

# The Uncertain Oracle

Some Intelligence Failures Revisited



In an article about "Intelligence and Military History," Keith Jeffery reflects that because of the lack of a historical record about MI operations, "we usually know more about intelligence failures than successes."<sup>1</sup> This observation has the ring of another eternal verity. The time devoted to dissecting intelligence failures is indicative of the human frustration at not being able to predict the future with any consistent success. There is an all too prevalent tendency in American society (the press, the congress) to call anything less than clairvoyance a failure. For many critics, the military intelligence analyst has no more scientific underpinning than the racetrack tout, stock market tipster or the cover-all-bases predictions of Jeanne Dixon. It is not enough to say that this attitude probably arises from growing accustomed to a usually reliable intelligence gathering apparatus, so that exceptions become even more jarring to our sense of safety.

The successes of military intelligence in divining enemy intentions often go to the grave with the operatives or to the shredder with their restrictive security classifications intact. This is felt to be necessary to prevent an enemy from emulating or thwarting those successes. While some important historical lessons are lost in this way, there are enough lessons to be learned from the failures to keep historians occupied for a time.

So yet another catalog of intelligence failure is presented here along with some analysis of where the breakdown may have occurred. I have concentrated on examples that directly affected U.S. military operations.

A nation is facing increasing hostility from its neighbor. Raids across its borders increase until finally a major attack is made on its sovereignty. It comes as a complete surprise to the United States government. The press is agitated by the failure of the government to predict this move. Politicians fume. The situation described could be the 1950 attack on South Korea by the Communist North, the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Arab surprise attack on Israel in 1973, the 1979 Chinese invasion of Vietnam, the Iraqi attack on Iran in 1980, the Argentinean invasion of the Falklands in 1982, or Saddam Hussein's sudden overwhelming of Kuwait in 1990. The scenarios are often the same. In this instance, I

am referring to the 1916 attack by Mexican bandit/revolutionary Pancho Villa on the American town of Columbus, New Mexico.

Villa hit the sleeping town on 9 March 1916 with a force of 485 men. The town and the garrison were totally surprised. Having sent men into the town the previous afternoon, he knew that there were only 30 soldiers in the garrison of the 13th Cavalry. He broke off the attack at 6:30 a.m., leaving behind 67 Americans dead and 13 others dying of their wounds.

The day before the attack, the foreman of a ranch reported to Col. Herbert H. Slocum, commanding the 13th Cavalry at Columbus, that he had seen Villa's force just six miles to the south. Other observers contradicted this report and it was not taken seriously. In fact, farmers and ranchers along the border were nervous and sightings of the Mexican bandits were legion.

The threat of raid on American soil was a real one. In the year preceding the Villa attack, there were 38 raids on the U.S. by Mexican bandits, resulting in the death of 37 U.S. citizens, 26 of them soldiers.

Maj. Gen. Frederick Funston, commanding the Southern Department at San Antonio, Texas, responded to the press uproar that followed when he said in his 1916 Annual Report:

Much has been said about whether or not this attack was a surprise. If there was any person in the country who was not surprised at such an attack by a large body of armed troops coming from a nation with whom we are at peace, that person must have been one of those residents of the immediate vicinity, who were alleged to have known of the plans for the attack, or to have guided Villa's troops in the attack....<sup>2</sup>

I use this example to show that there are some constants in history, despite the revolutionary advances in technology. In this instance, as in many to come, an intelligence failure was accompanied by an operational lapse. The garrison at Columbus had settled into a routine and despite 38 previous raids, vigilance was lax.

Early in the 20th century intelligence was not recognized as a separate and distinct military discipline. Intelligence gathering was primitive and

relied mainly upon spies or reconnaissance. Communications were slow, even if a telegraph was in the vicinity, and headquarters were almost always a long way off. The field commander had to rely upon his own collection system for security. In the case of the garrison at Columbus, usable intelligence was virtually nonexistent. The commander and many of the officers were away attending polo matches at El Paso at the time of the attack. The *villistas* were aware of that fact, having first made a simple reconnaissance.

### **Pearl Harbor**

That well known photograph of the USS *Ari-zona*, enshrouded in smoke, her superstructure tilting crazily, about to slip into the sizzling shallows of Pearl Harbor, stings the American consciousness. It has become a symbol of "intelligence failure," that too common condition that embarrasses governments, outrages congressmen, energizes the press, and causes servicemen to die. It is the nightmare of every member of the intelligence community. People find the anatomy of a blunder both fascinating and instructive. It is, therefore, a phenomenon that bears periodic reexamination.

Given that the United States could read top secret Japanese codes in 1941, how could it be so completely surprised as it was on the morning of December 7, 1941?

American military and political leaders all had access to information that indicated a Japanese attack. But the information was fragmented, located in different agencies, or slowed in bureaucratic channels. There was no central clearing house for intelligence that could pull together the entire picture. Because there was so much information pouring in on the situation before Pearl Harbor, "no single person or agency ever had at any given moment all the signals existing in this vast information network."<sup>3</sup>

The information could be contradictory. The MAGIC source pointed to a Japanese attack in Southeast Asia. Coast watchers, on the other hand, were sighting Japanese troop movements to Manchuria. In Hawaii there were a number of reports that pointed to a Japanese attack on Soviet Russia as well as alerts against local sabo-

tage. All of these signals were competing at the Washington, D.C. level with intelligence reports flowing from the Atlantic and Europe where the threats were frequent and paramount in the minds of the leaders.

Army and Navy intelligence predicted a Japanese attack on 30 November or 7 December on British (Malaya, Singapore), Dutch (Borneo) or American targets (Guam or the Philippines). There was no shortage of information that a attack was imminent. The question was where would it fall. Wohlstetter puts the question this way: "If we could enumerate accurately the British and Dutch targets and give credence to a Japanese attack against them either on November 30 or December 7, why were we not expecting a specific danger to *ourselves*? And by the word 'expecting,' we mean expecting in the sense of taking specific alert actions to meet the contingencies of attack by land, sea, or air."<sup>4</sup>

It is always easier to pick out of the fog the clear signal after the event.<sup>5</sup> Wohlsetter concludes that "we failed to anticipate Pearl Harbor not for want of the relevant materials, but because of a plethora of irrelevant ones." Then there was the matter of reacting to the danger in time. She added: "There is a difference, then between having a signal available somewhere in the heap of irrelevancies, and perceiving it as a warning; and there is also a difference between perceiving it as a warning, and acting or getting action on it."<sup>6</sup>

It has always been easier for intelligence analysts to measure the enemy's capabilities and determine if they had the means for an attack, than to predict the enemy's intentions or willingness to use those means. So they are understandably reluctant to make these kinds of educated guesses because they will be blamed for the failure to read minds.

At Pearl Harbor it was not only enemy intentions that were misread, but their capabilities as well. Information on Japanese torpedoes said they needed a depth of about 60 feet and instilled confidence that they would be worthless in the 30-40 foot shallows of Pearl Harbor. Only a week before the attack, the Japanese developed an improved torpedo that could navigate the shallower depths.

Japanese capabilities were seriously misjudged

when their aircraft production was underestimated by half, their pilot training pronounced inferior, their Zero fighter remained a mystery, their sonar gear was written off as substandard, and the number of aircraft on their carriers was undercounted.<sup>7</sup>

The question of *where* an attack would fall was wrongly answered just before Pearl Harbor when analysts prepared a list of possible targets which omitted Hawaii altogether. Although U.S. planners had considered Hawaii a potential target in their training exercises for many years, the widespread belief that the islands were an impregnable fortress tended to cause U.S. intelligence to write it off as a possibility.

Warnings were dispatched to Admiral Kimmel by the Chief of Naval Operations and by the War Department. On 27 November the CNO sent this message: "An aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days.... The number and equipment of Japanese troops and the organization of naval task forces indicated an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai or Kra Peninsula, or possibly Borneo. ...Execute an appropriate defensive deployment." On the same day the War Department said, "Negotiations with Japan appear to be terminated...hostile action possible at any moment." On 3 December the CNO warned, "Highly reliable information has been received that categoric and urgent instructions were sent yesterday to Japanese diplomatic and consular posts at Hongkong, Singapore, Batavia, Manila, Washington, and London to destroy most of their codes and ciphers at once and to burn all other important confidential and secret documents."<sup>8</sup> Since none of these messages specifically mentioned Hawaii and because the Japanese were not told to burn *all* of their codes, no special importance was attached to them.

Sometimes even apparent signals are rendered useless by operational inaction. U.S. defense plans anticipated that a single submarine attack would mean that a larger surface force was in the area. Yet when an enemy submarine was confirmed in the area on 7 December at 0640, there was no change in alert status.<sup>9</sup>

When Col. Rufus S. Bratton, the chief of Army Far Eastern Intelligence in Washington was troubled by the implications of the new informa-

tion intercepted via the "winds" code and wished to relay that information to his counterpart in Hawaii, he was thwarted by the high security classification which could not be sent through normal channels. So instead he sent a message in the clear instructing the Army intelligence man in Hawaii, Lt. Col. Kendall J. Fiedler, to "Contact Commander Rochefort immediately thru Commandant Fourteenth Naval District regarding broadcasts from Tokyo reference weather." Upon receipt, the untrained and inexperienced Fiedler in Hawaii filed the message and did not try to see Commander Rochefort. He simply did not see any urgency in this routine kind of message, especially since he did not expect any Japanese attack.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, when Admiral Husband E. Kimmel was informed that the Japanese were destroying their codes in London, Washington and Far Eastern consulates, he attached no particular importance to it vis-a-vis his situation. To congressmen and military leaders studying the event after the war, destruction of codes was an "unmistakable tip-off" and put Admiral Kimmel's judgment in question. But while the admiral might assume, as everyone did after the fact, that this meant war, he did not necessarily come to the conclusion that Pearl Harbor would be attacked. And burning of classified documents by the Japanese was a regular occurrence at the consulate in Honolulu.

No one in the Far East U.S. military establishment seriously believed that Pearl Harbor was a serious target to the Japanese. So it became easier to misinterpret those signs that pointed to this possibility. The human tendency to explain events according to their own expectations and beliefs, and the resistance to any information that overturns their opinions were key factors in the Pearl Harbor intelligence failure. Other factors were the mass of conflicting information, the Japanese success at keeping their intentions quiet, deception operations, sudden changes in military capabilities that caused, for instance, U.S. estimates of the range of the Zero to fall short, and our own communications security which not only denied information to the enemy but to key American officers as well.

After Pearl Harbor, congressional findings made note of the tendency of military men to ac-

cept personal responsibility for actions without asking for orders from a superior.

While there is an understandable disposition of a subordinate to avoid consulting his superior for advice except where absolutely necessary in order that he may demonstrate his self-reliance, the persistent failure without exception of Army and Navy officers...to seek amplifying and clarifying instructions from their superiors is strongly suggestive of just one thing: That the military and naval services failed to instill in their personnel the wholesome disposition to consult freely with their superiors.<sup>11</sup>

Wohlstetter found in her study of Pearl Harbor that there was a general prejudice against intellectuals and intelligence specialists. She said, “[intelligence officers’] efforts were unsuccessful because of the poor repute associated with Intelligence, inferior rank, and the province of the specialist or long-hair.”<sup>12</sup>

Analysts receive information piecemeal over a period of time and seldom are able to evaluate the cumulative weight of their information. This was true before Pearl Harbor when Magic intercepts were sent to decision-makers one at a time. A messenger waited outside their offices until the file was read and then carried it to the next person on the list. So the fragments were never considered as a body of evidence.

Expectations have a big part in determining how information will be interpreted. For example, the chief of Army intelligence in Hawaii was not expecting a Japanese attack. As a result, when he received warning of the Japanese destroying their codes, he attached no importance to it and merely filed the message.<sup>13</sup> An Army lieutenant received information from a radar station of a flight of approaching aircraft on morning of December 7th. He readily believed that the flight was friendly and told the radar operators to forget it. The “wishful-thinking” phenomena is closely related to expectations. It projects the desires of an individual into the expected outcome.

It is easy to misjudge the importance of new information in light of strongly held theories. Admiral Kimmel probably did so when he learned in a “for action” warning that the Japanese were

destroying their codes. This Japanese action was conveniently taken to mean that an attack would take place in Southeast Asia, the belief of the American leaders in Hawaii all along. So this report was not even passed on to the Army headquarters in Hawaii.

Another example of the tendency to reshape information to fit preconceptions was the October 1941 intercept of a Tokyo request of the Honolulu consulate for information on the exact number and location of U.S. warships in the harbor. No special importance was placed on this request because, said the Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark, “We knew the Japanese appetite was almost insatiable for detail in all respects. The dispatch might have been put down as just another example of their great attention to detail.”<sup>14</sup>

Of course, it was not entirely a failure of intelligence. Operational planning must be faulted as well. Even if the signs of the imminent attack on Pearl had been correctly interpreted and the warning disseminated, the victims of the attack must have sufficient time to react, to get into their defensive posture. Because the surprise attackers have a definite advantage in timing, seldom is there time to get ready. Placing troops on constant alert is not feasible. That exhausts both soldiers and patience. High levels of readiness cannot be sustained over long periods of time. There are always peaks and valleys.<sup>15</sup>

Wohlstetter concluded her definitive study of the catastrophe at Pearl Harbor with this caution for the future: “We have to accept the fact of uncertainty and learn to live with it. No magic, in code or otherwise, will provide certainty. Our plans must work without it.”<sup>16</sup>

Ephraim Kam reached a similar conclusion that surprise attacks were inevitable when he said, “History does not encourage potential victims of surprise attack. One can only hope to reduce the severity—to be only partly surprised, to issue clearer and more timely warnings, to gain a few days for better preparations—and to be more adequately prepared to minimize the damage once a surprise attack occurs.”<sup>17</sup>

The War Department General Staff began its own study of the Joint Congressional Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack

and published its findings in January 1947. The study analyzed the “evidence from the broad intelligence viewpoint” and drew its lessons from the analysis. Many of their findings and recommendations have been overtaken by changes in military intelligence organization and technology. But some of the lessons they surfaced can be valid in any era.

Its first conclusion was there was a lack of appropriations for military intelligence. That is a perennial problem that will stay with American society. A second finding was that “intelligence training was not given sufficient weight in the selection of high-level intelligence staff officers.” Emphasis was put on operations and command in Army schools and that meant that more prestige was attached to those positions. “The net result was a tendency to consider the Intelligence Officer in a junior advisory capacity and to usurp his evaluation functions.” The study recommended that “through the school system and military intelligence publications, the importance of strategic intelligence and its evaluation by trained personnel be stressed.”

A third conclusion was that “at every level there were failures to place sufficient credence in the incomplete intelligence at hand to insure that within existing capabilities no action was omitted which might improve our security against attack.”

“Dissemination of intelligence and information from Washington to the field was not adequate...to keep the field...informed. Conversely, the field personnel did not at all times forward all the information collected by their commands which would be of interest to the various intelligence agencies in Washington.”

Often security precautions kept information from being disseminated or slowed its flow.

A final finding found fault with the analysis and dissemination of information.

The principles of the importance of first information and of prompt dissemination of the conditions of first contact were widely overlooked. Japanese intention to attack Pearl Harbor was widely rumored in Japan at about the time we later learned it was first proposed by Yamamoto, but the rumors were disregarded as fantastic and soon forgotten. Later, when the Japanese moved into Indo-China,

this was properly interpreted at all levels as indicating a complete break soon. However, no one in a position to act realized that the logical target for initial surprise attack was our fleet at Pearl Harbor, the one means we then had to oppose their further obviously advertised intention to continue south. Finally, when their forces were first contacted at Hawaii, the significance of the contacts was missed until the bombs fell.

The five members of the study commission recommended “that there be required as a part of every course in all service schools a subcourse stressing the importance of rapid dissemination of first information and first contact, not only in a meeting engagement after hostilities have commenced but also at any time the status of foreign relations indicates that there is a possibility of war.”<sup>18</sup>

## **Korea**

In the moments before dawn on 25 June 1950, the North Korean Peoples Army moved out of their forward positions and swarmed into the Republic of Korea, supported by armor columns and planes. For the most part, they swept the small, woefully underequipped, US-trained Republic of Korea Army before them. The North Koreans achieved complete tactical surprise and would nearly overwhelm the peninsula before U.S. forces, under United Nations auspices, could land and establish a toehold at Pusan.

The U.S. had a small, but organized intelligence-gathering capability on the ground in Korea in 1950. The U.S. Army’s Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) had officers working with every echelon of the ROK Army and would compile intelligence on the North Korean Army. Because KMAG was assigned to the State Department rather than to General Douglas MacArthur’s Far East Command (FEC) in Japan, that information would bypass his headquarters and be reported to Washington. To collect the information he needed, Maj. Gen. Charles A. Willoughby, the FEC G-2, organized the Korean Liaison Office in Seoul which was in fact a detachment of intelligence specialists. Additionally, the U.S. Embassy in Seoul had its military attaches and

political analysts working on the military situation.

These assets did their work. They picked up plenty of warnings, like the evacuation of civilians north of the 38th parallel, troop buildups along the border, and the positioning of supplies and equipment in these forward areas. And there was a four-year record of border skirmishes and armed North Korean reconnaissance into the South.

So frequently had the North Koreans raided along the border, including two limited invasions of the South, that these kinds of incidents were referred to by Secretary of Defense Louis A. Johnson as "Sunday morning incursions." Even though there was a marked lull in the frequency of the border incursions, another possible indicator of an impending attack, no one thought the indicators of the 25 June Sunday morning attack to be out of the ordinary.

Between June 1949 and June 1950, FEC intelligence dispatched 1,200 warnings to Washington of an impending NK attack.<sup>19</sup> Artillery duels and border incursions were common. Department of Defense was saying that the ROK Army was far superior to its Communist neighbor, leading officials to reject the possibility of a NK attack and to be confident that even if an attack occurred, the ROKs could defeat the North in "two weeks." Analysts failed to evaluate the significance of T-34 tanks amassed at the border and underestimated their capabilities to negotiate flooded rice paddies.<sup>20</sup>

North Korean leader KIM Il Sung issued a proclamation on 7 June 1950 that elections would be held "Korea-wide" on August 15th, the first time that he had ever boldly asserted a deadline. Like all such outpouring from the North, it was dismissed as propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

The pattern took on increasing significance by 1950 and General Willoughby was forwarding reports to Washington from his analysts who believed that a North Korean invasion would take place in the Spring of 1950. Willoughby non-concurred, saying "such an act is unlikely."<sup>22</sup>

James F. Schnabel reported in to the G-2, FEC, in Tokyo in November 1949 and was briefed on the military situation in Korea. "A major from the G-2 section, quite frankly stated that the feel-

ing in G-2 was that the North Koreans would attack and conquer South Korea in the coming summer. The point was not emphasized particularly and the fact seemed to be accepted as regrettable but inevitable."<sup>23</sup>

So the failure to predict the North Korean invasion of the South in 1950 was not one of failing to target the enemy, nor of failing to pick up the signals. It was one of analyses at the higher echelons. In March 1950, Maj. Gen. Willoughby was reporting:

It is believed that there will be no civil war in Korea this spring or summer.... South Korea is not expected to seriously consider warfare so long as her precipitating war entails probable discontinuance of United States aid. The most probable course of North Korean action this spring and summer is furtherance of attempts to overthrow South Korean government by creation of chaotic conditions in the Republic of Korea through guerrillas and psychological warfare.<sup>24</sup>

In the same month, the embassy in Seoul told the State Department that there was little possibility of a North Korean invasion. In Washington, attention was focused elsewhere, on Indochina where a communist takeover appeared much more immediate. The Department of the Army G-2, Maj. Gen. Alexander R. Bolling, was saying in a March intelligence report that "Recent reports of expansion of the North Korean People's Army and of major troop movements could be indicative of preparation for aggressive action" but that "Communist military measures in Korea will be held in abeyance pending the outcome of their program in other areas, particularly Southeast Asia." This was at a time when the Air Force's Office of Special Investigations was alerting the Far East Air Forces that the Soviets had definitely ordered the North to launch their attack. It was also at a time when a remarkable number of indicators were piling up. DA G-2 said in May that "The movement of North Korean forces steadily southward toward the 38th parallel during the current period could indicate preparation for offensive action." A second intel summary reported routinely that "the outbreak of hostilities may occur at any time in Korea....<sup>25</sup>

Another routine report, just six days before the invasion, noted the evacuation of civilians from the border area, the replacement of civilian freight shipments with military supply movement only, large influx of troops, including concentrations of armor, and large stockpiling of weapons and equipment. No analyses accompanied this raw data, but coincidentally, on the same day, General Willoughby wrote: "Apparently Soviet advisors believe that now is the opportune time to attempt to subjugate the South Korean Government by political means, especially since the guerilla campaign in South Korea recently has met with serious reverses."<sup>26</sup>

Secretary of State Dean Acheson testified in congressional hearings:

Intelligence was available to the Department prior to the 25th of June, made available by the Far East Command, the CIA, the Department of the Army, and by the State Department representatives here and overseas, and shows that all these agencies were in agreement that the possibility for an attack on the Korean Republic existed at that time, but they were all in agreement that its launching in the summer of 1950 did not appear imminent.<sup>27</sup>

Some of the reasons that highly placed American officials discounted the intelligence indicating an attack were an instinctive distrust of their Korean sources who they felt were overstating the threat for their own purposes, and the fact that North Korean activity around the border was continuous and common. They were also distracted by Soviet-instigated trouble around the globe.

Intelligence is given less validity if the source is rated as unreliable. South Korean officials were doubted when they warned of a North Korean attack because they had said the same thing so many times in the past and it was felt their credibility was doubtful if not self-serving. General Matthew Ridgway wrote that MacArthur's G-2 staff did not rate its Asian agents as reliable because they felt "that South Koreans especially had a tendency to cry 'wolf' when there was no beast in the offing."<sup>28</sup>

A major reason that the leadership was so reluctant to accept the possibility of a North Korean attack could well have been the psychologi-

cal specter that nothing had been done to prepare for such an eventuality, short of evacuating American citizens. There were no contingency plans on the shelf. In fact, the Republic of Korea had been written out of the U.S. sphere of influence in a public speech given by Secretary of State Dean Acheson, a speech that is thought to have emboldened the Korean communists.

One way to dismiss contradictory information is to question its validity or to simply pretend it doesn't exist. When the American ambassador in Seoul reported a heavy buildup by the North along the 38th parallel, he was thought to be making a case for his recent request for armor for the ROK Army and thus ignored as an unreliable source. It was commonly believed that North Korea did not have the power to attack the South unless equipped by the Soviet Union. But the Soviet equipment was left out of the equation, and reports only said that the North did not have adequate resources for an invasion.

To the Army's credit, it always looks for lessons in failure. In this case, Maj. Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, then the Director of the Office of Military Assistance, summed up those actions that needed to be taken to improve the intelligence process. He said:

I believe that there are lessons to be learned from this situation which can point the way to better governmental operations and thus avoid costly mistakes in the future.... I recommend that...a clear-cut interagency standing operating procedure be established now to insure that if (in the opinion of any intelligence agency, particularly CIA) an attack, or other noteworthy event, is impending it is made a matter of special handling, to insure that officials vitally concerned...are promptly and personally informed thereof in order that appropriate measures may be taken. This will prevent a repetition of the Korean situation and will insure, if there has been vital intelligence data pointing to an imminent attack, that it will not be buried in a series of routine CIA intelligence reports.

But intelligence was to fail again in Korea and in only four months. The war in Korea looked like it was rolling toward its conclusion. After the Inchon landing, the Eighth U.S. Army in the west

and the X US Corps in the East were pushing the decimated and demoralized North Korean Army in front of them, moving quickly toward the Yalu River, North Korea's border with China. On 25 October 1950, U.S. patrols picked up an enemy soldier. He spoke neither Korean nor Japanese. Other prisoners followed. They were interrogated thoroughly, lie detectors being used on three of them. They told stories about being part of large Chinese Communist armies that had crossed the Yalu into Korea.

Little reliance was placed on this intelligence because Eighth Army could find no other confirmation of large Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) formations in Korea. They believed these Chinese were fillers in North Korean units, helping stiffen the defenses as UN forces approached the Chinese border.<sup>29</sup>

I Corps published an estimate at the end of October which claimed, "There are no indications at this time to confirm the existence of a CCF organization or unit, of any size, on Korean soil."<sup>30</sup>

In late November, 96 Chinese "volunteers" had been taken prisoner. They identified six different Chinese Communist armies to which they belonged.

Eighth Army was beginning to recognize their presence, however, and on 4 November noted that two division-sized Chinese units were in Korea. It upped that estimate to three the next day, but was still underestimating the number of armies now on the peninsula. At this time Peiping radio was broadcasting a communique declaring that China was threatened by the UN forces in Korea and that the Chinese people should come to the aid of North Korea. On 5 November, the daily intelligence summary made clear that the Chinese had the capability to attack UN forces without warning. At the Far East Command, Gen. MacArthur recognized that possibility as well. On 6 November he issued a communique of his own, referring to the massing of troops at the border as an act of "international lawlessness." He continued, "Whether and to what extent these reserves will be moved forward to reinforce units now committed remains to be seen and is a matter of the gravest international significance."<sup>31</sup>

As more prisoners were taken the numbers of Chinese in the theater rose and by the third week

of November Eighth Army intelligence reports were putting the figure at about 60,000. The Eighth Army G2, Lt. Col. James C. Tarkenton, believed that the Chinese units in Korea were not organized CCF forces but volunteers and that "China would not enter the war."<sup>32</sup> On the eve of the resumption of the UN offensive on 24 November, estimates from the Department of the Army, FECOM, Eighth Army and X Corps all were in agreement that there were as many as 76,800 CCF troops in Korea, but seemed to downplay the possibility of a full Chinese intervention. Maj. Gen. Willoughby has been quoted as saying that the Chinese would keep out of the Korean War. MacArthur too seemed to share the opinion of his intelligence experts. As the UN offensive got underway on the 24th, the Commander in Chief was declaring that little stood in their way. He believed that the Chinese would not enter the war in full force and, if they did, his airpower would take care of them. Earlier, at the meeting with President Harry Truman at Wake Island, on 15 October, the general was telling the president the same thing.<sup>33</sup>

The CIA believed that the Chinese were interested in only establishing a buffer zone along their border with North Korea. They would change their mind by November 24, just before the Chinese began their major offensive, but their re-estimate was too late to have any effect on UN defenses. The consensus in Washington and the Far East Command was that the communists would not risk direct military action, relying instead on subversion.

Based on the historic record, rarely does the collection effort fail to produce sufficient raw data. Only in the case of the Chinese intervention in Korea is the lack of information raised as a possible source of failure. MacArthur claimed after the Chinese intervention that he did not have enough information upon which to base any reasonable intelligence analysis. He said that his aerial recon planes were prohibited from crossing the Yalu River where enemy troops could be concentrated only a day's march from his theater. Likewise, political intelligence regarding Chinese intentions was hard to come by behind the Iron Curtain. He said, "no intelligence system in the world could have surmounted such

handicaps to determine to any substantial degree enemy strength, movements and intentions.”<sup>34</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Omar Bradley, backed up that claim when he testified that “we had the intelligence that they were concentrating in Manchuria.... We had the information that they had the capability [to intervene].” But they didn’t know, according to Bradley, that they would intervene.

Failure to predict just *when* an attack will take place is common to most strategic surprise attacks since 1939.<sup>35</sup> On 28 October 1950, after the Chinese began infiltrating their forces into the Korean peninsula, U.S. intelligence believed that “with victorious U.S. Divisions in full deployment, it would appear that the auspicious time for intervention had long since passed.”<sup>36</sup>

The reliability of the source came into play in 1950 when the Indian ambassador to China, K.M. Panikkar, informed U.S. officials that the Chinese intended to intervene in Korea if the UN crossed into the North. His impartiality was questioned because he was known to favor Chinese policies over those of the U.S.

A belief in the superiority of one’s own military capabilities can often blind decision-makers to bold enemy moves. The very presence of the powerful American fleet at Pearl Harbor was thought to be a deterrent. Instead it was a target. Similarly, an overconfident MacArthur thought that his airpower could take out any Chinese armies attempting to interfere with his victory in Korea. “There would be the greatest slaughter,” he predicted. As he said this, the Chinese were already in the war in massive numbers.<sup>37</sup>

In Kam’s analysis of surprise attacks from the victim’s point of view, he assumed that the “intellectual process at the level of the individual analyst...is consistently biased, and that this bias is the cornerstone of intelligence failures.”<sup>38</sup> Information about the enemy is interpreted in a way that conforms to the personal beliefs and hypotheses of the analyst who will then resist and dismiss any information that contradicts his beliefs. At the same time, analysts will give too much weight to evidence that support their conclusions. When aerial reconnaissance failed to find large bodies of Chinese troops in the northernmost reaches of Korea, that information dovetailed

perfectly with the earlier conclusion that time for Chinese intervention was past. It did not consider that the aerial photos might not show small groups of the enemy well camouflaged during daylight hours. It is the challenge of professionals to apply rigid tests to their conclusions and overcome the psychology of cultural bias.

In hindsight, it becomes clear that the Chinese had decided in early October to intervene in Korea if the UN forces crossed the 38th parallel. Between 14 and 20 October, they moved four armies across the Yalu River, three of them in front of the Eighth Army and one in the X Corps sector. In the following week two more armies crossed into Korea. By the end of October there were 180,000 CCF troops in the peninsula. Before the UN offensive would begin, in the third week in November, there were 300,000 Chinese soldiers facing the UN.

The Eighth U.S. Army had engaged Chinese forces, taken prisoners, and been informed of Chinese broadcasts that said they intended to intervene if the UN forces crossed the 38th parallel. The Air Force was providing photo recon missions. Still they failed to correctly estimate the number of Chinese, missing by more than 75 percent, and ignoring the signals of intervention. Why?

The Chinese used good operational security. They had made good use of deception, using code names for their units that made them to appear to be small, token units. They avoided detection by aerial observation by moving only at night and their daytime camouflage was excellent. An entire division marched 18 miles a day for 18 days, moving only at night over mountainous terrain. Roy Appleman described the march discipline that kept aerial photography from uncovering their presence:

...The day’s march began after dark at 1900 and ended at 0300 the next morning. Defense measures against aircraft were to be completed before 0530. Every man, animal, and piece of equipment were to be concealed and camouflaged. During daylight only bivouac scouting parties moved ahead to select the next day’s bivouac area. When CCF units were compelled for any reason to march by day, they were under standing orders for ev-

ery man to stop in his tracks and remain motionless if aircraft appeared overhead. Officers were empowered to shoot down immediately any man who violated this order.<sup>39</sup>

Human intelligence, mainly reports from prisoners and Korean civilians, was ignored because they could not be confirmed by imagery intelligence. The Chinese avoided contact with Eighth Army units. U.S. authorities thought the Chinese broadcasts were merely threats.

In Korea, U.S. intelligence has been accused of overemphasizing *capabilities* and neglecting *intentions*. After concluding that the North did not have the capacity to launch a major offensive, some analysts convinced themselves that the enemy would not therefore launch such an ambitious attack.

When it comes to emphasizing intentions or capabilities, there are two schools of thought. One maintains that the main concern should be enemy capabilities since these are more quantifiable, the methods more scientific, the results subject to only partial failure. To divine enemy intentions is a delphic enterprise that involves too much guesswork and can result in total failure and blame. Sometimes even the enemy does not know what he is going to do. The other school has been quoted as saying “the most difficult and most crucial element in the intelligence craft lies in estimating the enemy’s *intentions*.”<sup>40</sup>

Actually, the analyst must rely on both capabilities and intentions, since they cannot be isolated. This premise is recognized in the evolution of U.S. Army doctrine. In 1951 the field manual on *Combat Intelligence* cautioned commanders to “be certain they base their actions, dispositions, and plans upon estimates of enemy capabilities rather than upon estimates of enemy intentions.” Because analysts concluded in 1950 that North Korea had no intention of achieving its goals by an all-out attack, it ignored NK capabilities. Consequently, no measures were taken to strengthen or reinforce the South Korean army.<sup>41</sup> Later editions of the *Operations* field manual called for the consideration of both enemy intentions along with capabilities. The 1976 edition of FM 100-5 advised that “enemy intentions must be considered along with capabilities and probable actions.”<sup>42</sup>

## Seizure of the U.S.S. Pueblo

On 23 January 1968, the U.S. electronic intelligence ship USS *Pueblo* was captured by North Korean patrol boats and two MiG jets, and its 83-man crew was taken prisoner. The ship was taken by surprise and *Pueblo* offered no resistance. It was boarded in international waters twenty-five miles from the Korean mainland and forced into the North Korean port of Wonsan. It was the first American ship to be seized in 100 years. This was two days after a 31-man team of North Korean lieutenants was intercepted near the Republic of Korea presidential mansion on a mission to assassinate the ROK president, Park Chung-hee, and after a year that saw increasing North Korean infiltration across the Demilitarized Zone.<sup>43</sup>

The intelligence failure in this instance was centered around the “risk assessment” for the *Pueblo* mission. When the Navy headquarters assigned the ship its collection task, it also evaluated the dangers associated with it. A sister ship, the USS *Banner*, had sailed on sixteen missions along the same coasts. She had been harassed by both Chinese and Russian ships. But this had become an accepted part of the game. So the mission proposal was forwarded up the chain of command with a “minimal risk” label.

Rear Admiral Frank L. Johnson, Commander, Naval Forces Japan (COMNAVFORJAPAN), agreed that the risk was minimal and sent the request to Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT) in Hawaii. One of the many agencies there that had a piece of the action was the Current Intelligence Branch. The North Korean analyst, Ensign Charles B. Hall, Jr., was new on the job. He went along with the minimal risk assessment. He was quoted as saying, “At that time I did not see the North Koreans as a direct threat. I had no reservations because I frankly didn’t know enough about it to have any.”

Hall’s superiors concurred as well. The assistant chief of staff for intelligence at CINCPACFLT, Captain John L. Marocchi, said, “These evaluations were in no sense rubber stamps. The North Koreans were pushing bodies across the DMZ. They continued to seize South Korean ships and accuse them of being spy boats. What we saw

and heard didn't seem any different from what we had been seeing and hearing for the past ten years. The Koreans, up to that point, had done nothing to our ships, while the Russians had harassed them. The mission looked like it would be quiet and safe. The logic was in the message. It took me about as long to approve it as it did to read it." The proposal worked its way through succeeding headquarters. From Commander in Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) it went to the Defense Intelligence Agency where it was bundled with several dozen other proposals into 14 to 16 inches of dense paperwork. An overworked staff officer did not have time to ask any questions and he also approved it.

So the mission was launched as planned as a minimal risk with no air support, no escort, and the *Pueblo's* pair of inadequate .50 caliber machine guns useless under frozen tarpaulins. The mission was based on a fatal presumption expressed by Captain George L. Cassell, assistant chief of staff for operations at CINCPACFLT, who thought "It didn't follow that these people [the North Koreans], although they were attacking our people across the DMZ, would do anything across the water."<sup>44</sup>

## **Tet Offensive**

It was a lousy year for intelligence coups. As 1968 began, a message to the Defense Intelligence Agency from the National Security Agency, alerting them to the possibility that the North Koreans might seize the US intelligence ship *Pueblo* was misplaced on a clipboard and lost. It was located three weeks later. Later in the year, after building up their troops for seven weeks on the border, the Soviet's invaded Czechoslovakia, taking the U.S. by surprise. Then there was the Tet Offensive in Vietnam.

During the Tet holiday in Vietnam, a time of traditional ceasefires during the war, on 31 January 1968, the Communist forces launched a major surprise offensive, attacking cities, military and government targets throughout the country. Simultaneous armed insurrection by South Vietnamese citizens was a key part of the Communist strategy. If this succeeded, tens of thousands of the southern populace would be added to their

numbers. But it failed to materialize. As a diversion, the North aimed thrusts along the border with South Vietnam, especially the U.S. firebase at Khe Sanh. These attacks successfully diverted the allies attention away from their planned Tet attacks nationwide, but at the same time strained their resources.

Documents captured in November 1967 included an order to the People's Army which read: "Use very strong military attacks in coordination with the uprisings of the local population to take over towns and cities. Troops should flood the lowlands. They should move toward liberating the capital city."<sup>45</sup>

Concentrated attacks on U.S. facilities at Da Nang, Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa Air Base, and the logistical complex at Long Binh, caused initial confusion but were eventually thrown back by quickly responding American combat units. The bloody battle at Hue where U.S. Marines were desperately engaged and the attacks on government offices in Saigon, most dramatically the U.S. Embassy, came as shocks to the already anxious American psyche. There seemed to be fighting and destruction everywhere. Television sets throughout the United States magnified this perception. But the allies rallied to stymie the enemy. American firepower was brought to bear. By 21 February, the Communists were withdrawing everywhere but Hue where they would hold out until the 24th when the Imperial Palace was recaptured.

There were 4,000 Americans killed or wounded, and between 4,000 and 8,000 casualties for the ARVN. The Communists lost between 40,000 and 50,000 killed in action. Their Viet Cong infrastructure was destroyed. Ironically, Tet was the biggest victory the allies ever gained over the Communists during the war, but it was not recognized as such at the time. Instead, Tet was seen by American political leadership and the American people at large as proof that we were not winning in Vietnam and could be surprised and hurt by an offensive by an enemy that most military intelligence experts were counting out.

The Tet Offensive was a turning point in the war. It produced a staggering recoil in the American consciousness. It was a blow to the political

will on the homefront from which it would never recover. From that point on the U.S. policies shifted toward a reduction of U.S. involvement in the war. President Lyndon Johnson decided a few months later not to seek reelection. Tet was immensely successful and owed its success to its surprise. This was a result that was not foreseen by the planners of Tet. North Vietnamese General Tran Do said after the war, "We did not achieve our main objective.... As for making an impact in the United States, it had not been our intention—but it turned out to be a fortunate result."<sup>46</sup>

One of the reasons U.S. analysts were surprised was the overreach and irrationality of the enemy plan, as it was based on the faulty assumption that the South's citizens would seize this opportunity to join with the Communists to overthrow their government.

Collection did not fail before Tet. The allies had a captured order for the attack, tape-recorded discussions taken off agents at Qui Nhon, prisoner interrogations, the unprecedented number of high priority messages that were intercepted by SIGINT pointing to the attack, and the strong evidence provided by premature attacks in I and II Corps Tactical Zones.

Ephraim Kam assigns three levels of reliability to intelligence information: Nonreliable or partly reliable, reliable but controlled [enemy knows we know and can change plans], and reliable noncontrolled [evidence that enemy does not know we know]. The attack order intercepted several weeks before the Tet offensive was deemed as unreliable because it was written by someone outside the highest levels of the Communist leadership, because it was not specific as to the date of the attack, and because it was then easily mistaken for propaganda.<sup>47</sup>

There were at least four accurate reports of enemy intentions. General Phillip Davidson, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (J-2), briefed General Westmoreland on 13 January that attacks against Saigon were imminent and Westmoreland responded by strengthening the city, a move that probably prevented its complete occupation. But allied attention was drawn to the north by the enemy threat at Khe Sanh. On the

morning before the attack, General Davidson predicted that the precipitate attacks against the cities in I and II Corps foreshadowed similar attacks throughout the country within 24 hours.

Westmoreland heeded this warning but it was too late to take any real action to change any defensive dispositions. (The warning itself did not seem extraordinary to most commanders who were used to receiving everyday information from MACV headquarters over the telephone. Since the troops were on alert as often as they were off alert, this one issued at 1125 hours on 30 January seemed not at all unusual.) The North Vietnamese had achieved surprise.

Because U.S. intelligence analysts did not correctly put together all the pieces of the puzzle until hours before the Tet offensive, too late to make a difference, they are credited with an intelligence failure.

James Wirtz analyzes that failure of intelligence analysis in light of six empirical questions. "Were the Americans surprised because they failed to: (1) identify the adversary; (2) estimate the probability of attack; (3) determine the type of action involved; (4) identify the location of the attack; (5) predict the timing of the attack; and (6) determine the motivation behind the initiative?"<sup>48</sup>

Because it was wartime, the question of identifying the adversary becomes moot. When at war, it is also likely that an attack will take place, so analysts assumed that a major offensive was to be expected. And the type of action involved was also easy to figure since the North had no assets to launch an air, amphibious, naval, airborne or nuclear attack. The attack would be undertaken by ground forces. So the clues to the analysis failure lay in the where, when and why.

U.S. leaders had two choices as to where the enemy blow would fall—urban areas or along the DMZ. They chose the DMZ because, among other reasons, it coincided with their analogies to Dien Bien Phu. U.S. commanders were also more inclined to see their troops as the biggest threat to the enemy and to protect their own forces. Because they were dug in around Khe Sanh and well prepared, they would have preferred the attack to strike there. These beliefs were reinforced by SIGINT that indicated a massing of NVA troops along the borders.<sup>49</sup> So the predispositions of

U.S. leaders caused them to mistake the diversion for the main attack and the main attack for the diversion.

The tendency of U.S. analysts to think in terms of U.S. troops rather than their ARVN allies contributed to the failure to consider the Tet holidays, a time when half of the ARVN soldiers would be on leave, as being an especially opportune time for an enemy attack in ARVN areas of responsibility. They believed that the South Vietnamese army was protected by the American shield along the DMZ. In the past, the North had taken advantages of truces to resupply and build up their forces. Americans believed the attack would fall sometime after the truce.

The motivation for the Communist offensive, the *why* of the equation, was, more than anything else, to try and reverse their declining combat readiness and morale. U.S. analysts rightly saw such a possible enemy move as a desperate last ditch effort, not unlike the Germans offensive during the Battle of the Bulge. They did not recognize a further objective of Communists—that of playing upon U.S. strengths to deceive them and pouncing upon the vulnerable ARVN units to destroy them.

More than a few historians have suggested that American Army intelligence specialists produced reports that would confirm the views of their leaders and the Johnson administration that the enemy was just about finished.

Wirtz offers this insightful analysis of Tet:

The story of the intelligence failure also highlights the herculean task faced by officers, analysts, and policy makers as they strove to complete the intelligence cycle. Remarkably, the Americans almost succeeded in anticipating their opponents' moves in time to avoid the military consequences of surprise, despite their underestimation of the weakness in their alliance, the resourcefulness of their opponents, and the handicaps they faced in completing the intelligence cycle. But two factors ultimately slowed them in their race to predict the future: The influence of beliefs that could no longer account for events and their inability to anticipate the mistakes made by their opponents. The

failure to anticipate an attack in wartime, when Americans could have assumed that their opponents would do everything in their power to hurt the allies, testifies to the difficulty inherent in avoiding failures of intelligence.<sup>50</sup>

### **Raid on Son Tay**

In a daring raid on 20 November 1970, a 59-man assault force of elite soldiers, led by Col. Arthur D. "Bull" Simon, hit a small compound just 23 miles from Hanoi. It was the Son Tay prison camp that was thought to hold 61 American prisoners of war. Months of planning and rehearsal paid off as the team flawlessly were airlifted to their objective, executed their mission, overwhelmed all their opposition, and escaped without a single American casualty. There was only one problem. They brought out no prisoners. The camp was empty. When the news reached the war room in Washington, D.C. that the prison camp was empty, General William C. Westmoreland, then Army Chief of Staff, exploded "*Another* intelligence failure!"<sup>51 52</sup>

Son Tay intelligence depended largely on photo recon from SR-71s, RF4s, RF101s, and unmanned Buffalo Hunter drones. Six drone flights were either shot down or malfunctioned. The last and seventh drone mission, after the camp was evacuated, was to take shots from treetop level, but the aircraft banked as the shutter was triggered, producing only a photo of the horizon. SR-71 missions were hampered by cloud and dust cover. Agents were also inserted but with negligible results.

The prisoners had been moved four and one-half months before the raid because of flooding. Speculation centered around whether the flooding had been caused by a covert cloud-seeding operation designed to wash away resupply trails in Laos that was so secret that even the planners of the Son Tay raid could not be informed.<sup>53</sup>

An usually reliable foreign intelligence source provided information that the camp was empty and that information reached decision makers in Washington just hours before the final mission launch. When asked for an unequivocal answer on whether U.S. prisoners were in Son Tay or

not, Army Lt. Gen. Donald Bennett, commanding the Defense Intelligence Agency, held out a handful of messages and photos and said, "I've got this much that says 'They've been moved.'" Then he extended the other hand which held a thick folder and added, "And I've got this much that says 'They're still there.'"54

Defense Secretary Melvin Laird told the president on 20 November that the prisoners had been moved from Son Tay but that the camp had recently been reoccupied by unknown parties. Laird recommended the raid be given the go ahead. The president concurred.55

The Son Tay raid had the top priority for electronic intelligence coverage and ELINT was good. It had the North Vietnamese air defense system wired. But the delivery of the product was time-consuming and there was little time at the last minute to revise information. Because of equipment failures or delivery problems, the latest photo imagery taken before the raid could not be examined until the operation had been launched.

The overall commander of the raid, Air Force Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor couldn't get crucial weather information at the last minute because he lacked the proper clearances.56

When reporters queried Simons at a press conference about who was to blame for the intelligence failure, the colonel replied, "I can't answer that question at all. I am not sure what you mean by 'intelligence failure.'"57

Before Senate hearings on the failed raid, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird testified, "we have made tremendous progress as far as intelligence is concerned." The hearing room erupted in laughter. Laird went on to say, "We have not been able to develop a camera that sees through the roofs of buildings. [Otherwise] the intelligence for their mission was excellent." But since the mission failed to bring home any prisoners, few saw that as being relevant.58

There are a lot of ways for intelligence to fail, and things usually go wrong in combination. There are many critical nodes in the process. Likewise, there are many blocks in the minds of the evaluators. There are errors in process. There can be too little data resulting from the omission to target a given area. There can be too much information, sometimes caused by enemy misin-

formation, that clogs the channels and slows the flow. In these cases it becomes important to assign the correct priority. There can be conflicting data. Often the reliability of the sources comes into question. There can be a misreading of the urgency of the data. Human inaction quite often comes into play, like the lieutenant commander who told the excited clerk that the translation of the Japanese message that gave important indicators of the Sunday attack on Pearl Harbor could wait until Monday. The repetitious occurrence of indicators can cause the "crying wolf" syndrome which causes evaluators to discount signs that have taken on the appearance of the commonplace. Then, there is the pinching off of the information to the decision makers by overzealous executive officers or chiefs of staff who wish to protect their boss from adverse information.

There are errors in judgment. Rarely do military intelligence professionals err on the side of enemy capabilities. The numbers are usually right, or carefully qualified. If they are wrong, it is usually an overestimate resulting from caution. It is in the area of enemy intentions that the possibility of error multiplies. Here we enter that cloudy realm of wishful thinking. We need to understand, as historians and intelligence officers, the psychology of the human response to information that shapes the decision process. The policy makers inevitably sift the information that they receive through the filter of their own preconceptions.

People will believe what they have been conditioned to believe, predicting the future based upon their own vision of it. They see happening what they want to happen, but the course of the future is never so accommodating. Harry Truman was unwilling to believe that the North Koreans would do anything as irrational as cross that line that western diplomats had so conscientiously and sagely drawn. Stubborn adherence to false assumptions is a failing that is common to all of us.

The analyst never acts alone. He is always part of an organization with its own values, expectations, biases, pressures to conform, and political motivations. He works in an environment that does not always reward dissent, discrepant information, or uncertainty.

When dissenting views come from junior of-

icers, they are often suppressed or just ignored by those in higher positions. When Commander Arthur McCollum, Chief of the Far Eastern Section of Naval Intelligence, prepared a message alerting the Pacific fleets, based on what he saw as imminent dangers, he was denied permission to do so by four senior admirals who thought that sufficient warnings had already been sent.<sup>59</sup>

Dissenters can also be senior officials as was the case with Admiral Richmond Turner, the Chief of War Plans in the Navy Department, who believed that Hawaii would be attacked. George Kennan, a State Department Soviet expert, recognized the true reaction of the Chinese to the crossing of the 38th parallel by UN forces, but was not given a hearing by Secretary of State Dean Acheson.<sup>60</sup>

The intelligence analyst works within an organization, often a military one, and institutions themselves are subject to inherent inefficiencies like bureaucracy, compartmentalization, security, faulty communication or rivalry between agencies or services.

Group dynamics, or “Groupthink,”<sup>61</sup> can also affect the decision-making process as it is hard to resist the conclusions of a group of peers. But the group need not be small, or a selected clique of leaders. It can be as large as the entire American society, a peace-loving group that does not readily accept the possibility of war. An example of “groupthink” is seen in President Kennedy’s inner council of advisors prior to the Bay of Pigs invasion. There are few people who would challenge a president’s or general’s decision.

Intel analysts are sometimes overwhelmed by trivial detail, daily workload, unrealistic expectations, and pressures to be politically correct. It is difficult to sift the relevant from the noise prior to an event. It is understandable that analysts want to evaluate every scrap of information that comes their way, any clue that might help them reach correct conclusions.

If the military leader is not warned in time, there is little difference from not being warned at all. Because it would have taken almost three weeks to reinforce the Republic of Korea with U.S. forces from Japan, General MacArthur concluded that even a 72-hour warning of an attack would have mattered little to the outcome.

Some failures to provide sufficient warning of an attack can be chalked up to bad luck. A message from Army Chief of Staff George Marshall could not get through to Army headquarters in Hawaii because no one was on duty that Sunday morning. General Marshall had neglected to mark the message urgent so when it did reach Honolulu via Western Union it was too late. A motor-bike messenger was delivering the telegram when the bombs started to fall. Many portentous messages intercepted by Magic were simply not translated in time.

In reviewing some of those too many instances where intelligence has failed, we come to some obvious realizations. One is that science can be of little help when dealing with the often irrational and unpredictable human mind.<sup>62</sup> It is little wonder that many of the invaders of our century have been called “madmen.” Logic has its limits in plumbing the waters of the human soul. If intelligence analysis is then as much an art as it is a science, future failures are inevitable. That is not to say that we can’t improve upon the odds of success by adding to our understanding both of the process of intelligence analysis and of the human behavior.

I have summarized in a Table some of the obvious conclusions that come to mind after reviewing those historic examples of intelligence failures. It is an imperfect list and readers are invited to draw some of their own lessons and offer some of their own remedies. One thing becomes apparent. The key to guarding against intelligence deficiencies lies in the area of education. Many of the problems with communication and dissemination have already been fixed by procedural reforms and reorganizations. Problems residing in the human psyche can only be addressed by training that works at changing attitudes and judgmental weaknesses.

One can readily see how important education is to bringing about change and solutions. It is a daunting responsibility for Army schools. If there is going to be an improvement in intelligence work, there must be a corresponding movement within Army education to encourage open-mindedness, imaginative new approaches to analysis, the encouragement of dissenting opinions, interservice cooperation, and leadership at-

titudes. This can be accomplished in basic, advanced and pre-command courses.

It would also be useful to inculcate through training a higher tolerance to false alarms. Admittedly this would mean a willingness to accept higher costs in both dollars and up-time, but it would have the benefit of avoiding surprise attacks and perhaps convince an enemy of our preparedness.

It is thought that many of the problems of the past have been overcome by technology. Computers handle and track the masses of information. Mathematical models compile indicators and identify possible crises. Satellites relay voice and pictures in near real time. The President of the United States and the Joint Chiefs of Staff can watch televised battlefield damage assessments minutes after an attack. The decision-makers have never had so much information to aid them so quickly.

While machines serve us well in gathering and quantifying the more voluminous and complex information in today's world, we will still be left with the human fallibilities in analyses and response. The recognition of this fact is the first step toward understanding the process. The next step is understanding where deficiencies are likely to occur in the system. And finally, for those concerned with training the intelligence specialists and for the students themselves, the last step is to resolve that no intel failure should ever be the result of a lack of skill on the part of the intelligence specialist.

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2. *Funston's Annual Report*, 1916.
3. Wohlstetter, Roberta, *Pearl Harbor, Warning and Decision*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1962, p. 385.
4. Wohlstetter, p. 387.
5. Roberta Wohlstetter defines "Signals" as signs or indications. "Noise" is competing and conflicting signs, or disinformation. Most signals are read against a background of noise. It is easier to know which are signals and which are noise after the disaster.
6. Wohlstetter, p. 387.
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8. U.S. Congress, Senate. 1946, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, 79th Cong., 2d session, Washington, D.C., pp. 65, 102, 105, 126.
9. Kam, pp. 47-8.
10. Wohlstetter, pp. 389-90.
11. U.S. Congress, p. 258.
12. Wohlstetter, p. 312.
13. Wohlstetter, pp. 388-90.
14. Quoted in Kam, p. 102.
15. Wohlstetter, pp. 397-8.
16. Wohlstetter, p. 401.
17. Kam, p. 49.
18. Hunter, Col. W. Hamilton, Chairman, *et al*, "Study of the Pearl Harbor Hearings," War Department, General Staff, 23 January 1947.
19. Knorr, Klaus, and Patrick Morgan, eds., *Strategic Military Surprise*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, NJ, 1983, 80.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
22. Schnabel, James F., *Policy and Direction: The First Year*, Center of Military History, Department of the Army, Government Printing Office, 1992, p. 63.
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25. *Ibid.*, p. 63-4.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
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28. Ridgway, Matthew, 1967, p. 14.
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30. *Ibid.*, p. 753.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 762.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 755.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 760-3.
34. DeWeerd, H.A., "Strategic Surprise in the Korean War," *Orbis*, 6, Fall 1962, pp. 450-1.
35. Kam, p. 14.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-1.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
39. Appleman, p. 770.
40. Quoted in Kam, p. 57.
41. Quoted in Kam, p. 59.
42. Kam, p. 59.
43. Finley, James P., *The U.S. Military Experience in Korea, 1871-1982*, Command Historian's Office, Secretary Joint Staff, Headquarters, U.S. Forces Korea/Eighth U.S. Army, APO San Francisco 96301, 1983.
44. Armbrister, Trevor, *A Matter of Accountability: The True Story of the Pueblo Affair*, Coward-McCann, New York, 1970, p. 189-90.
45. Arnold, James R., *Tet Offensive 1968: Turning Point in Vietnam*, Osprey Publishing Ltd, London, 1990, p. 36.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
47. Kam, pp. 39, 41-2.
48. Wirtz, James, *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1991. 49. James Wirtz makes the point that U.S. analysts have a weakness for SIGINT over other less reliable sources of intelligence and

thus fall victim to what he calls the *Ultra syndrome* (p. 274).

50. Wirtz, p. 275.

51. Schemmer, Benjamin F., *The Raid*, Harper and Row, New York, 1976, p. 182.

52. Time was squandered in selling the idea to the military and political hierarchy. The raid at Son Tay contrasted with the Israelis raid on Entebbe on 4 July 1976 which successfully rescued hostages. The difference is in operational realm, not in intelligence.

53. Schemmer, p. 81.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

59. Kam, p. 161.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

61. Irving Janis defines *groupthink* as “a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.” The condition can be recognized by these symptoms:

—An illusion of invulnerability...which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risks;

—Collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings which might lead the members to reconsider their assumptions...;

—Stereotyped views of enemy leaders...as too weak and stupid to counter whatever risky attempts are made to defeat their purposes;

—Direct pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group’s stereotypes, illusions, or commitments....

Janis uses the example of Pearl Harbor to show how hard it was to confront a strong leader with dissenting views:

During the week before the attack it would have been doubly difficult for any of Kimmel’s advisers to voice misgivings to other members of the group. It was not simply a matter of taking the risk of being scorned for deviating from the seemingly universal consensus by questioning the cherished invulnerability myth. An even greater risk would be the disdain the dissident might encounter from his colleagues for questioning the wisdom of the group’s prior decisions. For a member of the Navy group to become alarmed by the last-minute warning signals and to wonder aloud whether a partial alert was sufficient would be tantamount to asserting that the group all along had been making wrong judgments. *Victims of Groupthink*, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston, 1972, pp. 9, 197-8.

62. Irrationality on the part of the enemy is often the reason analysts give for failing to predict surprise attacks. The enemy cannot succeed in such an endeavor so it won’t risk it, goes the reasoning. And the reasoning does not appear to be flawed. In the eleven surprise attacks since 1939, only twice have the attackers achieved victory.





