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INTELLIGENCE  
AND THE ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of  
**INTELLIGENCE**  
**AND THE ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The creation of intelligence from several pieces of information is an inexact science at best; an art in most cases. The intelligence cycle can be used to examine the various facets of this process, its sequential nature and the effect the product of one portion of the process can have on the validity of the next step. The most critical aspect of this process is the actual creation of military intelligence from separate yet perhaps related pieces of information--the analysis or production step. While the dissemination to and acceptance of the final intelligence product by consumers is fraught with potential difficulties, a mistake in the analysis/production of intelligence may irrevocably alter the outcome and efficacy of the intelligence product. One of the many formidable tasks in the production step is determining the correct perspective with which to analyze information. Failure to view an enemy's actions or potential actions from the enemy's perspective can result in flawed analysis. The incorrect perspective, once introduced into the analysis process, can have grave consequences as illustrated by the case of the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. To try and attain the proper perspective, an analyst must employ objectivity and the perspective of the enemy.

## The Art of Intelligence

Sun Tzu, in The Art of War, refers to "foreknowledge" that allows a leader to best his enemy at every meeting. Foreknowledge cannot be gained from ". . . analogy with past events, nor from calculations. It must be obtained from men who know the enemy situation."<sup>1</sup> Sun Tzu recommends the use of "agents" to gather information on the enemy; these agents are either the enemy's own men or the general's men who enter the enemy's inner circle to learn ". . . the true state of affairs. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Today's use of agents is augmented by a vast array of technological collection means that attempt to view the enemy's true state of affairs via various methods. An analyst must combine the information collected from multiple sources, human and technological, and arrive at a conclusion as to the enemy's situation. This can be called the *art of intelligence*--human interpretation of human acts, capabilities and intentions, based on information gathered from various sources.

Perhaps the best tool to use in the creation of intelligence is an analyst who attempts to understand the enemy's situation; one who considers the enemy environment, thought processes, and potential or rationale for action *from the enemy's perspective*. Is this a realistic expectation? It must be, for it is imperative in the production of useful intelligence.

## The Intelligence Process

Joint Pub 2-0 defines the elements of the intelligence cycle as planning and directing, collection, processing, production, and dissemination. Planning and directing are the administrative efforts of organization and prioritization, followed by actual collection; processing is the translation of collected data into a format which can be analyzed; production is the "integration, evaluation, analysis, and interpretation of information . . . into finished intelligence. . . ";<sup>3</sup> followed by dissemination or distribution to a user.

In his work War, Strategy and Intelligence, Michael Handel states that "intelligence work can be divided into three distinct levels: *acquisition* (the collection of information); *analysis* (its evaluation); and *acceptance* (the readiness of politicians to make use of intelligence in the formulation of their policies)."<sup>4</sup> These 'levels' also can be seen as a linear progression of steps in the intelligence process: the collection of information; the analysis of information and its transition to intelligence; and the consumption of intelligence by a user.

Whether one chooses to examine the five step or three step process, or create an amalgam of the two, will depend on the detail in which one wants to examine the process. *Acquisition* may be seen as the sum of planning, directing and collection. The critical step of analysis or *production* is

best described as processing, evaluation, analysis interpretation, and integration. The choice of the third element, either *acceptance* or dissemination, may depend on how one views the use of intelligence; as a one-way or two-way street. For this discussion, the three step intelligence process of *acquisition*, *production* and *acceptance* (fig. 1)<sup>5</sup> will be used, for the interface between producer and consumer is, and needs to be, a two-way relationship.

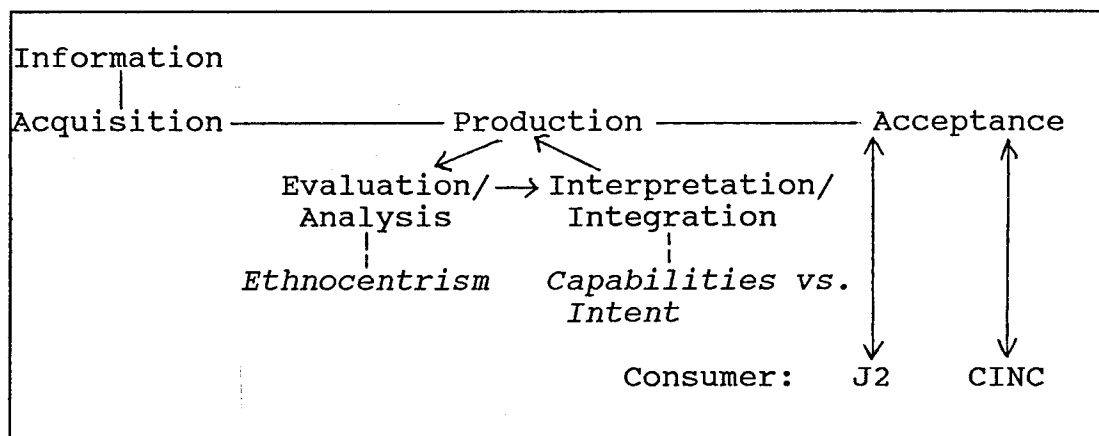


Figure 1. The Intelligence Process

The first step of the intelligence process, acquisition, is the most basic and one major question stands between the information and its acquisition: are the means available to collect this information? Technology is perhaps the greatest consideration at this point; however, in some cases even technology cannot provide the means for acquisition. Elements of organization and prioritization of collection should be considered here, and their implications for the total effort.

Problems with the act of collection (improper prioritization, faulty organization) will affect the rest of the process.

The next step, production, is the critical point at which information is broken down and reconstructed as part of a larger whole. Information is evaluated, analyzed and interpreted based on its own merits, and integrated into an existing framework or concept with other pieces of information to form intelligence.

The evaluation and analysis of information is based on, to a large extent, one premise: the perspective of the analyst. Is the analyst truly objective and is he or she judging the information on the basis of its merits alone? Handel discusses many potential pitfalls of the analyst, some of which are: ethnocentrism, pre-existing concepts, and projection.<sup>6</sup> All involve the analyst allowing too much of his own situation to influence his evaluation of the information; all may be unconscious mistakes. Perhaps the most pernicious, the most pervasive of many possible biases is ethnocentrism. The analyst's culture and perspective tend to remain at the center of the evaluation and analysis, rather than those of the subject's.

The interpretation and integration of information allow the analyst to fit the information into the larger whole, or concept, and judge the importance. At this point, potential concerns include: the question of capabilities versus intent, ambiguity, and estimating risk.<sup>7</sup> The analyst forms a concept

about the enemy--an evaluation of the enemy's actions and potential actions. One of the most difficult tasks is using information concerning enemy capabilities and combining it with an unknown element, the enemy's potential for action, in order to divine intent.

At this point in the examination of the intelligence process it is worthwhile to define the level of intelligence, and the context within the three levels of war: tactical, operational and strategic. Applying the model to the operational level of war, intelligence produced by an analyst is provided to the senior intelligence officer on a joint staff, the J2. The J2 is the first consumer of intelligence, and is also an analyst in his own right, supplying the intelligence to the Theater Commander in Chief (CINC).

The consumers, the J2 and the CINC, as well as any other analysts which obtain the intelligence, also may attempt to evaluate, analyze, interpret and integrate the intelligence in the context of the sum of information to which they have access. All are vulnerable to the same unwitting pitfalls as the original analyst. A third consumer is the next echelon in the chain of command, either intelligence or operational.

Thus, the intelligence process begins with collected information and ends by providing intelligence to a consumer; the consumer can re-enter the production portion of the process again and create his own intelligence. Many difficulties exist in the process, but by examining

consequences of an incorrect analytical perspective, such as ethnocentrism, and its effect on estimating an enemy's intent, an analyst or consumer can take steps to minimize possible deleterious effects.

### Ethnocentrism

A critical aspect of the evaluation and analysis of information is the perspective with which the information is to be judged. The importance or relevance of the information can be determined only by comparing the information to other aspects or other pieces of information in the same context. Many times, the perspective of the analyst will determine this context. If the context is inaccurate, the analysis may be suspect, and the intelligence produced potentially distorted or functionally irrelevant.

In assessing information at all levels of war, a common mistake is to judge the information based on one's own context, or culture; from one's own perspective. The danger in using the wrong cultural context is that the significance of the information may be misinterpreted. Simply, an Israeli analyst would judge Arab capabilities, intentions or actions using Israeli cultural norms and Israeli military doctrine, strategy and tactics vice those of the enemy. A term to describe this is ethnocentrism, the "view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it."<sup>s</sup>

Stating that an analyst needs to judge the actions of members of a specific culture against the rules/mores/values of that culture may seem unnecessary. Unfortunately ethnocentrism may be one of the most basic, and therefore overlooked, analytical mistakes. This has implications at the strategic level among policy makers who cannot or will not understand overtures of another nation. A faulty context or perspective for judging an enemy could result in a strategic surprise. At the operational level, the inability to understand an enemy's value system or theories of war might lead to misjudging his perceived capabilities or courses of action. To mitigate the effects of ethnocentrism, one may employ cultural relativism, in which the elements of an enemy ". . . are perceived and described in terms of scientific detachment as, ideally, from the perspective of participants in or adherents of a given culture."<sup>9</sup> An analyst would be aware of his or her cultural bias and attempt to avoid that context when dealing with information from another culture. To understand an enemy's perspective is the basis for judging his actions, and involves ". . . real understanding of other nations, including a subjective feeling of how other societies see themselves and would wish to be seen."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, an Israeli analyst would want to use, to the greatest extent possible, Arab cultural norms and military doctrine to judge Arab action or potential for action. The Israeli analyst would want, as much as possible, to think like an Arab, or put

himself in the mind of the Arab.<sup>11</sup>

### Capabilities vs. Intentions

Handel states that "all information gathered by intelligence concerns either the adversary's *intentions* or his *capabilities*."<sup>12</sup> Capabilities include easily quantifiable material aspects such as hardware, and less obvious, non-material aspects such as doctrine or morale. The tendency is to collect information on the former, simply because the characteristics are easier to categorize and define. But issues such as doctrine and morale must be investigated, in order to evaluate the enemy's effectiveness in using hardware. The two aspects of capabilities, material and non-material, viewed together, form a clear picture of the combat strength of the enemy.

The element of intent is the most elusive of all aspects of the enemy, simply because it can be the most closely held information, limited to a leader and his inner circle. The intent of the enemy's forces in a theater of war or the intent of a nation will be determined by the intent of the leader. Intent can also change, as a man can change his mind.

If an enemy's intent is not known, a possible solution is to attempt to judge his intent based on his capability. An enemy's capabilities and intentions are inextricably linked, since an enemy's capabilities must somehow support his intentions. If the enemy intends on war, his capabilities

must conform to *his perception of the strength required to meet his enemy*. This is the critical vulnerability of using capabilities to judge intentions: his capabilities must satisfy his perception of the situation, combined with his perception of the intended outcome. His perception of the situation, and therefore his intent, are the most elusive pieces of information. Thus, if an enemy intends on attack, he may not have the forces deemed necessary by one's own doctrine. But if his intent is quick, limited action followed by negotiation to change the status quo, then he may deem his forces (capabilities) are sufficient.

There is no simple solution to this dilemma, and one can only collect information on both aspects of an enemy's capabilities, and use whatever sources are available to judge an enemy's intent, such as memoirs, speeches or open source information.<sup>13</sup> Examining capabilities *and* intent, within the context of the enemy perspective, is the most effective means of assessing potential enemy action. Failure to use the enemy's perspective, as the Israelis did in 1973, can lead to a complete misinterpretation of events and potential action.

#### The 1973 Arab-Israeli War

In response to the Zionist movement and with international (though not universal) support, the territory for the Jewish nation-state of Israel was carved out of the Arab occupied land historically known as Palestine. The state

of Israel was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948, immediately recognized by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and set upon by neighboring Arab states. By mid-1949 separate armistice agreements with each neighboring country were signed and there was no longer a territory known as Palestine. In 1967, fearing an imminent collective Arab attack, Israel launched a preemptive strike and never lost the initiative. At the time of the cease-fire six days later, Israel had taken the Golan Heights and new territory in Syria, all of Jordan's territory west of the Jordan River (the West Bank), the Gaza Strip and all of the Sinai to the eastern bank of the Suez canal. This territory was won at the expense of a devastated Egyptian army, and damaged Jordanian and Syrian armies.

The period following the Six Day War saw a War of Attrition along the Suez Canal between Egypt and Israel, which ended with a cease-fire in 1970; the emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organization as a terrorist force to be reckoned with; and the dramatic increase in the participation of the U.S. and Soviet superpowers in arming the region.

Between 1972 and early 1973 Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, frustrated with the inability to negotiate a change to the status quo, decided to initiate a limited war with Israel. Syrian President Hafez Assad joined the effort to ensure a two-front war for Israel. On October 6 1973, Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, Egypt and Syria mounted an attack on Israel. Failing to fully appreciate the warning

signs at the operational and strategic level, Israel was unprepared for the attack and suffered an initial setback. Following full mobilization of the reserves, Israel was able to take the initiative and again emerge victorious. A United Nations-monitored cease-fire went into effect 24 October, followed by separate disengagement agreements between Egypt and Israel and Syria and Israel.

The Israelis failed to realize the extent to which the Six Day War affected the Egyptians.

The very magnitude and decisiveness of the Arab defeat in June 1967, with its implications to Arab pride, self-respect and honour [*sic*] (*the importance and significance of which had never been adequately appreciated by Israeli leaders*), created the inevitability of the next war (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup>

Russian and Western interpretation of events was just as poor.

At the root of the problem stands the reluctance and perhaps sheer inability in the cultivated and liberal circles in the Western world to acknowledge the vehemence and violent bitterness of the Arab rejection of Jewish political assertiveness in the Middle East.<sup>15</sup>

Booth notes that this basic inability forces Western thinkers to reject Arab thinking or to form it into a shape that is imaginable. "For most of us, a comfortable distortion always beats a tormenting truth."<sup>16</sup>

The Israelis let the 1967 war and the intervening years distort their perception of the situation. Their previous successes led the Israeli defense and national command establishments, on the whole, to believe their opponent was inferior; and the Israelis tended to judge Arab actions based

on Israeli values and principles of war. Israeli military planning relied heavily on air superiority, and the Israeli defense establishment believed the Arabs would not attack in the face of Israeli air superiority, or without the ability to strike deep into Israeli territory to attack airfields and/or population centers. The Israelis could not conceive of an attack based on their perception of the status of forces. The Israeli intelligence establishment estimated Egypt could launch an attack in 1975-6, after acquiring medium-range bombers.<sup>17</sup> Since an imminent attack was not an option, data concerning a change in the status of Arab capabilities in other warfare areas, or in general military force posture and readiness levels, could not be judged independently or objectively. In his examination of the war, Chaim Herzog notes that it appeared ". . . the assumption that the Arab armies could not or would not go to war caused a complete mental black-out."<sup>18</sup> The Israeli intelligence and defense establishments failed to incorporate Egyptian and Syrian surface-to-surface, surface-to-air, and anti-tank missile acquisitions into a new concept which allowed for the possibility of attack.<sup>19</sup>

In the fall of 1973, the Egyptian forces along the Suez could not give a clear indication of imminent attack because the forces had been there, at various levels, since 1969. Three Israeli mobilizations had occurred since 1971 in response to Egyptian mobilizations and perceived preparations

for war, without further Egyptian actions. The partial mobilization in May of 1973 was ordered by the Israeli chief of staff, Gen. Elazar, although the intelligence estimate indicated that war would not occur. Israeli intelligence believed Sadat would continue his method of brinkmanship indefinitely, and that he would not commit forces to war. The cost of the May mobilization, along with the affirmation of the intelligence assessment, would cause paralyzing indecision in October.

In early October 1973, the possibility of war had been discussed since 3 October, when Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir had returned from a trip abroad. In all formal and informal meetings between Mrs. Meir and her cabinet, the intelligence estimate given was that the probability of war was low. Friday, 5 October, Gen. Elazar placed the standing army at the highest state of readiness and a special cabinet meeting was called. During the meeting Elazar stated twice that the Egyptian force posture could indicate either attack or defense, and during his presentation Maj.-Gen. Zeira, director of Military Intelligence emphasized this point three times; and again the intelligence estimate of the probability of attack was stated as low.<sup>20</sup> It does not appear that, as a group, the cabinet could break away from the old concept that the Arabs would not attack; this may have prevented an attempt to tie actions of the Egyptian forces to that of the Syrian forces to the north.

The mistake of all involved both in intelligence and at the policy-decision level, in the given circumstances of unusually heavy concentration and escalation, was in not relating the simultaneous increase in capability in the north and in the south to Syrian and Egyptian intentions.<sup>21</sup>

A lack of understanding of the Arab perspective, a low estimation of the Arab capability to fight a war, and a basic inability to consider the possibility of war in the absence of Israeli-perceived enemy military requirements led the Israeli intelligence and command structure far from the truth. A failure to judge capabilities and intentions objectively, from the perspective of the Arabs, led to the final failure to misinterpret Arab actions.

The failure occurred within the intelligence and defense establishments. Israel's Agranat Commission, which examined the 1973 surprise attack, blamed the ". . . warning failure on the intelligence community's 'stubborn adherence' to 'the conception' that Egypt would not go to war without the capability to strike deeply at Israeli airfields and that Syria would not attack without Egypt."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, a failure within the defense establishment caused a faulty assessment of Arab strategy. The Israeli General Staff also relied on the assumption that Egypt and Syria could not attack without air superiority, and did not incorporate the surface-to-air missile "umbrella" as a capability which offered an alternative solution.

The mistake of the Israeli General Staff was to judge the Arab General Staff by its own standards of military

thinking; they did not envisage that the Arabs would come to the conclusion that they could achieve their war aim by a limited strategy under the cover of a missile umbrella.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

Sun Tzu elucidates in the simplest of terms: "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."<sup>24</sup> Knowing one's enemy *to the best of one's ability*, and judging his capabilities *and* intentions from *his* perspective are essential. These are difficult tasks, and are best described as the ideal rather than the norm. But an honest appreciation of the validity of viewing a situation through the enemy's eyes will allow for more meaningful intelligence. Joint Pub 2-0 acknowledges this, and stresses the importance of objectivity, and the need to avoid preconceived ideas.<sup>25</sup>

Still, ". . . intelligence will always have to deal with shifting signals. Its evidence will never be more than partial, and inference from its data will always be hazardous."<sup>26</sup> The best attempt to examine an enemy's capabilities and intentions will still be based on only a portion of the complete picture. But by emulating the enemy perspective, an analyst can enhance the information and perhaps gain further insight into capabilities and intentions.

The first, and most important step in emulating the enemy perspective is to realize and acknowledge that the enemy perspective is not one's own. The most difficult task is

achieving an awareness of how deeply one's own cultural biases are ingrained, and that perceptions and assumptions flow from those biases. The ability to emulate the enemy perspective can only come with study, which could include training in the enemy language and/or customs,<sup>27</sup> and examination of enemy ideology and statements in open literature.

For U.S. intelligence producers and consumers, the lesson may not be so easily learned. Fiscal constraints have reduced the availability of funding for analyst trips abroad. In service and joint intelligence centers, analysts are, in many cases, "one deep" in expertise, or one analyst is given responsibility to monitor military/political issues in a geographic region vice a specific country. The U.S. Army is de-emphasizing its Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program, which involves travel, cultural immersion and language training for officers. The U.S. intelligence community's short-term budget reduction measures may result in a decreased understanding of the essence of intelligence--the enemy perspective.

A second step is the willingness to fight the impulse, if only momentarily, to discount a theory or concept concerning the enemy that does not fit the established, entrenched concept. One analyst within the Israeli Southern Command forwarded the assessment on 1 October 1973, and again on 3 October 1973 with additional information, stating that Egyptian mobilization and deployment indicated preparations for war. The report was not distributed by the Southern

Command's senior intelligence officer.<sup>28</sup> Within the intelligence process, the J2 is a consumer as well as an analyst. He must view intelligence in light of the sum of information available to him. This is not to say that each and every dissenting opinion should be examined with all available assets; but that a concept concerning the enemy and incorporating valid information warrants some examination, even if it presents a different viewpoint.

Handel states that the ultimate success of intelligence work depends on three elements: sufficient raw data; the fact that perceptions of the intelligence analyst and all other participants are accurate; and the lack of political distortion or interference in the intelligence process.<sup>29</sup> For the analyst, the scope of control extends only to the juncture between producer and consumer. If a valid product is provided to the consumer then, although not guaranteed, the chances are good that the consumer can more effectively use the intelligence product.

## NOTES

1. Sun Tzu, The Art of War, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 145.
2. Ibid, p. 146.
3. U.S. Dept. of Defense, Joint Doctrine for Intelligence Support to Operations (n.p.: 12 October 1993), p. II-8.
4. Michael I. Handel, quoted in Michael I. Handel, War, Strategy and Intelligence (Totowa, NJ: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1989), p. 235.
5. This model is an attempt to depict graphically a combination of the intelligence cycle and two known vulnerabilities. The information concerning vulnerabilities was derived from Handel's War, Strategy and Intelligence, and his synopsis diagram 'The Problem of Strategic Surprise'. The model was developed in part through discussions with Professor Handel. Bias, analytical mistakes, politicization and the paradoxes of intelligence pervade the process.
6. This is not an all-inclusive list of vulnerabilities; others are wishful thinking, hubris and past experience. These can be found in Handel's War, Strategy and Intelligence, and in his synopsis diagram 'The Problems of Strategic Surprise' under the heading 'Perceptions and Misperceptions'.
7. Handel develops these ideas in War, Strategy and Intelligence.
8. W. G. Sumner, quoted in Ken Booth, Strategy and Ethnocentrism (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc, 1979), p. 15.
9. David Bindey, quoted in Booth, Strategy and Ethnocentrism, p. 16.
10. Booth, p. 181.
11. E. B. Potter, Nimitz, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1976), p. 65. Admiral Nimitz directed his fleet intelligence officer, Commander Layton, to ". . . think like a Japanese. . . ."
12. Michael I. Handel, quoted in Handel, War, Strategy and Intelligence, p. 239.
13. Handel, p. 240.

14. Major-General Chaim Herzog, The War of Atonement October, 1973 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), p. 13.

15. Gil Carl AlRoy, quoted in Booth, Strategy and Ethnocentrism, p. 55.

16. Booth, p. 55.

17. Herzog, p. 41.

18. Ibid, p. 278.

19. Ibid, p. 31 and p. 41.

20. Ibid, p. 50.

21. Ibid, p. 44.

22. Avi Shlaim, quoted in Alexander P. Butterfield, Jr., "The Accuracy of Intelligence Assessment: Bias, Perception, and Judgement in Analysis and Decision" Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1993, p. 48.

23. Herzog, p. 276.

24. Sun Tzu, p. 84.

25. Joint Pub 2-0, p. II-8.

26. Roberta Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 227.

27. Potter, p. 65. It was possible for Commander Layton, Pacific Fleet intelligence officer, to attempt to "think like a Japanese," because the U.S. Navy had sent him to Japan to study the language and customs.

28. Herzog, p. 47.

29. Handel, p. 187.

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