Spain away from Carthage. Not only would this prevent the reinforcement of Hannibal's forces, it would significantly reduce Carthage's ability to conduct a war. When Rome gained control of Spain, the final outcome of the war was inevitable. As for Hannibal, he underestimated the nature and resiliency of the Italian confederation, the Roman center of gravity. While he correctly perceived the dissatisfaction of some allies, he underestimated the developing hegemony of the Italians. To most of them, Carthaginians were barbaric outsiders with the reputation of treating subject peoples harshly. Hannibal was not an attractive alternative to Roman dominance. If Hannibal had fully understood the strength of Rome's center of gravity, there may not have been a Second Punic War. Carthage may have employed other ways to gain their strategic objective.

#### Decisive Point

As with the cause of the First Punic War, the third theater of operations of the Second Punic War was for control of a decisive point--the island of Sicily. Control of Sicily, and to a lesser extent of Sardinia and Corsica, was necessary to both Rome and Carthage. Whoever held the island had the advantage--control of the lines of operation between Carthage and Italy and the sea lines of operation between Carthage and Spain. It was also an ideal staging area for an offensive force going to either Italy or North Africa. Because the Romans had control of Sicily and its neighboring islands at the beginning of the war, the Carthaginians had to use a land route to invade Italy. During the War, Rome used Sicily as a base to restrict Carthaginian resupply of forces in Spain and Italy. Later,

Rome used Sicily as a base to marshal an army to invade North Africa. Rome also resupplied this army through the island, which greatly facilitated that campaign.

#### Culminating Point

Cannae was the strategic culminating point for the Carthaginians in Italy. After that battle, Rome's Fabian strategy neutralized Hannibal's offensive capability. By avoiding decisive confrontations, the Romans denied him the opportunity to use his remaining offensive power to win more battles in that theater. His overextended forces could not gain control of new Italian cities, while retaining control of others.

#### Interior lines

Rome also enjoyed interior lines in Italy. Their road network and fortresses enabled them to move freely so they could harass Hannibal, disperse his forces, and deplete his supplies. The best example of Rome's use of interior lines occurred when the Roman general Claudius Nero moved his army north against Hasdrubal. He attacked and destroyed Hasdrubal and then returned to oppose Hannibal. Hannibal never knew Claudius had left the area.

As valuable as these strategic lessons are, they are certainly not the only ones from the Second Punic War. The war is a good case study of the interplay between the ends, ways, and means and campaign planning. However, there is perhaps a more valuable lesson. This war teaches strategists that during the course of a war they must be able to recognize when and if they should modify their ends, ways, and means. As we have seen, throughout the eighteen years of the War, the Romans never changed their vision and intent-- *ends* they sought to achieve. They did modify their *ways* to secure that

national objective and achieve the ends on at least two occasions. They postponed the invasion of Africa until Spain was under their control, and they adopted the Fabian strategy against Hannibal instead of trying to destroy or expel him from Italy. As for the *means* or the forces the Romans used to accomplish the ways, they maintained a strong navy to control the lines of communication and committed their citizens and allies to total war. The Carthaginians modified the *ends* they sought to achieve when it was clear that the outcome of the war would not be in their favor. They gave up the vision of acknowledged parity of power with Rome and sought a peace with moderate terms. They also adjusted their *ways* to secure their objective by expanding the theaters of operation when they recognized their original plan for gaining Italian allies was not working. But the *means* or forces at their disposal were insufficient. The citizens of Carthage did not support a total war and were not willing to attempt to regain control of their sea lines of supply and communication, lost in the previous war. When the war arrived at their door, it was too late.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> William O'Connor Morris, Hannibal: Soldier, Statesman, Patriot (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1897), V. Morris informs readers that Polybius, a Greco-Roman, is generally regarded as one of the primary sources of information on the Second Punic War. While his work is not impartial, he was a soldier who understood military matters and he was not far removed from Hannibal's time. The second primary source is Livy who wrote over 160 years after the event. His work is not trustworthy as he didn't check the truth of his sources, but he did incorporate information from previous records which are now extant.

<sup>2</sup> Department of the Army. Decisive Force: The Army in Theater Operations, Field Manual 100-7 (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, May 1995), 1-2. The Operation level is "the vital link between strategic direction and tactical employment on the battlefield."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> Polybius, The Histories, trans. W.R. Paton, vol I, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 169 and 193.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-238.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 271. Frank R. Kramer, "Massilian Diplomacy Before The Second Punic War," American Journal of Philology LXIX (1948), 11. William Ledyard Rodgers, Greek and Roman Naval Warfare (Annapolis: US Naval Institute, 1937), 30.

<sup>8</sup> S.A. Cook, F.E. Adcock, and M.P. Charlesworth, eds., The Cambridge Ancient History, vol. VIII, Rome and the Mediterranean 218 - 133 B.C. (New York: MacMillan Co., 1930), 75.

<sup>9</sup> Livy, The War With Hannibal, trans. Aubrey De Selincourt (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 23 and 69-70. Kramer, 5, 11, 17 and 22. B.W. Jones, "Rome's Relationship with Carthage, A study of Aggression," The Classical Bulletin vol 49 (December 1972), 28.

<sup>10</sup> Livy, 23-38 and Rodgers, 316.

<sup>11</sup> E.T. Salmon, "The Strategy of the Second Punic War," Greece and Rome second series vol. VII (1960), 138.

<sup>12</sup> Livy, 45 - 46 and Trevor Nevitt Dupuy, The Military Life of Hannibal: Father of Strategy (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1969), 21-36.

<sup>13</sup> Elmer C May, Gerald P. Stadler, and John F. Votaw. Ancient and Medieval Warfare (Wayne, New Jersey: Avery Publishing Group, Inc. 1984), 53. Dupuy, 35-36. Livy, 73. Polybius, vol II, 145.

<sup>14</sup> Livy, 39, 49 & 74. Hans Delbruck, Warfare in Antiquity, trans Walter J. Renfroe, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 345-355. Salmon, 141.

<sup>15</sup> Rodgers, 319.

<sup>16</sup> Barry S. Strauss and Josiah Ober., The Anatomy of Error: Ancient Military Disasters and Their Lessons For Modern Strategists (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 150.

<sup>17</sup> Livy 119-120.

<sup>18</sup> Dupuy, 55 and Livy 107-108.

<sup>19</sup> Livy 111, 120 and 133.

<sup>20</sup> Strauss, 149-150.

<sup>21</sup> Polybius, vol II, 239.

<sup>22</sup> Rodgers, 320.

<sup>23</sup> Dupuy, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Livy 158, 165 and 181.

<sup>25</sup> Livy 158 and 183. Also, Dupuy, 71.

<sup>26</sup> Cook, 74.

<sup>27</sup> Livy 165 and 171.

<sup>28</sup> Salmon, 138.

<sup>29</sup> Livy, 172 and Salmon, 139.

<sup>30</sup> May, 59.

<sup>31</sup> Rodgers, 328.

<sup>32</sup> Livy, 173 and Strauss, 151.

- <sup>33</sup> May, 59.
- <sup>34</sup> Rodgers, 342 and 347.
- <sup>35</sup> Dupuy, 100-102.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 13-15.
- <sup>37</sup> Rodgers, 333.
- <sup>38</sup> Livy, 283 and Dupuy, 103.
- <sup>39</sup> Livy, 341-345.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 377 and 380.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 411-417.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 451-454 and 456.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 486-493.
- <sup>44</sup> Dupuy, 121.
- <sup>45</sup> Rodgers, 364.
- <sup>46</sup> Livy , 563.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 497-498, 519 and 547.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 562.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 570.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 603-604, 610-612, 623-625 and 628-630.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., 638-639 and 642-644.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 654-658.



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