

## Organizational Obstacles

Intelligence analysts work within an organizational framework, usually in a military or civilian intelligence agency. The military intelligence agency is in turn part of a larger military organization. The underlying assumption of my study is that misjudgment by the individual analyst is the cornerstone of estimate failures. At the same time, there can be little doubt that intelligence agencies, like all organizations, are subject to various general inefficiencies and obstacles as well as afflictions peculiar to intelligence agencies, all of which contribute to those failures.

Structural blocks to perception stem from various factors. Organizations may have a vested interest in the status quo and thus tend to discourage abrupt changes of beliefs. Communication patterns within a large organization are often inefficient. Bureaucratization, hierarchy, specialization, centralization, routine, and secrecy may distort or hinder information processing and impede analysis and proper judgment. Organizational problems may also be caused by intraservice and interservice rivalries.

### The Military as an Organization

The preeminent feature of organizational activity, as defined by Allison, is "its programmed character: the extent to which behavior in any particular case is an enactment of preestablished routines." Reliable performance of the organization's task by its subunits requires standard operating procedures, which constitute routines for dealing with normal situations. These procedures are designed to be simple, unambiguous, and resistant to change. "Routines allow large

numbers of ordinary individuals to deal with numerous instances, day after day, without much thought. But this regularized capacity for adequate performance is purchased at the price of standardization" (1971, pp. 81, 89–91). The alternatives defined by the organization are severely limited in both number and character. Moreover, major organizational modes of operation are straight; that is, behavior at any one time is only marginally different from behavior at any other time.

Established routines are sometimes an important factor in the failure to predict surprise attack. Organizational routines resist change and channel new problems into existing programs. Although surprise attack is not rare in the history of war, an army—including an intelligence community—generally does not expect to be surprised. Consequently it may tend to treat a growing threat as merely routine and to respond to it with limited and inadequate programs. Hence the activity of the victim's army up to the moment of attack is often identical with its behavior the day before. Moreover, the number of options designated by the army in case of war is limited (Allison, 1971, pp. 89–90).

In peacetime a soldier's routine demands that he report anything unusual or suspicious. In wartime or under emergency conditions he is expected to do much more, especially if he is a senior officer: to take initiatives, to find out what is happening, to give orders to his subordinates, to alert his superiors and colleagues, and to transmit an atmosphere of emergency. Yet standard operating procedures might prevent accurate perception of the signals that indicate an attack. On the morning of December 7, 1941, almost everyone in Pearl Harbor behaved as usual. An hour before the Japanese attack, when an American destroyer patrolling the harbor spotted the conning tower of a submarine, dropped depth charges on it, and then intercepted a sampan, which surrendered, the chief of staff of the naval district did not see any imminent danger. "We were vaguely alarmed, but could see no specific threat involved . . . We felt that by referring the matter to the Commander-in-Chief that we had done all that we possibly could even if the attack were real." In other words the second in command of the district felt that he had fulfilled his duty by placing the matter in the hands of a higher authority (Wohlstetter, 1962, pp. 16–17).

Most armies have long-range plans to deal with possible enemy attack, but few prepare contingency plans in case of surprise attack. Furthermore, long-range planning tends to become institutionalized

and then disregarded (Allison, 1971, p. 92). For years prior to December 1941 American war plans and maneuvers in the Hawaiian area took full account of the possibility of a Japanese attack by air. "As far back as 1936 war games and drills in the Hawaiian Islands had been planned on the basis of a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor . . . defined as a surprise air raid by Japan." But the actual organizational routines proceeded without reference to that planning. "There had never been any attempt to cover the full 360 degrees around the islands by long-distance reconnaissance." Moreover, despite two alerts in July and October 1941, "before December 7 Short [the Army commander in Hawaii] held no drill or alert in which the boxes of ammunition were opened" (Wohlstetter, 1962, pp. 68, 13, 104; see also U.S. Congress, 1946b, p. 29). In other cases no such contingency plans were even prepared. For example, the former Director of Egyptian Military Intelligence indicated that the plan for the defense of the Sinai Peninsula in 1967 was based on the assumption that any Israeli attack would be "routine" (*Al-Khawadith*, Beirut, September 1, 1972). And in 1935, when Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, the Soviet First Deputy Commissar of Defense, urged that Red Army war games assume a scenario of a German surprise attack, his suggestion was resisted by the Chief of the General Staff (Erickson, 1975, pp. 1-3).

Even new specific assignments may not significantly alter organizational priorities and procedures (Allison, 1971, p. 91). Traditionally Army Intelligence (G-2) in Hawaii was primarily in the business of detecting subversive activity. But in May 1940 General Marshall requested that an evaluation branch be established within G-2 for the "maintenance of current estimates of predicted activity in . . . the Far East." This request entailed an increase in the number of officers on the G-2 staff from twenty-two to nearly eighty men by December 1941. Yet at the time of the attack military intelligence was still "specifically concerned, particularly concerned, and practically solely concerned" with antisubversive precautions and operations (Wohlstetter, 1962, pp. 279, 75, 290).

Incompatible imperatives assigned to an organization present additional problems, since while meeting one objective the organization may neglect another (Allison, 1971, p. 92). The aerial arm of the U.S. Navy stationed in Hawaii had two imperatives: to train pilots for an attack on the Japanese mandated islands and to carry out distant reconnaissance of enemy activities. Given the available aircraft, it was impossible to satisfy both imperatives, so the Navy

concentrated on the first. In order to conserve resources for the primary mission, aircraft were returned to base on weekends for maintenance. Had a limited number of aircraft been attending to the second imperative on Sunday, December 7, the base would have had an hour's warning. But attention to that objective had been neglected in favor of concentrating on preparations for an offensive attack (Wohlstetter, 1962, pp. 12–13; Allison, 1971, pp. 92–93).

### **Rivalry, Coordination, and Communication**

Another set of problems derives from the size and complexity of intelligence agencies, which are often part of an even larger organization—the military. Large intelligence communities usually comprise several distinct intelligence agencies. Centralized intelligence began to materialize only after the Second World War. The first effort in that direction came with the founding of the CIA in 1947; but even the CIA has encountered vigorous competition from the more recently founded DIA. The Soviets and the British followed with similar experiments in 1947 and 1964 respectively but have not developed centralized intelligence to this day. Needless to say, the organization of intelligence during the Second World War was even more chaotic.

One problem created by size is that a large organization requires and encourages specialization in order to increase efficiency in the production of information. Yet specialization creates much irrelevant or misleading information. Different estimates from different units produce ambiguity and ambivalence, while estimates that agree may conceal deviating opinions and tend to obscure issues. In addition, experts are often too distant from policy, while policy makers may be too dependent on experts' estimates. Complex organizations also require a hierarchical structure in order to ease internal control and motivate hard work. Yet hierarchy blocks upward communication, facilitates misrepresentation of information, and permits low-level personnel to be ignored by the higher levels (Wilensky, 1967, p. 175; Stech, 1979, pp. 132, 356). Moreover, as Hareven explains, "the nature of the hierarchical dialogue depends to a considerable extent on the personalities of the officials . . . when officials at successive levels lack judgment, their mutual influence is liable to produce disturbance rather than control and balance." Hareven suggests that in 1973 the Director of Israeli Military Intelligence, General Zeira, frustrated the intelligence hierarchy by imposing his views

and not allowing dissenters to appeal to their superiors (1978, pp. 5, 15). Last, bureaucratic politics at various levels—within the intelligence organization, among intelligence agencies, and between the intelligence community and policy makers—affects the analytical process.

Specialization, hierarchy, and bureaucratic politics often distort information processing. Subordinates, who have to decide what information to pass on to their superiors, may withhold a disproportionate amount of discrepant information. Subunits tend to exaggerate the importance of some events and minimize that of others. The content of data may be changed in transmission. Ambiguity about responsibilities and standard operating procedures pertaining to the handling of information may lead to ignorance and neglect of critical evidence. Different units within the organization may hold conflicting assumptions regarding the significance of incoming information and consequent warning. Interpersonal difficulties may result in inadequate or distorted transmission of information. Scarcity of time and resources prevents proper handling of information and may lead to the selective and incomplete dissemination of information to its consumers (Downs, 1967, p. 189; Jervis, 1976, p. 143; Stech, 1979, pp. 169, 173).

Thus British intelligence failed to anticipate the German invasion of Norway because it had been “too loosely organised to ensure that all the available evidence was properly weighed on an inter-departmental basis.” In the Admiralty the geographical section dealing with Germany was responsible for interpreting Special Intelligence Service (SIS) and diplomatic reports bearing on German intentions in Scandinavia; but the center responsible for operational intelligence did not receive all the SIS and diplomatic information. To make matters worse, relations between the two sections were not good. In Military Intelligence a similar situation prevailed. MI2, responsible for interpreting reports received from Scandinavia about German intentions there, did not receive reports of preparations in Germany. These were studied by MI3, which did not see the information from Scandinavia. Also, relations between these two sections were poor (Hinsley, 1979, pp. 168, 119).

The difficulties of information handling should also be considered in the context of the larger problems of coordination and communication within or between complex departments or organizations. People tend to forget that members of another department or organization do not share their own information, missions, and con-

cerns. They often ignore the possibility that because of different background factors the same message will be read differently elsewhere, and that what is obvious in one place is understood differently in another. Warnings can be misunderstood (see Chapter 1), with the result that implementation of measures designed to meet the threat of war is inadequate. For example, as a result of the November 27, 1941, war warning, General Short, the Army commander in Hawaii, decided to implement alert number 1, the lowest of three possible levels of alert: "Defense against sabotage and uprisings. No threat from without." In explaining the considerations that led to his decision he stated that he was relying on the Navy to provide him with adequate warning of the approach of a hostile force, particularly through distant reconnaissance, which was a Navy responsibility. Admiral Kimmel then testified that he did not realize that the Army had been alerted to prevent sabotage only; he thought that the Army was on an all-out alert and in fact did not know that the Army had any other kind of alert. He also assumed that Army radar would be in full operation (U.S. Congress, 1946a, pp. 120, 125, 151). To close the circle, "Most top officials in Washington had only the haziest idea of what information was sent as a matter of course to the theaters, and since intentions were excellent, everybody assumed . . . that all essential or critical items of information were being sent out quickly" (Wohlstetter, 1962, p. 168).

Similarly, during the last days prior to the Arab attack of October 1973 the Israeli Minister of Defense and the Chief of Staff relied on the existing intelligence assessment in part because they believed that Military Intelligence had used the special early-warning measures at its disposal. Only after the war broke out did they learn that the Director of Military Intelligence had made a personal decision not to activate these measures. The latter, for his part, comforted himself with the knowledge that the standing army was considered by the General Staff to be capable of withstanding an initial assault. Prime Minister Meir relied on both assumptions: "I was convinced that the army was ready for any contingency—even for full-scale war. Also my mind was put at rest about the question of a sufficiently early warning" (Meir, 1975, p. 354; see also Bartov, 1978, p. 304; Herzog, 1975, p. 51).

Erroneous assumptions regarding the knowledge and behavior of others lead to two further mistakes. When people believe that others share their information and concerns, they do not bother to inform them of new developments. As the Roberts Commission, established

following the Pearl Harbor attack, stated: "On and after November 27, 1941, the commanding general, Hawaiian Department, and the commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, independently took such action as each deemed appropriate to the existing situation. Neither informed the other specifically of the action he was taking, and neither inquired of the other whether or not any action had been taken, nor did they consult as to the appropriateness of the actions taken by them respectively" (Sherwood, 1950, p. 425). Indeed part of the explanation for such a shortcoming has to do with interservice rivalry and the concern not to offend the sensibilities of others. Kimmel explained his failure to acquaint himself with what the Army was doing by saying: "When you have a responsible officer in charge of the Army and responsible commanders in the Navy, *it does not sit very well to be constantly checking up on them*" (U.S. Congress, 1946a, p. 153).

Meanwhile, when people assume that others share their information and concerns, they do not attempt to verify their assumptions or to ensure the implementation of orders. Thus the November 27 war warning ordered General Short "to undertake such reconnaissance and other measures as you deem necessary" and to "report measures taken." Short reported: "Re your 472. Department alerted to prevent sabotage. Liaison with Navy." Short's message was not clearly responsive to the order. Yet during the nine days before the attack, not one responsible officer in the War Department called on Short to alert the Hawaiian Department as consistent with instructions. "It does not affirmatively appear that anyone upon receipt of General Short's reply 'burdened' himself sufficiently to call for message No. 472 in order to determine to what the report was responsive." The congressional investigation committee concluded: "It was the responsibility of General Marshall to see that General Short was properly alerted. General Short, after being ordered to report his state of readiness to General Marshall, was entitled to assume that this state of readiness was satisfactory to the Chief of Staff unless he heard to the contrary . . . Because of [General Marshall's] silence, General Short was led to believe that the Chief of Staff approved his alert against sabotage" (U.S. Congress, 1946a, pp. 256, 266-L, 266-M).

A second set of problems has to do with rivalry between organizations. Such problems are more frequent, of course, where there are several competing agencies, but they also exist among various bodies of the same organization. Conflict of interest within the com-

munity may prevent the taking of any action that is not absolutely necessary. The information center and the radar sets in Pearl Harbor were not being operated on a regular twenty-four hour basis on December 7 owing to bickering over the question of control between the Air Force and the Signal Corps. For the same reason no liaison officers were present or even assigned. Consequently there was no possibility of correct and rapid identification and interception of aircraft (Wohlstetter, 1962, p. 9).

Because of competition, "issues that arise in areas where boundaries are ambiguous and changing, or issues that constitute new territories are dominated by colonizing activity" (Allison, 1971, p. 93). As a result areas of responsibility between competing organizations are inadequately defined and consequently neglected. The failure of the alert system on three occasions prior to the Pearl Harbor attack had not been sufficiently alarming to generate a proposal of central coordination of intelligence and communication. Naval Intelligence regarded its own sources as superior and lacked the incentive for merging with an inferior, while Army intelligence had little interest in combining intelligence operations. On the basis of quite separate sources and types of information, each of the Army and Navy units at Pearl Harbor had a different estimate of likely contingencies for the end of 1941. As the congressional investigation committee explained: "The failure to integrate and coordinate Army-Navy efforts in Hawaii appears to have been attributable to a feeling on the part of each commander that he would intrude upon the prerogatives of the other and thereby invite similar intrusion if he inquired as to what the sister service was doing" (U.S. Congress, 1946a, p. 245; see also Wohlstetter, 1962, pp. 166-167, 35-36).

Lack of clear-cut allocation of responsibility often results in a "none of my business" attitude. The question one asks is often "What should I do within the confines of my formal responsibility?" rather than "What is to be done?" On December 6, 1941, Naval Communications intercepted the first thirteen parts of a crucial memo from the Japanese government to its ambassador in Washington. The memo was read by the president and nine senior officials and officers. Owing to the practice of decision making by war cabinets, councils, committees, and individuals, "official responsibility of each man was so blurred that each man became indifferent to his own individual responsibility." Admiral Turner, the Chief of War Plans, for example, later claimed that the officer who showed him the memo "informed me that Admiral Wilkinson and Admiral In-



gersoll and Secretary Knox had all seen it before it had been shown to me. I considered the dispatch very important, but as long as those officers had seen it, I did not believe it was my function to take any action." And Admiral Ingersoll, Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, later explained: "When I read the 13 parts there was nothing on which the Navy Department as such could that night take action." No one did take action that night; all waited for the next day. Because of the confusion in Washington, "the high principle of *individual responsibility* was apparently lost to sight." The result was that none of the readers of the crucial dispatch was sufficiently concerned to do anything about it (U.S. Congress, 1946b, pp. 34, 46; 1946a, p. 218).

Similarly when the Chief of the Army Military Intelligence Division (MID) received a series of Japanese espionage messages, which included the significant report that the Japanese had divided Pearl Harbor into five sectors, his first reaction was that as naval messages these were of no concern to MID. He refrained from using the material for fear of coming into conflict with the Navy's use of it (Wohlstetter, 1962, pp. 301–302).

In a period of heightened danger one might expect the center to try to coordinate the activities of the diverse organizations, but this does not necessarily occur. Washington did not know what was going on in Pearl Harbor and assumed that the "system of mutual cooperation was working within its limitations and that local commanders were fully discharging their responsibilities" (U.S. Congress, 1946a, p. 245). And no single person or agency in Washington possessed all the available information at any one time. Each department and agency processed the signals it had collected, provided its own interpretation, and occasionally shared it with others. If the department considered the information important, it tried to push it up to the highest levels. Only rarely was material from one source weighed against material from another, nor were sources weighed and evaluated for their comparative accuracy over a period of time (Kirkpatrick, 1969, pp. 150–151).

The rivalry between organizations was even more intense at the upper echelons. "Proper demarcation of responsibility between these two divisions of the Navy Department [War Plans and Naval Intelligence] did not exist. War Plans appears to have insisted that since it had the duty of issuing operational orders it must arrogate the prerogative of evaluating intelligence; Naval Intelligence, on the

other hand, seems to have regarded the matter of evaluation as properly its function." On the eve of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Office of Naval Intelligence was aware of the dangers of an American-Japanese confrontation; but the office lacked the bargaining power or the status it needed to compete effectively with the Office of Naval Operations and thus was not consulted in the formulation of the warnings issued to the Pacific theater in late November. Another result of the rivalry in Washington was a total absence of meetings of the Joint Army-Navy Intelligence Committee during the two months before the attack: "There were still discussions and difficulties going on between the War and Navy Departments as to just what the functions of that committee would be, where it would sit, what rooms it would have, what secretary it would be allowed, et cetera" (U.S. Congress, 1946a, p. 254; 1946b, p. 45; see also Wohlstetter, 1962, pp. 312-319, 322-323).

Internal mechanisms do, however, exist within the intelligence community and the military for reaching a consensus among competing agencies and services. Such "agreed intelligence" reflects the least common denominator of the various agencies' assessment, and members of the intelligence community are the first to admit the damage caused by such procedures. As the Church Committee claimed: "Some members of the intelligence and foreign policy communities today argue that the consensus approach to intelligence production has improperly come to substitute for competing centers of analysis which could deliver more and different interpretations on the critical questions on which only partial data is available" (U.S. Congress, 1976, p. 272).<sup>1</sup> The former Director of the DIA advanced a similar argument: "I have seen . . . countless inter-agency sessions on estimates in which perceptive insights and relevant data have been shunted aside, sent back for reconfirmation, or watered down because they would not fit with some agency's position, or because they stood to block inter-agency consensus on a particular point" (Graham, 1979, p. 25).

The need to reach a consensus can sometimes present a genuine stumbling block. On December 1, 1941, the Office of Naval Intelligence attempted to produce a document pointing out the possibility of Japanese operations in the Kra Peninsula (bottleneck of Malaya) and against the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island, and Hawaii. The document was not disseminated because the head of the Navy War Plans Division, officially charged with preparing estimates, de-

manded changes that were unacceptable to Naval Intelligence. Consequently the estimate was still in interservice liaison at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor (Brinkley and Hull, 1979, p. 36).

### **Intrinsic Problems in the Intelligence Organization**

In addition to the inefficiencies and difficulties common to many organizations, some problems and constraints are specific to the intelligence community.

#### **The "Cry Wolf" Phenomenon**

Among the most subtle obstacles to accurate interpretation of vital signals is the "cry wolf" phenomenon. One of its manifestations is the ambiguous warning, discussed in Chapter 1: the warning against an attack from any possible direction. The more common and more damaging case, however, is the previous false alarm. This preceded most, if not all, of our instances of surprise attack. Before the Pearl Harbor attack, for example, there had been three periods of extreme tension in American-Japanese relations—in June 1940 and again in July and October 1941—that resulted in alerts in Hawaii. Before the Yom Kippur War there were three periods of escalation in which Israeli intelligence noted Egyptian mobilization and preparations for war—at the end of 1971, in December 1972, and in May 1973 (Herzog, 1975, pp. 43–44).

There are two main reasons why intelligence agencies cry wolf too often. In the first instance the intelligence warning that the enemy intends to go to war is correct, but the enemy changes his mind. Between November 12, 1939, and May 10, 1940, Hitler postponed his attack on the Western Front twenty-nine times, often at the last minute (Mason, 1963, p. 557). In the second instance sometimes it is the success of intelligence itself in exposing the enemy's intentions that leads him to postpone his plans; the warning will nevertheless be perceived as a false alarm. In fact it is usually impossible to tell at the time if an alarm is truly false or if the enemy has changed his mind, whether because of being found out or for other reasons. Thus it is very difficult to judge the accuracy of an assessment and to correct it if necessary (Brody, 1983, p. 47).

In addition psychologists have found that the rewards for interpreting a signal correctly and the costs of failure in detection or of false reports have a striking effect on how well a person decodes a

signal (De Rivera, 1968, p. 56). From the viewpoint of intelligence, to issue a war warning is risky because of the costs involved in acting on false alarms. Hence the decision to issue a warning is also a function of the extent to which the intelligence agency is willing to take such risks. But since intelligence agencies consider their first and most important mission that of providing advance warning, they place a high cost on the failure to report a signal. Usually they believe that it is more dangerous to underestimate than to overestimate threats. When the issue is war, they feel that it is preferable to sound an alarm, though it may prove false, than to take the chance of being caught unprepared. Since nobody wants to be blamed for an intelligence failure, too many false alarms are given.

False alarms have a considerable impact. High costs can be incurred when faulty analysis is responsible for reporting a signal when there is none. Despite the priority given to advance warning, intelligence agencies are sometimes overcautious about giving false warnings, which would decrease their credibility. Hence intelligence agencies tend to report vague estimates and suppress warnings. In explaining why additional warnings were not sent to Hawaii, some have suggested that there was a desire to avoid crying wolf too often lest the commanders become impervious to messages designed to alert them (U.S. Congress, 1946a, p. 256).

The effect of previous false alarms is harmful to the entire process of information analysis. Decision makers tend to ignore warnings if their intelligence agency has previously cried wolf. In the Senate hearings after the North Korean attack, Secretary of Defense Johnson testified that intelligence reports had cried wolf so often before June 1950 that nothing in the reports of that time "put us on notice that anything was going to happen in Korea" (DeWeerd, 1962, p. 440). One official later explained in a letter: "Our intelligence agencies were frightened by the Roberts Commission which investigated Pearl Harbor and have gotten into the habit of warning about everything all the time. The result is useless to policy makers because a large percentage of their warnings turn out to mean nothing. During the week of the attack nothing was called to the attention of the policy makers pointing a finger toward Korea" (Paige, 1968, p. 98n.).

Not only an agency but also a source of information that previously cried wolf may lose its credibility. Thus prior to the German invasion, the Norwegian foreign minister did not trust his embassy in Berlin after two previous false alarms; his immediate reaction on receiving similar signals in April 1940 was to consider them un-

substantiated rumors. The Dutch thought no better of their own embassy in Berlin. Beginning in November 1939 the Dutch received numerous direct warnings from their military attaché in Berlin of an imminent German attack. These warnings led to three major alarms, when tension increased as the possibility of a German attack was seriously considered by at least some officials in The Hague. Yet each time Hitler changed his mind about the attack; the cumulative effect of these aborted decisions was to undermine the credibility of the attaché (Holst, 1966, p. 40; Pearson and Doerga, 1978, p. 27).

In general too a source will be more reluctant to report information if he has previously provided a false warning. Thus the Norwegian embassy in Berlin deliberately sent vague warnings about German intentions to invade Norway because it had been criticized for reporting unreliable rumors in the past. Similarly when the Dutch military attaché in Berlin received reliable information on May 3, 1940, that an invasion of the Low Countries was planned for the following week, he did not pass the message on to The Hague because during the preceding months he had sent many similar warnings, which had been received with disbelief (Holst, 1966, p. 40; Hinsley, 1979, p. 135).

Furthermore, recurrent warnings that turn out to be false alarms induce a kind of fatigue and decrease sensitivity. Initial warnings are taken seriously; but as time passes and alerts prove to be false, sensitivity decreases. At the time of the first alert in Pearl Harbor in June 1940 a daring and difficult enemy raid on Hawaii was believed to be probable, whereas a year later it was considered to be an extremely costly and unlikely gamble for the Japanese. By the end of 1941 the Pacific Fleet in Hawaii was tired of checking out Japanese submarine reports in the vicinity of Pearl Harbor; in the week preceding the attack it had checked seven, all of which proved to be false (Wohlstetter, 1965, p. 649).

Yet if past failure to predict a coming attack contributes to misperception of signals, past successes will have the same effect. Personal involvement gives an event greater impact, especially if the analyst's views were validated. Experiments have shown that the probability that individuals will maintain a hypothesis despite disconfirmation depends on their past success with the hypothesis (Betts, 1982, p. 123). If an intelligence agency had previously received signals of a coming attack but has correctly estimated them to be false, it will tend to regard similar future signals as the critical indicators.

In such cases the agency pays insufficient attention to the *reasons* why the past estimate was correct, and variations in the situation may not be noticed. Decision makers thus tend to rely on successful intelligence agencies without seriously questioning the validity of their estimates.

Navy Intelligence in Hawaii was not particularly disturbed by the loss of radio contact with the Japanese carriers after November 16, 1941. Frequently throughout 1941 and earlier, radio intelligence traffic had failed to locate carriers and other warships. In all these cases Navy Intelligence had correctly assessed that the ships were heading for home waters, where they used direct low-power radio contact with shore stations. Since these assessments had always been justified by events, intelligence did not consider the loss of signals in December 1941 an indication of war (Wohlstetter, 1962, p. 42).

### The Worst-Case Analysis

The “cry wolf” phenomenon is associated with a more basic tendency within intelligence communities when evidence is ambiguous—to emphasize the worst scenario that might develop. “When a situation is not clear-cut, and various interpretations are possible, it is indeed the duty and tradition of intelligence to point out the worst possibility” (Greene, 1965, p. 132). The reason for that tendency is similar to that for “cry wolf.” Brown, Kahr, and Peterson have suggested, following discussions with intelligence analysts and their supervisors, that “there may be less of a penalty for crying ‘wolf’ than for failing to predict an unpleasant outcome. The analyst perceives a smaller penalty, or negative value, associated with the error of overestimating the probability than with the error of underestimating it” (1974, p. 432). Kissinger describes the same phenomenon in the CIA: “Its analysts were only too aware that no one has ever been penalized for not having foreseen an opportunity, but that many careers have been blighted for not predicting a risk. Therefore the intelligence community has always been tempted to forecast dire consequences for any conceivable course of action, an attitude that encourages paralysis rather than adventurism” (1979, p. 37).

On the face of it, worst-case analysis should provide a solution to the problem of surprise attack, for intelligence agencies always assume the worst possibility, they will always take into account an enemy attack. In practice this is not the case. Intelligence agencies do not always point out the worst possibility. Existing beliefs, over-

confidence, and lack of alertness might overcome the tendency to assume the worst. Moreover, the worst-case approach is not sufficient to guarantee security. Decision makers tend to discount a consistent emphasis on the greatest possible danger. Such an approach can reduce their options, while their own experience tells them that less dangerous developments are more likely to take place. Assuming the worst means incurring extraordinary expenses and may provoke enemy countermeasures or preemption. And as Betts argues: "Even if worst-case analysis is promulgated in principle, it will be compromised in practice. Routinization corrodes sensitivity. Every day that an expected threat does not materialize dulls receptivity to the reality of danger . . . Seeking to cover all contingencies, worst-case analysis loses focus and salience; by providing a theoretical guide for everything, it provides a practical guide for very little" (1978, p. 74).

The recurrence of surprise attacks is the best proof that worst-case possibilities are not considered seriously enough when most needed. To the extent that worst-case analysis is used, not only does it usually not prevent surprise, but the damage it causes to the credibility of intelligence agencies and sources actually contributes to the success of surprise attacks.

### The Wait-and-See Attitude

Usually after major intelligence failures one can hardly understand in retrospect how intelligence agencies could have ignored and misperceived so many alarming signals. Part of the problem lies in the general attitude within the intelligence community toward threatening situations and warning indicators.

The intelligence community commonly operates in an atmosphere of doubt, full of question marks and queer, inexplicable occurrences. Intelligence analysts must always cope with conflicting evidence and information of questionable reliability. They are accustomed to lacking vital information and having no answers to disturbing questions. They are often faced with potentially threatening situations. Thus unusual behavior on the part of the enemy does not necessarily put the community on extreme alert. In an atmosphere of constant crisis, intelligence analysts are not excited by each warning indicator and often adopt a wait-and-see attitude toward alarming signals.

There are two reasons for adopting this attitude. For one, analysts—especially in a military organization—get bonuses for taking responsibility and keeping cool, not for putting policy makers on the alert too often. They are educated to make a systematic, balanced, and cautious analysis before deciding that they must change their assessment. Experience has taught them that most potential threats fail to materialize, and new information is constantly coming in. Hence analysts and decision makers often prefer to wait for additional information before sounding the alarm. Since a considerable part of intelligence information is contradictory, the arrival of alarming information is not surprising and does not lead to immediate reconsideration of the existing assessment.

The wait-and-see attitude was adopted, for example, by Admiral Kimmel at Pearl Harbor:

Between 7:30 and 7:40, I received information from the Staff Duty Officer of the *Ward's* report [concerning the discovery of a submarine off Pearl Harbor], the dispatch of the ready-duty destroyer to assist the *Ward*, and the efforts then underway to obtain a verification of the *Ward's* report. *I was awaiting such verification at the time of the attack.* In my judgment, the effort to obtain confirmation of the reported submarine attack off Pearl Harbor was a proper preliminary to more drastic action in view of the number of such contacts which had not been verified in the past. (U.S. Congress, 1946a, pp. 138–139, emphasis added)

Kimmel's statement touches on another aspect of the same problem—the contradiction between the natural tendency to wait for verification of evidence and the fact that time may be running out. As the former Director of Intelligence and Research in the State Department, Ray Cline, explained: "You almost never know when something is going to happen. You wait until the evidence comes in and by the time you are sure it is always very close to the event" (U.S. Congress, 1975, p. 656). There is also always a delay, especially in large organizations, as reports shuttle between the source and the evaluation center, between accuracy checks and final evaluation, and between the center and the final report to the decision makers. Communication procedures and the use of technical equipment consume considerable time, from minutes and hours to days or even weeks. In the meantime the opponent may make his move.



Following the 1973 airlifting of Soviet advisers' families out of Egypt and Syria, Israeli intelligence began to change its low-probability assessment regarding the outbreak of war. On the morning of October 5 Director of Military Intelligence Zeira informed the Prime Minister that he anticipated confirmation of Egyptian intent from a reliable source by nightfall. By evening highly reliable information received by Military Intelligence could indeed have been interpreted to indicate that war was imminent. General Zeira, while disturbed by that information, decided to wait for another confirmation, expected late in the evening. Only at 2:00 A.M. did the irrefutable information come in, and by then it was quite late. Another Director of Israeli Military Intelligence, General Shlomo Gazit, later suggested that with better communication procedures the information could have arrived twenty-four or even forty-eight hours earlier (Bartov, 1978, pp. 317, 323; Gazit, 1981, p. 11). Had this happened, it might have changed the entire picture.

### Security of Sources and Restriction of Information

Another problem connected with assessing and reporting intelligence information arises from the fact that although the intelligence agency wants to report all relevant information to the decision makers, the need to protect the security of sources requires limited use of that information. Hence the intelligence community must develop some system of classification whereby each analyst and decision maker gets only the information he needs to have. In some cases the release of critical information is delayed or prohibited in order not to expose its source—as with the famous Zimmermann telegram in the First World War.<sup>2</sup>

The golden mean between intelligence research and operational needs on the one hand and source security on the other is sometimes difficult to find. Before the Pearl Harbor attack only nine top government officials besides the president were allowed regular access to the Magic intercepts. Neither the intercepted messages nor essential information derived from them was sent to Hawaii. The substance of some exceptional messages had been transmitted, but even this practice was stopped in July 1941, although Kimmel and Short were never notified of the change. As a rule two high-level couriers—a navy commander and an army colonel—would wait in an outer office while such messages were read and then returned to them for further dissemination. After the authorized recipients had

seen the messages, the only copies retained were kept by the chiefs of the Far Eastern sections of Army and Navy Intelligence (U.S. Congress, 1946b, p. 37).

These severe restrictions on the handling of sensitive information created considerable problems. First, decision makers were denied access to important information. Kimmel did not know, for example, that before the attack on Pearl Harbor the Japanese consul general in Hawaii had been briefed in detail to note the presence of particular ships in particular areas and at particular times. Nor did Kimmel receive any notification that the Japanese were continuing negotiations after November 26 merely as a cover for their war plans, a change in the political situation known to the Navy Department. Then too those who saw the messages had them in hand only momentarily and had neither time nor opportunity to make a critical and systematic review of the material. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of sensitive information invited trouble. Those allowed to read it generally did not know which other officials had access to it. The Chief of Naval Operations assumed, for instance, that Kimmel was reading all the Magic intercepts, an assumption particularly critical to Washington's decisions about the phrasing of its warnings to the theater and its communication with other decision makers. Finally, those who did not see the Magic material but who had learned somehow of its existence were sure that it contained military as well as diplomatic information and believed that the contents were more complete and precise than they actually were. This mistaken assumption increased the theater commanders' confidence in Washington's sensitivity to imminent war (Kimmel, 1955, p. 56; Wohlstetter, 1962, pp. 186, 394).

Once the intelligence community accepts the principle of selective distribution of information among the services and theaters—and in fact there is no alternative—there still remains the problem of determining the optimal distribution to reduce harmful consequences. Before the Pearl Harbor attack the Washington agencies received many more signals than the theaters concerning Japanese activities and intentions. Yet no single agency or individual had access to the total mass of information. While it was not practical or advisable to send to the theaters all the information available in Washington, the agencies there were not necessarily good judges of what material would be most useful to the theaters. Thus, owing to both the ambiguous wording of messages and the selective forwarding of information from Washington, Hawaii was not suffi-

ciently receptive to the danger signals. In general the result of selective distribution of information is the prevalence of a feeling in the intelligence community that somebody else probably knows what is going on and will take care of the situation. This reliance, so often unjustified, on other analysts may contribute to the persistence of biased assumptions and to the neglect of discrepant information.

A generation after Pearl Harbor information distribution had not improved. The same problem manifested itself within the American intelligence community prior to the Yom Kippur War. On the morning of the Arab attack the Watch Committee, which was responsible for crisis alerts, met to assess the likelihood of major hostilities and concluded that no major offensive was in the offing. It was later assumed that one of the reasons for this failure was that some participants were not cleared to see all intelligence information, so the subject could not be fully discussed. The draft CIA postmortem concluded: "If the information contained in the NSA [National Security Agency] messages had been available prior to the time of the outbreak of hostilities, we could have clearly predicted that (a foreign nation) knew in advance that renewed hostilities were imminent in the Middle East" (*Pike Papers*, 1976, p. 20).

The need to maintain the security of sources creates another problem: since a major part of intelligence information is classified, the intelligence community is largely a closed system. Intelligence analysts cannot share classified information with analysts and observers outside the community. Thus ideas and data based on classified material are not subject to rigorous, informed, independent criticism by outside groups such as the academic community and the press (Wilensky, 1972, p. 243).

Finally, analysts and policy makers read intelligence information selectively because of the organizational time constraints under which they work. These constraints are generated by the enormous amount of information that has to be read and by the work required to integrate different interests and opinions within an organization. This pressure is especially heavy when war is impending. Consequently analysts and decision makers do not have the time to read information thoroughly or weigh different points of view judiciously. As pressures on the analyst to reach a quick conclusion increase, the amount of information on which he bases his assessment decreases. Since intelligence analysts are always under pressure not to withhold judgment, they are obliged to reach a conclusion quickly even if they realize that they may be incorrect (Jervis, 1976,

p. 194). This may cause misperception even though relevant information is available.

### The "Current Events" Approach

Intelligence agencies give precedence to the urgent and immediate rather than to fundamental analysis. Pressures of time and limited resources and manpower dictate concentration on current intelligence. In addition, information on fundamental issues and social trends tends to be considered overly academic by field personnel, since it is usually not fast-changing. Furthermore, collecting information on these intangible issues is difficult and unrewarding, and in many cases field personnel lack the background and qualifications to pursue it effectively (U.S. Congress, 1979, p. 3).

More important, the "current events" approach reflects the growing demand by policy makers for information of current concern. Intelligence consumers usually need answers to immediate problems. Only seldom do they look for fundamental, in-depth analysis, especially with regard to political developments. Since policy makers show less interest in fundamental analysis, and since the relationship of fundamental analysis to policy issues is not readily apparent, intelligence communities tend to devote fewer resources to that kind of research (U.S. Congress, 1979, p. 3; 1976, p. 272). Also, intelligence analysts themselves are usually drawn to current, rather than fundamental research. The "action" is in current events, and for current analysis they can receive a bonus.

The outcome is clear. Current intelligence "is an important warning vehicle" and "most effective in reporting events that stand out clearly," but "it does not lend itself to assessments of the long-term significance of events" (U.S. Congress, 1979, p. 4). Focusing on current events, for example, reduces an analyst's ability to understand the enemy's intentions, especially his conceptual framework, as well as the influence of internal factors on his possible decision to go to war. An understanding of these factors cannot be based only on current analysis. The Church Committee concluded:

According to some observers, this syndrome has had an unfavorable impact on the quality of crisis warning and the recognition of longer term trends. The "current events" approach has fostered the problem of "incremental analysis," the tendency to focus myopically on the latest piece of information

without systematic consideration of an accumulated body of integrated evidence. Analysts in their haste to compile the day's traffic, tend to lose sight of underlying factors and relationships. (U.S. Congress, 1976, p. 273)

### Military Men and Surprise Attack

The military is inevitably implicated in the failure to prevent surprise attack. In most cases those who are responsible for strategic warnings are military men. Many of the intelligence agencies are military organizations. Countermeasures to face the enemy's attack are always taken by the armed forces. Is there a connection between the failure to foresee surprise attacks and the fact that many of those involved are military men?

Some of the qualities attributed to military personnel may indeed contribute to their vulnerability to surprise attack. They are described as more authoritarian, aggressive, decisive, and conservative and less tolerant than civilians. "Military and civilian writers generally seem to agree that the military mind is disciplined, rigid, logical, scientific; it is not flexible, tolerant, intuitive, emotional. The continuous performance of the military function may well give rise to these qualities" (Huntington, 1957, pp. 59–60). Janowitz (1960, pp. 24, 242–243) claims that military men are predisposed toward a status quo outlook; for them past events become a powerful precedent for the future.<sup>3</sup>

Military men in addition are educated to take great risks, accept personal responsibility, and solve problems by themselves without bothering superiors or relying on others. Even when they have doubts, they hesitate to ask for clarification of instructions lest this be interpreted as weakness. As General Zeira, the Director of Israeli Military Intelligence in 1973, later testified, "I am not accustomed to bringing matters in my sphere of responsibility before my superior officers" (Hareven, 1978, p. 15). Similarly on November 27, 1941, Admiral Kimmel received the "war warning" message. Every naval officer who later testified on the subject, including Kimmel himself, stated that never before had he seen an official dispatch containing the words *war warning*. Kimmel nonetheless opted to implement the warning without seeking clarification from Washington. General Short was instructed to undertake reconnaissance, but he took for granted that Washington had made a mistake and ignored the order. The congressional investigation committee noted:

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. (U.S. Congress, 1946a, p. 258)

Moreover, military men work within a rigidly hierarchical organization. Hierarchy and discipline conflict with intellectual independence and objectivity. Military men are under pressure not to undermine the positions and policies of their superiors. Officers who do not share their superiors' beliefs are open to reprisal on their fitness reports. As Blachman notes: "The promotion system created exceptional pressures for conformity on career officers. Promotion depends heavily on the evaluation report of one's commanding officer; one unfavorable mention in the report could postpone promotion for many years and, perhaps, permanently blight a career" (1973, p. 332).

Furthermore, in assessing external threats military men tend to emphasize the enemy's capabilities rather than his intentions. They feel professionally capable of estimating the enemy's fighting strength, while estimating his intentions seems to be an uncertain undertaking open to error. Hence they tend to base their threat perception on the enemy's capabilities while attributing to him the worst intentions: "If a state has the power to injure one's own security, it is necessary to assume that it will do so" (Huntington, 1957, pp. 66–67). In terms of anticipating surprise attack military men usually adopt the worst-case analysis. Because military men focus on capabilities, it becomes easy for civilian decision makers to reject their warnings, feeling that they understand those enemy intentions that military estimators ignore or distort.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the entire threat perception of military men might be biased and unbalanced. As Kennan described the background of the North Korean intervention: "The unexpectedness of this attack . . . only stimulated the already existent preference of the military planners for drawing their conclusions only from the assessed *capabilities* of the adversary, dismissing his *intentions*, which could be safely assumed to be hostile. All this tended to heighten the militarization of thinking about the

cold war generally, and to press us into attitudes where any discriminate estimate of Soviet intentions was unwelcome and unacceptable" (1967, p. 497).

These traits and tendencies of military men may indeed contribute on occasion to the failure to predict surprise attack. Yet in the final analysis it seems that the involvement of military men in the intelligence and warning process per se is not an important component of such failure. While some traits of military men make them more vulnerable to surprise, other traits may offset this weakness. "Military intelligence analysts have one major advantage over their civilian counterparts. They bring to the interpretation of military data a professional understanding of the actual operation of military forces. This brings to their judgments on the likely combat performance of enemy equipment an authority that no civilian can match" (Freedman, 1977, p. 21). Moreover, the military man always stresses the dangers to military security, recommends caution, and favors preparedness (Huntington, 1957, pp. 66, 69).

Indeed it has not been proven that civilian intelligence agencies are less vulnerable to surprise attack than their military counterparts. The CIA, the dominant intelligence agency in the United States, was wrong about the North Korean and Chinese interventions in Korea and about the 1973 war in Israel. In 1941, until the final stage prior to "Barbarossa," both military and civilian intelligence services in Britain found it difficult to discard the belief that Germany would present Russia with demands and an ultimatum. The Foreign Office, for instance, "was never wholly convinced that 'Germany intended to attack Russia and not merely to use diplomatic and military pressure to intimidate the Soviet government' " (Hinsley, 1979, p. 480). And in 1962 the dominant intelligence agency in India was the civilian Intelligence Bureau; growing reliance on its estimates was one of the causes of the failure to anticipate the Chinese attack.