

U.S. FAILURES IN THE PEARL HARBOR ATTACK
LESSONS FOR INTELLIGENCE

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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Abstract

In this thesis, I will examine the reasons why the United States failed to prevent the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, and will extract lessons from the failure. There were some problems of collection, analysis, and management in the U.S. intelligence. Each defect is not uniquely attributed to the U.S. intelligence per se but is inherent to a cognitive and behavioral limit of human beings. The lessons of Pearl Harbor are not omnipotent tools to prevent a surprise attack, yet they will make a significant contribution to breaking the constraint and will mitigate casualties by enemy's attacks. This thesis recommends that intelligence officers should learn the historical lessons at heart to deal with a future contingency.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....p.1

Introduction.....p.3

Chapter 1 The Path to Pearl Harbor.....p.5

Collision Course.....p.5

On the Eve of Pearl Harbor.....p.9

Chapter 2 The Direct Cause of the Failure in the Pearl Harbor Defense.....p.14

Conspiracy Theory?.....p.14

Uncertainty about the Target.....p.16

Chapter 3 The Origin of the Failure I: *Collection of Intelligence*.....p.18

Sources of the U.S. Intelligence.....p.18

Quality of Intelligence.....p.21

Collection on the “Pearl Harbor Plan” by the U.S. intelligence.....p.21

Japanese Efforts to Keep the Plan Secret.....p.24

Immaturity of the U.S. Intelligence.....p.26

Chapter 4 The Origin of the Failure II: *Analysis of Intelligence*.....p.28

Misperception on Opponents’ Thinking.....p.29

Underestimation and Overconfidence.....p.34

Persistence of Prejudice.....p.36

Chapter 5 The Origin of the Failure III: *Management of Intelligence*.....p.39

Sectionalism.....p.39

Security Problem.....p.41

Insensitivity.....p.42

Rigid Group Atmosphere.....p.44

Chapter 6 Was the Pearl Harbor Attack Unavoidable?.....p.46

Chapter 7 The Lessons from Pearl Harbor.....p.49

Chapter 8 Learning from History: Comparison to the 9/11 Terrorist Attack.....p.61

Conclusion.....p.64

Introduction

At dawn December 7, 1941, 275 miles north of Hawaii, the six Japanese carriers, the heart of the Imperial Navy's air arm, launched more than two hundred planes against the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor and an hour later sent off 170 more.¹ These fighters raided Pearl Harbor and destroyed the American defense. This Japanese surprise attack gave severe damage to the U.S. forces. The final death toll was to reach 2,403, and some 1,178 were wounded. The air-bombing cost the U.S. fleet eighteen operational warships. Four battleships and *Utah* [an old battlewagon] were sunk; four were severely damaged and only two were partly repairable. Three light cruisers, three destroyers, and three auxiliary craft fell out of action, sunk, or wrecked beyond repair. The navy lost thirteen fighters, twenty-one scout bombers, and forty-six patrol planes in addition to carrier *Enterprise*'s four dive bombers. The army air force losses were even more devastating: eighteen bombers—including four B-17s—and fifty-nine fighters. In addition there was extensive damage to airfields and installations.²

Commander Jesse L. Kenworthy, Jr. witnessed the disaster:

As I reached the upper deck, I felt a very heavy shock and heard a loud explosion and the ship immediately began to list to port. Oil and water descended on the deck and by the time I had reached the boat deck, the shock of two more explosions on the port side was felt. As I attempted to get to the Conning Tower over decks slippery with oil and water, I felt the shock of another very heavy explosion on the port side.³

Fifteen hours after the surprise, the executives of the Roosevelt Administration gathering at the White

¹ Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American entry into World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press 1988), p.218.

² Edwin T. Layton, et al., *"And I Was There" Pearl Harbor and Midway—Breaking the Secrets* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1985), p.320.

³ John Costello, *The Pacific War* (New York: Rawson, Wade 1982), p.136.

House found the President in a grave mood. The President told them that this session was the most serious session since Lincoln's cabinet meeting on the outbreak of the Civil War. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins recorded: "It was obvious to me that Roosevelt was having a dreadful time just accepting the idea that the navy could be caught unaware."⁴

Never had the United States bore such a massive attack on its soil. Until today, the shocking incident has deeply lingered over Americans' memory in the words—"Remember Pearl Harbor." Now, why did the United States fail to prevent such a destructive attack? Could it have defended Pearl Harbor, or was the Japanese surprise attack unavoidable?

⁴ Costello, p.145.

Chapter 1

The Path to Pearl Harbor

How was the U.S.-Japanese relation before the Pearl Harbor attack? Whether the attack was predictable or not depends heavily on the situation of the relationship prior to the event. If the United States and Japan, for example, had maintained a friendly relationship, it must be extremely difficult for U.S. officials to expect Japanese aggression. In reality, before the Japanese belligerence in December 1941, the U.S.-Japanese relationship had already been exacerbated. Then, to what extent did the relationship deteriorate prior to the collision and how did the U.S. government perceive it? If the relationship was on the verge of collapse and the American officials regarded Japan as an imminent threat, it would have been relatively easy for them to anticipate the Japanese hostility.

Collision Course

Reviewing the history of the U.S.-Japanese political affairs up to the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941, the moment of the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 was a peak. From then on, Japanese and American interests began “heading on a potential collision course.”⁵ In the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan, replacing Russia, emerged as a major regional power in East Asia—the change of power balance made the United States cautious toward Japan. U.S. military, for instance, made the “War Plan Orange” for the purpose of future war with Japan.⁶ The grass root level also illustrated the worsening relationship. The Japanese immigrants in America were under fire due to American racism, economic anxiety, and psychological fear against the Japanese. The hatred resulted in limitations and prohibitions upon Japanese immigration, naturalization, and landholding,

⁵ Jonathan Marshall, *To Have and Have Not: Southeast Asian Raw Materials and the Origins of the Pacific War* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1995), p.55.

⁶ James C. Thomson, Jr., Peter W. Stanley and John Curtis Perry., *Sentimental Imperialists: The American Experience in East Asia* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers 1981), p.142.

boycotts, school segregation, and also personal violence against the Japanese. The Japanese, in response, were outraged by a series of American's discriminatory treaties.⁷

The outbreak of World War I pushed both nations to a collision course. Japan grabbed German concessions in China and ultimately issued a list of twenty-one demands on China. The Japanese aggression aroused strong opposition within the Wilson administration that Japan's foothold in China would eventually nullify the Open Door policy. Some officers of the administration even referred to war. Franklin D. Roosevelt, then assistant secretary of the navy, was drawn into an anti-Japanese position with a background of sentimental attachment to China. He personally drew some rough war plan of naval operation against the Japanese navy.⁸ On the other hand, Japan was frustrated with diplomatic and military disadvantages vis-à-vis the United States. As a consequence of the 1921-22 Washington Naval Disarmament Conference, the naval ratio of the United States, Great Britain, and Japan was determined as 5:5:3, which reinforced Japanese suspicions that the West still degraded it as a second-rank country. What was worse, as mentioned above, the America's harsh policies and attitudes toward the Japanese further hurt the nation's pride. However, these frictions were normal between major powers and not a driving force to war. Overall Japan was careful to play as a civilized industrial country—abiding by the international norm, embracing the standards of parliamentary democracy, and respecting Great Power's interests. In fact, the Japanese domestic politics in the 1920s was dedicated to a democratic and antimilitary direction.⁹

Then the Great Depression occurred at the end of the 1920s. Already shaken by a financial panic in 1927, Japan was struck by the world-wide economic disaster after 1930. The growth in unemployment rates in the cities and bad crop harvest in the countryside flared up riots by urban and rural labor. In the midst of this economic disorder, violent rightwing and ultranationalist groups

⁷ Thomson, p.144.

⁸ William Neumann, "How American Policy in the Pacific Contributed to War in the Pacific," in Harry Elmer Barnes ed., *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd. 1953), p.242.

⁹ Marshall, p.55-57.

actively pursued their ideologies, weakened parliamentary democracy and strengthened extremist cliques, all of which reflected a military-oriented foreign policy. Some ultranationalists in the Kwantung Army plotted to invade Manchuria by creating a minor incident on the South Manchurian Railway in 1931. By using this incident as an excuse, the Kwantung Army overwhelmingly conquered the region and established the puppet state of “Manchukuo” in 1932. The pattern was a “set of military adventurism and civilian submission to the army’s faits accomplis.” In response to the Japanese aggression, the United States condemned the Japan’s violation of international law and a direct challenge to Western prestige in China. Then Secretary of State Henry Stimson announced that the United States would not accept any change of the status quo by means of force and would retain the Open Door policy.¹⁰

Little was done by Japan and the United States to ease the tension in the subsequent period. Japan withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933 and the Washington Naval Disarmament Treaty in 1934. The breakdown of the London Naval Disarmament Conference of 1935-1936 highlighted irreversible gap between Japan and the Anglo-Saxon nations. The United States and Britain attempted to impose disadvantageous naval ratios to Japan. The event further stiffened the Japanese view that only military action could push the nation up to a first-class status. Coupled with the sense of political defeat and isolation, Japan approached Nazi Germany and signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936. Economically too, Japan was facing isolation in the early 1930s through commercial restrictions and boycotts of its products in China and Southeast Asia. Due to its few resources and a growing population, Japan sought to overcome its vulnerability to foreign economic pressures by forcefully expanding its economic sphere and living space. Under such circumstances, ultranationalist groups trumpeted their ideologies of pan-Asiatic and anti-Western world.

In the summer of 1937, Japan turned its militant policy to mainland China and announced to

¹⁰ Marshall, p.55-57.

destroy all resistance throughout the country. In November, 1938, Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro declared to create a “New Order in East Asia.” The United States was fiercely opposed to Japan’s intention to push the West out of China. U.S. interests in China counted a large potential market for U.S. goods, substantial “philanthropic” ideologies, and established general principles of international order. All of them shaped U.S. foreign policy of the Far East, standing against Japan.¹¹

The Sino-Japanese conflict, however, was not the only critical contention between Japan and the United States. The intensified U.S.-Japanese relationship was inseparably combined with the European theater. From the late 1930s on, both countries increasingly bound themselves to Europe: Japan allied with Nazi Germany, the United States consolidated its tie with Great Britain. As James C. Thomson Jr., et al. observe, although Japan intended to discourage American entry into the war by making the Tripartite Pact of September 1940, it ended up an opposite effect. To Americans, Nazism seemed thoroughly evil and they could not allow Great Britain, the only major power desperately fighting against Hitler, to collapse. They viewed the Japanese decision of alliance with the Nazis coupled with its increasing aggression in East Asia as an inevitable adversary. On the other hand, the Japanese regarded the American policy as double-standards: accepting European colonies but opposing Japanese ones. The Japanese were convinced that they could hardly avoid moving southward and acquiring resources for their survival. But the Japanese would risk American intervention if they inflicted the defenseless European colonies.¹²

This uncompromising relation had become “a vicious circle of advance by the Japanese and reprisal by the Americans.”¹³ In July 1939, the American government renounced its commercial treaty with Japan, and by 1940, the U.S. government had driven Japan into a corner by placing exports of aviation fuel and high-grade scrap iron and steel under license. Consequently, in September

¹¹ Marshall, p.55-57.

¹² Thomson, p.160-161.

¹³ Ibid, p.161.

1940, Japan invaded northern Indochina in order to gain raw materials, and in response the United States imposed scrap metals embargo on Japan. In July 1941, Japan entered the southern part of French Indochina, and consequently the United States froze Japanese assets and placed an oil embargo against Japan.¹⁴ As a result the most serious problem for Japan became its shortage of oil as both the army and navy were dependent on imported oil and had only about a two-year supply on hand.¹⁵

On the Eve of Pearl Harbor

By July 1941, the intensified relation had set the stage for the Pearl Harbor tragedy. Washington and Tokyo started bilateral negotiations, seemingly seeking to avoid war. In reality, however, the attempt led only to a stalemate and despair instead of reconciliation of their incompatible interests. While both governments talked, their armies and navies prepared for war in case of a breakdown of the negotiations.¹⁶ By the time the United States began a series of negotiations with Japan, American policymakers had already irreversibly distrusted the Japanese. “We knew that Japanese leaders were unreliable and treacherous,”¹⁷ Secretary of State Cordell Hull recalled later. In early October, Secretary of War Henry Stimson recorded Hull’s agreement that “no promises of the Japs based on words would be worth anything.”¹⁸ With so little to talk about and distrust of Japan, why did Hull begin a round of negotiations with the Japanese diplomats? The bottom line was that he hoped to delay war until military preparedness was finished. “The point is how long we can maneuver the situation until the military matter in Europe is brought to a conclusion” he told. “I just don’t want us to take for granted a single word they say, but appear to do so, to whatever extent it may satisfy our

¹⁴ Thomson, p.192-193.

¹⁵ Edwin O. Reischauer, *JAPAN: The Story of a Nation 4th ed.* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company 1990), p.173.

¹⁶ Marshall, p.134.

¹⁷ Congress of the United States, 79th Congress, *Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office 1946), Part 2, p.425.

¹⁸ Marshall, p.141.

purpose to delay further action by them.”¹⁹ (FR JAPAN, IV” (Jonathan, 136). Thus, for the United States the negotiations were a sort of strategy to gain time. In other words, the U.S. policymakers must have assumed that the end of the negotiations would be likely to cause an armed conflict with Japan.

What reinforced their belief in likelihood of the conflict was the intelligence report, which intercepted Japanese diplomatic communications. The six messages from Tokyo to the Japanese embassy in Washington indicated the deadline of the bilateral negotiations. The message of November 5, for example, stated:

Because of various circumstances, it is absolutely necessary that all arrangements for the signing of this agreement [the last Japanese diplomatic proposals before the outbreak of hostilities, known as Proposal A and B] be completed by the 25th of this month.²⁰

And, the nine messages illustrated Tokyo’s fear or threat of rupture of the negotiations. For example:

November 11—*Tokyo to Washington, reporting a conversation with the British ambassador*: The Imperial Government has made the maximum concessions she can in drawing up its final proposal, I explained...If, unfortunately, the United States refuses to accept those terms, it would be useless to continue the negotiations [translated November 12].

November 14—*Tokyo to Hong Kong*: Should the negotiations collapse, the international situation in which the Empire will find herself will be one of tremendous crisis [translated November 26].²¹

From these messages, the U.S. government reassured itself that Tokyo prepared for contingencies “in the event of war” or “tremendous crisis,” or “in the case of a sudden change in the international

¹⁹ Marshall, p.136.

²⁰ Congress of the United States, Part 12, p.100.

²¹ Ibid, p.118.

relations.” These phrases were sometimes used alone and sometimes in conjunction with “if the negotiations are ruptured” or “should the negotiations not end in success.” The latter phrases disappeared, naturally, after November 26.²²

In addition to predicting a high possibility of war with Japan, the Roosevelt administration even anticipated *how* the war would begin. Just before the Pearl Harbor attack, evidently the problem for the administration was not to prevent war with Japan but how to enter it. In the United States while only Congress can declare war, isolationism, which has been discouraging the members of Congress to go to war, prevailed at that time. According to Churchill’s account of the talks: “The President...said he would wage war, but not declare it” because of the isolationist opposition in Congress.²³ Secretary of War Stimson recorded the consensus of the administration that a Japanese assault on Southeast Asia would be “a terrific blow” to the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. And “if the British fought, we would have to fight,” and a “whole chain of disastrous events” would ensue. President Roosevelt believed that an attack on the Netherlands East Indies “should result in war” with Japan, but the problem remained how to convince Congress and the public.²⁴ Roosevelt then decided to draft a speech in the case of a Japanese attack on Southeast Asia, describing the nation’s stake for the purpose of persuading the American people.²⁵ For the U.S. government, the most justifiable and persuasive way to enter the war was to make Japan commit a first attack. Stimson summed up the cabinet’s thinking of November 25, 1941: “The question was how we should maneuver them into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves. It was a difficult proposition.”²⁶

The strategy of making Japan attack first was to provoke it into violating America’s interests so

²² Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (California: Stanford University Press 1962), p.203.

²³ Walter LaFeber, *THE AMERICAN AGE: The United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad, 2nd ed.* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company 1994), p.401.

²⁴ Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins, an Intimate History* (New York: Harper, 1950), p.428.

²⁵ Marshall, p.165.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.169.

that Congress and the public would be convinced to fight the war. The administration exploited the diplomatic round. At the final round of the negotiations, the Japanese government prepared Plan A and Plan B. Plan A's conditions were little different from previous Japanese draft, but Plan B was a "modus vivendi" to be offered in the hope that the United States and Japan could step back from the edge of war.²⁷ In response to the Japanese proposals, however, Hull simply handed the Japanese Ambassador Nomura the ten-point note on November 26.²⁸ Jonathan Marshall observes that the ten-point note eventually demanded Japan to "surrender all of its gains since 1931 throughout Asia". The Hull note was almost provocatively harsh and probably not intended to continue the negotiations.²⁹ In fact, Hull himself had no illusions that Japan would accept, for it had refused less tough proposals before. Having handed the note, Hull told Stimson that he had broken the whole matter off: "I have washed my hands of it, and the situation is now in the hands of you and Knox—the Army and the Navy."³⁰ Moreover, the President himself was convinced that "we might even be attacked , say Monday [December 1], for example [for] the Japanese were notorious for making an attack without warning[.]"³¹ On the grounds of the diplomatic contexts with Tokyo, Washington had issued several warnings directly to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet just before the Japanese assault. Furthermore, the U.S. government read a Japanese intention of war on the morning of December 7, and immediately proceeded a decisive military action. The Chief of Naval Operations, for instance, authorized unrestricted air and submarine warfare against Japan on the basis of this message even before Japan actually attacked the United States.³²

In sum, the relationship between the United States and Japan had deteriorated since the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, and worsened further as a consequence of the Japanese aggressive

²⁷ Marshall, p.147.

²⁸ Ibid, p.156.

²⁹ Ibid, p.152-153.

³⁰ Congress of the United States, Part 11, p.5422.

³¹ Ibid, p.5421.

³² Ariel Levite, *Intelligence and Strategic Surprises* (New York: Columbia University Press 1987), p.88.

U.S. Failures in the Pearl Harbor Attack: Lessons for Intelligence

behaviors in Asia on the one hand and the U.S. severe sanctions against Japan on the other. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, it was obvious that the United States correctly predicted not only that war with Japan was imminent after a break up of the negotiations but also that Japan would initiate the conflict. Accordingly, the U.S. government was vigilant against a Japanese offensive act. Now, the question is raised again: why did the United States fail to defend Pearl Harbor despite its significant awareness of the Japanese aggression?

Chapter 2

The Direct Cause of the Failure in the Pearl Harbor Defense

Conspiracy Theory?

Considering that President Roosevelt wanted to make Japan attack first, it can be inferred that the American top officers knew in advance that Japan was going to strike Pearl Harbor and deliberately let the Japanese conduct the plan. If so, it is understandable that the United States bore the *surprise* attack despite their awareness of Japanese aggression. More importantly, as the president desired, the sneak attack helped unite the American people and made Congress declare war against Japan in the end. The next day of the attack, Roosevelt appeared before a joint session of Congress, proclaimed December 7, 1941 as “a date which will live in infamy,” asked to declare war against Japan, and swore to fight until total victory was won. The Senate approved the war resolution 89 to 0, the House 388 to 1.³³ Thus the Japanese intolerable attack on U.S. soil significantly outraged and then united the American people. In addition, when Japan bombed the base at Pearl Harbor, the American aircraft carriers, which were proved to be far more important weapons in the ensuing war, were somehow cruising at the moment and intact as the result.³⁴ If this hypothesis is true, the Pearl Harbor attack was undoubtedly *successful* for the United States. In other words, there was no motivation for the United States to prevent it.

However, the above assumption is probably wrong. Firstly, the damage to Pearl Harbor was too big to tolerate. As mentioned in the Introduction, numbers of American soldiers were killed, numbers of battleships and aircraft were destroyed, and airfields and installations were ruined; all of which were essential to the U.S. Navy. Secondly, if Washington had intended to undertake a first-blow to

³³ LaFeber, p.404.

³⁴ Reischauer, p.174.

Pearl Harbor, it would not have issued several warnings to the theater. In reality, Washington had issued several warnings directly to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet. For instance, on November 24:

Chances of favorable outcome of negotiations with Japan very doubtful. This situation coupled with statements of Japanese Government and movements their naval and military forces indicate in our opinion that a surprise aggressive movement in any direction including attack on Philippines or Guam is a possibility.³⁵

and on November 27:

This dispatch is to be considered a war warning. Negotiations with Japan looking toward stabilization of conditions in the Pacific have ceased and an aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days.³⁶

Thirdly, if Roosevelt knew in advance of the Japanese plan on attacking Pearl Harbor, he would not have prepared for the speech that was purported to persuade the public and Congress in the case of a Japanese attack on *Southeast Asia*. And what he was worried before Pearl Harbor was whether he could convince the American people on a basis of a Japanese attack on a non-U.S. territory. Jonathan Marshall notes that President Roosevelt was far from sure that he could convince the public and Congress to fight a two-front war on the basis of an abstract national interest. Nor did Roosevelt imagine that the Japanese were so stupid to unite America by attacking U.S. possessions such as the Philippines.³⁷ Moreover, as Stimson described, the point was to let the Japanese commit a first attack *without* bearing tremendous damage to America. What should be emphasized here is that the U.S. government would have defended Pearl Harbor had it known the Japanese intention beforehand. In other words, the United States apparently failed to prevent the Pearl Harbor attack even though it

³⁵ Congress of the United States, Part 14, p.1405.

³⁶ Ibid, p,1406.

³⁷ Marshall, p.167.

should have done so. Then, what was the real cause of the U.S. fatal blunder?

Uncertainty about the Target

The fact is that U.S. officials were not certain about the location where Japan would attack. The list of the possible Japanese targets, raised by American analysts, indicated several places such as “the Burma Road, Thailand, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, the Philippines, and the Russian Maritime Provinces.”³⁸ In fact, Pearl Harbor and other American territories were not listed even as potential targets.³⁹ Among those possible targets, Thailand was believed to be the most likely spot since Japanese troops increasingly entered in neighboring Indochina, the total in the southern part rising from 50,000 to 90,000 with great numbers of trucks and aircraft just between November 21 and 29 according to the American consul in Saigon. Moving to Thailand would open the way to Malaya and to Rangoon, port of entry for the Burma Road.⁴⁰ In reality, however, the target was not Thailand, but Pearl Harbor. In this sense, President Roosevelt was fairly shocked when the incident was first to have reported for he expected that the Japanese would attack somewhere in *Southeast Asia*, not *Hawaii*. Secretary of the Navy reacted: “This can’t be true, this must mean the Philippines?”⁴¹ For the Hawaiian commanders too, what caused the total surprise was the fact that they did not recognize the real Japanese target. Had they known that Japan would attack Pearl Harbor, they would have regarded the Japanese threat as their *own* threat, and would have dealt with it accordingly. In other words, even though they had not been sure about other factors such as a method and timing of the assault, the theater officers would have been more vigilant against the Japanese attack had they recognized that Pearl Harbor was the Japanese target. Therefore, the direct cause of the failure was attributed to the unclearness of the target— almost all American officers did not imagine that the

³⁸ Ephraim Kam, *Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1988), p.16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Heinrichs, p.215.

⁴¹ Costello, p.138.

Japanese would attack such a far location from its homeland.

Then, why was the United States unable to detect the Japanese aim? To answer this question, looking back at the U.S. intelligence is imperative because detecting an enemy's military target is fundamentally intelligence work rather than policymaker's work. Abram Shulsky and Gary Schmitt refer to a primary intelligence function as searching something to do with military matters, such as an adversary's intentions and capabilities, which it usually tries to hide at its best efforts.⁴² The first thing to seize an enemy's essential information is collection intelligence. How did the United States collect sensitive matters from Japan in pre-Pearl Harbor period?

⁴² Abram N. Shulsky and Gary J. Schmitt, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc. 2002), p.1.

Chapter 3

The Origin of the Failure I: *Collection of Intelligence*

Sources of the U.S. Intelligence

The U.S. intelligence exploited several means to seize Japanese information as follows:

a. MAGIC

Both the Army and the Navy had special sections to decode Japanese communications; the operation was known as MAGIC. Thanks to MAGIC, the U.S. military and political leaders had the privilege of seeing the most private communications the Japanese government and its ambassadors in Washington, Berlin, Rome, and other major Japanese embassies around the world. They knew in advance the Japanese diplomatic intention and the information. U.S. intelligence agencies had been breaking PURPLE (the top priority of Japanese diplomatic code) by machines. The machines sometimes enabled American officials to get information from Tokyo more rapidly than the Japanese officials. Captain Safford, who had been in charge of all U.S. naval ciphers and codes as well as all interception and decoding of secret foreign-language communications for the Navy, testified that in most cases there was some delay in finding the key, but “there were very few purple keys which we failed to solve, maybe two or three per cent.”⁴³ Thus, the U.S. intelligence had enjoyed an unprecedented advantage in breaking the Japanese communication codes before Pearl Harbor.

b. Radio Traffic

Navy intelligence at Pearl Harbor had a radio traffic unit to analyze and detect the

⁴³ Wohlstetter, p.170-173.

location of Japanese ships.⁴⁴ Although Navy intelligence could not read the content of Japanese coded messages by the radio traffic, it was able to draw the composition and location of the Japanese Fleet units from a study of intercepted ship call signs. When the Japanese units stationed at home waters, it lost them because the ships in port used frequencies that the radio traffic could not track. Most of the time, however, the intelligence precisely pinpointed various Japanese Fleet units on naval maps.⁴⁵

c. American Embassy in Japan

Ambassador Grew's reports from Tokyo were superb sources, helping to understand the insight of Japanese intentions and attitudes. These reports were related almost exclusively to the state of mind of the Japanese people toward the war and their hostility toward the United States. For example, on November 17, 1941, he precisely estimated that the Japanese future action: "I take into account the probability of the Japanese exploiting every possible tactical advantage, such as surprise and initiative."⁴⁶

c. Other Sources

The attaches and observers of allies in Washington, especially the British, supplemented intelligence on Japan and the Far East.⁴⁷ However, the foreigners were reluctant to release information to the Americans. What's more, the British and Dutch were allocating many of their collection resources to the European theater, at the expense of the Asian one.⁴⁸ Therefore, this source was not so reliable. There were other sources such as news media and commercial ties; however, those sources could not penetrate Japan's secrecy. As the U.S.-Japan political and economic relation deteriorated, the Japanese

⁴⁴ Wohlstetter, p.31.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.383.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.284.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.285.

⁴⁸ Levite, p.59.

authority tightened its security measures so that potential enemies could not take an advantage in accessing sensitive strategic information.⁴⁹

Despite the Japanese strict policy on secrecy, overall the U.S. achievement of collection from Japan was remarkable. MAGIC enabled Washington to predict Japanese diplomatic moves. According to Wohlstetter, “At the time of Pearl Harbor the circumstances of collection in the sense of access to a huge variety of data were, at least in Washington, close to ideal.”⁵⁰ She notes that the reasons for the failure in producing an accurate image of the Japanese intentions and capabilities was not attributed to the collected materials; and says “Never before have we had so complete an intelligence picture of the enemy.”⁵¹ However, it is questionable whether the collection on the plan of the *Pearl Harbor attack* was enough. Suppose there had been sufficient clear indications, such as “Japan will attack Pearl Harbor by air strikes on December 7,” from reliable sources, American officials would have been likely to recognize at least a possibility of a Japanese attack on Hawaii and list it as a potential target. Certainly, as we have seen, U.S. officials recognized the probability of Japan’s aggression as a result of the breakdown of the negotiations—the assumption was reinforced by several intercepts by MAGIC. However, the mere speculation of Japanese hostility was not enough to take countermeasures against the Pearl Harbor operation. We cannot expect U.S. military officers, not knowing a specific time and place, to prepare for a Japanese surprise attack because, in reality, it is impossible for any military to be vigilant against an adversary’s potential attacks at any time and at any place. Ephraim Kam notes that no army can keep its units in full readiness for a massive assault at all time.⁵² Naturally, a theater commander needs a concrete warning to handle potential aggression.

⁴⁹ Levite, p.50.

⁵⁰ Wohlstetter, p.70.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.382.

⁵² Kam, p.31.

Quality of Intelligence

Hence, the point is how much “qualified” information the U.S. intelligence possessed. Quality here means “relevance and accuracy, and the known reliability.”⁵³ Regarding relevance and accuracy on a surprise attack, as Kam suggests, the four questions should be taken into account: (1) whether the attack will actually happen, (2) its timing, (3) its location, and (4) the way in which it will be carried out.⁵⁴ As analyzed before, (1) *whether* Japan would attack or not was clear: the American leaders actually expected a Japanese attack. Then, what about the other elements? To examine this, we have to look at specific indications which show or imply the rest of elements: *where*, *when*, and *how* Japan would attack.

Regarding reliability, there are three levels: (1) *non-reliable or partly reliable* information (considered as a problematic source, a lack of access to evidence, or a possibility of manipulation by enemies. Kam notes that human sources fall into this category.) (2) *reliable but controlled* information (considered as an objective and accessible but deceivable sources), and (3) *reliable non-controlled* information (considered as hard evidence revealing important aspects of enemy behavior or intentions, and not deceivable information. Kam notes that intercepted messages are the best example of this category.)⁵⁵ Considering two criteria—accuracy and reliability, how much qualified information did the U.S. intelligence collect?

Collection on the “Pearl Harbor Plan” by the U.S. Intelligence

One of the pieces of information about the Pearl Harbor plan was from Ambassador Grew in Tokyo. In January 1941, the Peruvian minister to Tokyo informed the first secretary of the U.S.

⁵³ Levite, p.35.

⁵⁴ Kam, p.12.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.39.

embassy in Tokyo of the Japanese military plan on a surprise mass attack on Pearl Harbor. Grew, having been reported by the secretary, sent the message to the State Department—the message then was passed to both Army and Navy intelligence, and finally to the commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Hawaii. Subsequently, Navy intelligence investigated the original source, which turned out later that the rumor was from the Peruvian's Japanese cook. The Grew's message was finally discarded and forgotten.⁵⁶ Reviewing this information from a qualitative point of view, while the information about the Japanese target was accurate, the source was not reliable firstly because there was no evidence to show the truth and secondly because the Japanese cook was nothing to do with a Japanese military operation.

An additional warning of the Japanese strategic target given to the United States was from the British intelligence. Dusko Popov (code named Tricycle), a British double agent, was sent to the United States by his German boss in August 1941 to establish a new spy network and to collect information on a variety of matters, very prominent among which was on military installations in Pearl Harbor. He was ordered to gather information on which the German officer asked (he memorized and immediately destroyed the questionnaire) regarding the military assets in Hawaii. Since Popov soon noticed that the purpose of espionage was to collect operational intelligence for a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor by torpedo, he reported the story to his British employers. The British intelligence then arranged a secret meeting between Popov and FBI agents in New York on August 10, 1941, at which time Popov told the agents about his impression of the operation. The FBI, however, did not trust Popov who was loyal to the British. This is not only because a double agent, especially when operated by others, is inherently suspicious, but also because Popov neither possessed a hard copy of the German questionnaire nor did he have any evidence to support his

⁵⁶ Gordon Prange with Donald Goldstein and Katherine Dillon, *At Dawn We Slept* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1981), p.31-35.

story.⁵⁷

The U.S. officials, in fact, obtained an indication on a potential target from a highly reliable source—MAGIC. The reason for the reliability is that the Japanese government was not aware of their communications being intercepted. The Japanese diplomatic movements, therefore, proceeded as MAGIC read. MAGIC intercepted a Japanese espionage message on September 24, which was translated on October 9, 1941, requesting the Japanese agent in Honolulu to make his reports to divide the waters of Pearl Harbor into five areas and:

With regard to warships and aircraft carriers, we would like to have you report on those at anchor (these are not so important), tied up at wharves, buoys and in docks. (Designate types and classes briefly. If possible, we would like to have you make mention of the fact when there are two or more vessels along side the same wharf.)⁵⁸

In retrospect, this message indicated a Japanese potential target. However, as Levite notes, at that time the message only showed a Japanese operational concern in Hawaii and did not reveal any specific intention and timing of an attack.⁵⁹ Moreover, not only Hawaii but also other areas in Pacific the Japanese investigated such naval installations and ship movements.⁶⁰ Therefore, the order to the espionage to survey the Pearl Harbor base must have been diluted by other similar messages.

In sum, U.S. intelligence did not possess accurate information from reliable sources. For the American officials (2) *when* Japan would attack was not so clear because no one knew the specific day and time of an assault while it could be predicted sometime in the near future after a rupture of the negotiations; (3) *where* Japan would attack was a highly ambiguous element and it directly caused the Pearl Harbor tragedy; and (4) *how* Japan would attack was also unimaginable to the Americans for they did not think that Japan would launch air strikes from the Far East. Hence, two elements out

⁵⁷ Levite, p.74.

⁵⁸ Congress of the United States, Part 12, p.261.

⁵⁹ Levite, p.75.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.73.

of four were quite obscure, and one element was somewhat unclear. Only one element—whether Japan would attack or not—was quite certain. Particularly, as analyzed above, ambiguity about the Japanese target was a critical absence for protecting Hawaii. Roberta Wohlstetter points out that American officers possessed significant information on the enemy. Yet, she admits at the same time that the Americans did not have the complete list of targets, the exact hour and date for the attack, and an accurate knowledge of Japanese capabilities and intentions.⁶¹ Ariel Levite concludes that the Pearl Harbor *surprise* was essentially a failure of collection for no information, in terms of both quality and quantity, clearly illustrated *where* and *when* the move would take place, and *what* kind of move Japan had in mind.⁶² While the poor collection is the main reason for the failure of the Pearl Harbor event, could not the United States have prevented the tremendous damage? Indeed, if the U.S. intelligence had gathered more accurate and reliable information, the surprise attack might have been avoided. However, was it possible for the U.S. intelligence to penetrate the Japanese secret information beyond it actually did? Should it have collected more accurate and reliable materials? To examine this question, we have to review a Japanese security policy. If it was too difficult to break, it may be possible to conclude that the Pearl Harbor attack was an unavoidable incident.

Japanese Efforts to Keep the Plan Secret

Ryunosuke Kusaka, who joined the operation Pearl Harbor as a first chief of staff of the 1st Air Fleet, explains in detail how the Japanese officers tried to keep the plan secret. He underscores what the success of the surprise attack owed to the Japanese strict security policy. Naturally a very limited number of officers had been informed of the plan until the moment when the operation was launched. To achieve this secrecy, the training for the Pearl Harbor attack was kept away from the others; as a

⁶¹ Wohlstetter, p.386-387.

⁶² Levite, p.79, 82.

result even commanders in chief and their staffs did not know the secret plan.⁶³ Moreover, the most sensitive part of the order related to the operation was conveyed verbally.⁶⁴ In addition, while the Japanese Imperial Navy's detailed plan was issued in seven hundred pages, providing full details of the attack on the Philippines, Malaya, and so on, the Pearl Harbor mission was pointedly erased.⁶⁵

The Japanese Combined Fleets also paid significant attention to concealment of its movement during the operation. Kusaka describes that the essential point was to have units cross as far as 3,000 miles unnoticed so as to *surprise* the enemy. However great the Pacific was, it was certainly hard task not to meet on its way and attack any ships of any nationality. Apparently the nearer the force approached Hawaii, the more the risk of being detected by the enemy increased. Having engaged in an extensive study of all passages of ships across the Pacific for ten years or more, the course was determined—the line near 40 degrees North Latitude—that no ships had ever passed before. In addition, the task force was to move with a high-speed in the darkness of night and without using radio communications.⁶⁶ The reason for selecting the northern route was that it was an unprecedented operation. Minoru Genda, a preeminent strategists and a planner of the Pearl Harbor mission, explains the detail of the decision:

The northern route was very good as far as carrying out the plan in secret went, but there was the question of being able to supply the units at sea in the stormy waves of the northern Pacific Ocean because the operation was to begin in the winter season. This was the main reason that Vice Admiral Nagumo always insisted upon taking the southern route. However, my insistence was that from looking back into history for examples of surprise attacks, such as the Battle of the Hiyodori Pass, the Battle of Okehazama [those battles are famous for

⁶³ Ryunosuke Kusaka, "Rengo Kantai (Combined Fleet)," edited by Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, *The Pearl Harbor Papers: Inside The Japanese Plans* (Washington: Brassey's 1993), p.142.

⁶⁴ Kam, p.143-144.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.143.

⁶⁶ Kusaka, p.140-141, 152.

surprise attacks in Japanese history], and Napoleon’s Battle of the Alps, if we do not take the northern route we will not succeed. The southern route had very calm waters, the distance was only two thousand miles and it was best from the standpoint of navigation, but the chance of being spotted was too great.”⁶⁷

Thus, the Japanese attempt to conceal the plan and operation was incredibly fine. In conclusion, it was extremely difficult for the U.S. intelligence to catch the core information—when, where, and how Japan would attack—even in maneuvering MAGIC.

Immaturity of the U.S. Intelligence

While it was difficult to break the Japan’s tightened security, it is true at the same time that the British secret agent and Ambassador Grew’s source somehow reached a part of the secret. They got the information by human intelligence (humint). This means that if the United States had maneuvered humint, it might have been able to assemble some parts of the picture of the plan. The fact was to the contrary. The U.S. authority did not exploit a critical covert source—humint. In sharp contrast to Great Britain, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union, which skillfully used espionage and gained impressive outcomes, the United States deliberately refrained from adopting humint due to moral, political, and economic constraints. As a result, the United States took a disadvantage in detecting the enemy’s intentions which were considered to be best suited for humint.⁶⁸ The Henry Stimson’s attitude toward espionage, for example, represented then the Americans’ thought. He, as Secretary of State in 1929, dissolved cryptanalytical unit, saying that “gentlemen do not read each other’s mail.” He thought codebreaking was “a low, snooping activity, a sneaking, spying, keyhole-peering kind of

⁶⁷ Minoru Genda, “Analysis No. 1 of the Pearl Harbor Attack, Operation AL,” edited by Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, *The Pearl Harbor Papers: Inside The Japanese Plans* (Washington: Brassey’s 1993), p.24.

⁶⁸ Levite, p.50-51.

dirty business, and a violation of the principle of mutual trust.”⁶⁹

In addition to a lack of humint, MAGIC itself had a shortcoming. It indeed provided the U.S. government with much impressive highly reliable information. However, most of the information through MAGIC was *diplomatic* communications between Tokyo and other cities and did not include *strategic* information. Since the Japanese diplomats were kept away from primary decisions of the Japanese cabinet and operational plans for war, MAGIC did not reveal clear indications on Japanese military’s sensitive information. Therefore, while the Roosevelt administration realized the Japanese diplomatic movements through MAGIC, it knew little about the Japanese military movements.⁷⁰ Thus, coupled with the Japanese strict security policy and in a way the U.S. immature intelligence, we could not have expected the United States to collect more qualified information on the Pearl Harbor project.

⁶⁹ David Kahn, *The Codebreakers* (New York: Macmillan 1967), p.360.

⁷⁰ Levite, p.52.

Chapter 4

The Origin of the Failure II: *Analysis of Intelligence*

Is the collection the only reason for the U.S. failure in defending Pearl Harbor? Certainly, if the U.S. officers had possessed accurate and reliable information on the surprise attack, they might have been able to intercept the Japanese air operations in the course of Pearl Harbor. However, it is rather rare and difficult to infiltrate the adversary's most secret information and that is why many states fail to prevent surprise attacks. In addition, collection itself does not always solve the problem. Richards Heuer insists that proper analysis rather than additional information often contributes to an accurate judgment.⁷¹ And failures of analysis, not failures of collection usually cause major intelligence failures.⁷² Hence, if the United States had appropriately *analyzed* the available information, it might have prevented or at least reduced damages to the Pearl Harbor base. In fact, the government officials obtained some signals which might have signaled the Japan's surprise attack on Hawaii. For instance, the U.S. intelligence caught a message just four days before the event that Japanese diplomats were ordered "to destroy most of their codes and ciphers at once and to burn all other important confidential and secret documents." Many Washington officers saw it as the most significant warning to the theater commanders and a clear signal for a full alert.⁷³

Given this kind of indications, it is fair to say that the United States could have been more cautious toward Japan's hostility and taken more effective counterattacks. While Levite concludes that the essence of the failure in the Pearl Harbor attack was a collection problem, he notes that numerous pathologies in the event helped contribute to the U.S. Pacific Fleet's unreadiness; that is,

⁷¹ Richards J. Heuer, Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence 1999), p.51

⁷² Ibid, p.65.

⁷³ Kam, p.26.

they could have dealt with the Japanese attack more efficiently, even if not prevented it completely.⁷⁴ Therefore, if the American strategists had properly processed the collected information, the United States might have diminished, if not prevented, the disaster. Then, what were the deficiencies of the U.S. intelligence beyond collection problem? There were in fact perceptual obstacles in U.S. analyses.

Misperception on Opponents' Thinking

Before the Pearl Harbor attack, the U.S. assumption of the Japanese intentions and capabilities seemed to be rational. They thought an attack on U.S. soil was too risky for the Japanese to commit. In fact, the Pearl Harbor attack caused a total war and devastated Japan in the end. Edwin O. Reischauer depicts the destruction:

In the late summer of 1945 Japan lay in ruins. Some 3 million of its people had died in the war, a third of them civilians; 40 percent of the aggregate area of the cities had been destroyed, and urban population had dropped by over 50 percent; industry was at a standstill; even agriculture, short of equipment, fertilizer, and workers, had declined...Many were homeless and half-starved, and all were bewildered and mentally numbed.⁷⁵

Before the war, even Japanese leaders were rational enough not to think that Japan could defeat the United States. Many of them acknowledged that American power was much greater than that of Japan—Japan had only one-tenth the productive capacity of the United States in 1941.⁷⁶ From this perspective, the Japanese government made efforts to avoid war with the United States. For instance, the Japanese Emperor had expressed his desire for peace with the United States until the last moment

⁷⁴ Levite, p.84.

⁷⁵ Reischauer, p.184.

⁷⁶ Thomson, p.193-194.

of the breakdown of the negotiations.⁷⁷ At the final moment of the talk, the Tojo cabinet enthusiastically hoped that the negotiations with the United States would somehow prevent war: “Proposal B is not an excuse for war,” Premier Tojo Hideki told one official. “I am praying to the Gods that somehow we will be able to get an agreement with the United States with this proposal.”⁷⁸ Admiral Yamamoto, the Commander in Chief of Japan’s Combined Fleet, mentioned his view in a letter to Navy Minister Shimada on 24 October, 1941: “War with America and Britain should still be avoidable when the overall situation is taken into consideration, and every effort should of course be made to that end.”⁷⁹ Thus, before the rupture of the diplomatic relation, the Japanese leaders *rationaly* thought that war with America should be avoided. In this sense, the hypothesis established by the U.S. officials was accurate and consistent with the Japanese intention.

In addition, the following fact also supported the American assumption that Japan would attack Southeast Asia: Prior to the attack on America, the Japanese military expanded to Southeast Asia step by step in response to the U.S. economic sanctions. Considering the previous movements, it was rational to expect that the next Japanese military operation would be toward Southeast Asia where an amount of oil was produced (Japan imported half of its oil from Dutch East Indies at that time)⁸⁰, in response to the U.S. oil embargo. In reality, the U.S. assumption was not wrong—subsequent to the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese air-fighters assaulted Singapore, the Philippines, Malaya, and Hong Kong, and devastated British and American defenses.⁸¹

Moreover, the American judgment was consistent with the then Japanese assessment; the plan of the surprise attack of Admiral Yamamoto contradicted the Japanese naval tactical doctrine.⁸² At that

⁷⁷ Costello, p.113, 116.

⁷⁸ Marshall, p.147.

⁷⁹ Isoroku Yamamoto, “Letters from Yamamoto,” edited by Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, *The Pearl Harbor Papers: Inside The Japanese Plans* (Washington: Brassey’s 1993), p.120.

⁸⁰ Nagaoka Shinjiro, *Economic Demands on the Dutch East Indies: The Fateful Choice Japan’s Advance into Southeast Asia, 1939-1941*, ed. James William Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 145

⁸¹ Heinrichs, p.218.

⁸² Wohlstetter, p.386.

time, the Japanese Naval General Staff adopted orthodox teaching and concentrated all their forces on a decisive battle in the familiar waters near Japan, where their chances of winning were greater. Therefore, the carriers and battleships were supposed to be engaged close to home. This strategy was not peculiar to the Naval General Staff but is characteristic of most military organizations.⁸³

Furthermore, the Americans' evaluation of the feasibility of an attack on Pearl Harbor was understandable. The plan was at first considered to be infeasible even for many Japanese naval officers. As mentioned above, keeping the plan secret, which is essential to surprise, was extremely difficult. The large scale task force, involving sixty ships, was required to start off at least a month before the day of attack. Chances of being detected by the enemy through visual observation, through some inadvertent leak from the Japanese officials, or through some accident in transmitting radio messages, were believed quite high.⁸⁴ Moreover, there existed refueling problem that would cause danger and uncertainty to the carriers. The destroyers needed refuel twice before arriving at Pearl Harbor, and feasible days calculated on the basis of weather statistic were considered to be only seven days per month on the average.⁸⁵ From these reasons, actually Admiral Yamamoto initially faced strong oppositions from other naval strategists on the basis of several critical shortcomings of the plan.

Thus, the American hypothesis was not necessarily irrational. However, the assumption was based on *Americans'* rationality, not on *Japanese* rationality. Their misunderstanding is that the Japanese must think the same way as the Americans do. As Jonathan Marshall mentions that the so-called Hull Note virtually meant a demand to Japan to give up all of its gains since 1931 all over Asia.⁸⁶ It can be considered that this Hull's proposal encouraged the Japanese leaders to make a desperate decision to fight with America. On December 1, 1941, at the Privy Council in the

⁸³ Wohlstetter, p.372.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.371-372.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Marshall, p.153.

Emperor's presence, which decided on war, General Tojo had described the consequences of submission: "Should Japan submit to [U.S.] demands, not only would Japan's prestige be entirely destroyed and the solution of the China Affair rendered impossible, but Japan's existence itself would be endangered."⁸⁷ In reality, Japan did not have the time to drag the negotiations because its oil supply had been cut off. As time had passed, Japan would have had no choice but to bow to the U.S. demands. Therefore, it was not necessarily illogical to wage war against the United States during which oil reserves remain enough to fight, should the Japanese did not want to give up the fruits which their ancestors had acquired through huge numbers of victims. Mitsuo Fuchida (former Captain of Imperial Japanese Navy) and Masatake Okumiya (former Commander of Imperial Japanese Navy) observe that since oil reserves would be exhausted within three or four years at the most, "Japan must either take up arms before it was too late or else reconcile herself to eventual complete capitulation."⁸⁸

No one in Washington, however, regarded the Japanese situation as a life-and-death matter. Washington was "absolutely unwilling to continue in what they regarded as Japan's precarious position surrounded by great and hostile powers[,]" the then Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson recalled later.⁸⁹ Given such circumstances, it was obvious that Japan would take some drastic military action to break the stalemate. Yet the Pacific Fleet in Hawaii still retained "a naïve image of a midget that would not dare strike a blow against the powerful giant."⁹⁰

Selecting Pearl Harbor as a target was also rational for the Japanese navy, if not for the U.S. navy. The Japanese plan was essentially based on security of oil, an indispensable energy for modern

⁸⁷ William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Undeclared War 1940-1941* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers 1953), p.909-910.

⁸⁸ Mitsuo Fuchida and Masatake Okumiya, *Midway: The Battle That Doomed Japan The Japanese Navy's Story* (New York: Ballantine Books 1986), p.32.

⁸⁹ Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc. 1969), p.36.

⁹⁰ Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A psychological study of foreign-policy decisions and fiascoes* (Atlanta: Houghton Mifflin Company 1972), p.87.

warfare; without oil any machines such as ships, airplanes, trucks, tanks, and automobiles are useless. Therefore, Japan, having been cut off oil, had to control the rich petroleum-producing areas of Southeast Asia as soon as possible after the battles began. The problem was, however, how to prevent a U.S. intervention in Japanese activities in Southeast Asia. The orthodox strategy established by the Naval General Staff was that after a prompt seizure of Southeast Asia, the Japanese Imperial Navy should be dispatched to the western Pacific in order to intercept and destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet intending to interfere with Japan's aggression against European colonies. However, it was not certain that Japan could successfully deploy its core fleets without delay for the decisive battle. Had Japan missed the chance, its homeland might have been ruined by the U.S. navy. In this context, as supreme commander at sea, Admiral Yamamoto was concerned above all with the potential threat posed by the U.S. Pacific Fleet based at Pearl Harbor. Fuchida explains: "Were the American Fleet left free and undamaged, Japan would become unable to exploit any success in south. Conversely, if it were destroyed at Pearl Harbor at the start of hostilities, the conquest and exploitation of the rich oil areas would become easy tasks."⁹¹ Yamamoto then thought that the U.S. Pacific Fleet must be eliminated while the southern operation was launched. Thus, the idea of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor was generated by the surrounding Japanese situation, not by irrelevant haphazard ideas. If Japan had to fight with the United States sooner or later, destroying American fleets at the initial stage to gain free action in Southeast Asia would not be unthinkable.

In sum, no U.S. policymakers and military officers expected enemy moves from the Japanese viewpoint: relegating their status to a third- or fourth-rate nation, giving up all their territories gained from years of fighting and sacrifice, and subjecting to the enemy without fighting could not be tolerated.⁹² Thus, if the American officers put themselves into the Japanese position, they could have imagined the desperate attempt. Only Ambassador Grew recognized the Japanese suicidal decision: if

⁹¹ Fuchida, p.36.

⁹² Janis, p.88.

reconciliation failed, the Japanese might make “an all-out, do-or-die attempt, actually risking national *Hara-kiri* [suicide], to make Japan impervious to economic embargoes abroad rather than yield to foreign pressure.” Such action, he warned, might come “with dangerous and dramatic suddenness.”⁹³

Underestimation and Overconfidence

Underestimation and overconfidence led the American analysts to a lack of imagination, which prevented them from predicting the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The U.S. Navy believed that battleships in the shallow water could not be sunk by torpedo from the air. This assumption was fixed by the fact that in 1940 only under the condition of a minimum depth of about sixty feet was feasible for aircraft to validate torpedo, whereas the depth of the water in Pearl Harbor was only thirty to forty feet.⁹⁴ In June 1941 Admiral Ingersoll, Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, informed Navy headquarters in Hawaii:

[I]t may be assumed that depth of water will be one of the factors considered by any attacking force, and an attack launched in relatively deep water [60 feet or more] is much more likely.⁹⁵

In reality, the Japanese navy got over the tactical difficulties by developing weapons and training pilots and crews.

Overall, the American officials tended to play down Japanese capabilities. For example, they assumed that Japanese pilot training was inferior to them although Japanese cadets flew average 300 hours compared to 200 for American cadets; Japanese first-line pilots averaged about 600 hours; and their carrier pilots, about 800 hours of flight experience. American estimation of the Zero fighter was lower than real range, speed, and maneuverability. The aircraft capacity of Japanese carriers, the

⁹³ Janis, p.98.

⁹⁴ Wohlstetter, p.369-370.

⁹⁵ Congress of the United States, Part 33, p.1318.

efficiency of their direction-finding stations, etc., were also underestimated. U.S. officers even believed that Japanese eyesight was physically poor.⁹⁶ This underestimation must have discouraged them from imagining the Japanese air attack on Hawaii all the way from the Far East.

Conversely, the United States overestimated its capabilities in defending Hawaii. Admiral Pye stated: “If we had ten minutes warning everybody would have been there [manning the guns], and we didn’t anticipate that they could get in without ten minutes warning.”⁹⁷ An even more complacent view was stated in General Marshall’s memoir of May, 1941, to the President:

The Island of Oahu [the island on which Pearl Harbor is located], due to its fortification, its garrison and its physical characteristics, is believed to be the strongest fortress in the world. With adequate air defense enemy carriers, naval escorts and transports will begin to come under air attack at a distance of approximately 750 miles. This attack will increase in intensity until within 200 miles of the objective the enemy forces will be subject to attack by all types of bombardment closely supported by our most modern pursuit... In addition Hawaii is capable of reinforcement by heavy bombers from the mainland by air. With this force available a major attack against Oahu is considered impracticable.⁹⁸

Like General Marshall, most of other senior officers believed in and acted on the basis of an extreme sense of invulnerability—until the actual bombs began to explode. For instance, Admiral King, head of a military commission that conducted one of the inquiries on the Pearl Harbor attack, concluded that at Pearl Harbor there was an “unwarranted feeling of immunity from attack.”⁹⁹

Moreover, ironically the abundance of MAGIC intercepts led American officers to overconfidence. The extremely reliable source generated a kind of illusion among the officers that if something happened MAGIC would catch and tell them. As a result, while MAGIC only intercepted

⁹⁶ Wohlstetter, p.337-338.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.69.

⁹⁸ Congress of the United States, Part 15, p.1635.

⁹⁹ Janis, p.76.

Japanese diplomatic communications, intelligence analysts tended to believe that they were learning all of Japanese intentions.¹⁰⁰ The U.S. intelligence gained the information on Japanese movements day after day; however, sometimes additional information only causes overconfidence in the judgment.¹⁰¹

Persistence of Prejudice

Now, what caused the U.S. intelligence analysts to adhere to the hypothesis that Japan would attack Southeast Asia, and to underestimate Japanese abilities and will? In other words, why didn't they doubt their perception? In fact, some incidents in Hawaii before the real attack showed some implications of possible Japanese military actions on Pearl Harbor. As mentioned above, MAGIC intercepted a Japanese espionage message which implied Japan was interested in Pearl Harbor as a military target, though not clearly indicated a real target. This message could have inferred the future Japanese military operation toward Pearl Harbor, but was ignored by the American officers. In addition to the intercept, there was a signal of the enemy's carriers coming to Hawaii. On December 7 at 6:40 A.M. (about an hour before the attack) a submarine was detected near Pearl Harbor. This detection could have been expected as the presence of a considerable surface force, probably composed of fast ships accompanied by a carrier. However, the Army and the Navy command was not on full alert, in practice nothing was done.¹⁰² What's more, the U.S. Army and Navy officers at Pearl Harbor received several warnings of potential Japanese aggression prior to the real offense.

Kam analyzes that once people's minds were formed, initial beliefs would distort the process of analysis through misinterpretation of subsequent evidence. New evidence will seem credible if it is consistent with one's initial beliefs; contradicted evidence is dismissed as incredible, erroneous, or

¹⁰⁰ Wohlstetter, p.300.

¹⁰¹ Heuer, p.52.

¹⁰² Kam, p.47-48.

unrepresentative. Generally, people are inclined to make mistakes on the side of resisting a change in their beliefs rather than accepting the opposite evidence. This mistake occurs because reviewing a belief on a basis of new evidence makes individuals fear that they are wrong and have to face with an earlier uncertainty.¹⁰³ Accordingly, before Pearl Harbor the popular hypothesis among the U.S. intelligence officers was that Japanese aggression would be directed against Southeast Asia and that Japan would not risk a conflict with the United States. Because of this persistence, when the head of Army Intelligence at Pearl Harbor received a warning from Washington, they simply filed it away and did not sense any urgency.¹⁰⁴ Since new contradicting signals were much less readily accepted than those which reinforced the initial beliefs, warnings from Washington did not convince the military commanders in Hawaii to do special preparedness.¹⁰⁵ Wohlstetter describes, “There is a tendency in our planning to confuse the unfamiliar with the improbable. The contingency we have not considered seriously looks strange; what looks strange is thought improbable; what is improbable need not be considered seriously.”¹⁰⁶ The message sent by Naval Operations on November 27, warning against the possibility of Japanese attack on the Philippines or Southeast Asia, was assimilated into that view. As Colonel Edwin Layton, the Fleet Intelligence officer, later described his reaction to the message:

It certainly fitted the picture up to date, and that we would be at war shortly if Japan would decide not to leave her Philippine flank open and proceed southward. . . It made me feel that the picture we had was a good picture, and perhaps complete[.]¹⁰⁷

Moreover, in early December Fleet Intelligence got two reports that Japanese carriers had left home ports and were moving south. These reports were compatible with the hypothesis that Japan was

¹⁰³ Kam, p.89-90.

¹⁰⁴ Wohlstetter, p.389-390.

¹⁰⁵ Kam, p.99.

¹⁰⁶ Wohlstetter, p.vii.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 45-46.

going to attack Southeast Asia, and since Pearl Harbor had not appeared in the officers' minds, they were handled accordingly.¹⁰⁸ As Layton explained:

I did not at any time suggest that the Japanese carriers were under radio silence approaching Oahu. I wish I had...My own personal view, and that is what we work on, when making estimates to ourselves, was that the carriers were remaining in home waters preparing for operations so that they would be in a covering position in case we moved against Japan after she attacked, if she did, in Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁹

Thus, there were several signs of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, but because of the perceptual obstacles, the officers in the area did not pick them up as an imminent threat. Once people formed their minds, they tend to see what they want or what is seemingly consistent and whether consciously or unconsciously, exclude what is seemingly inconsistent with their minds.

¹⁰⁸ Kam, p.99-100.

¹⁰⁹ Congress of the United States, Part 10, p.4840.

Chapter 5

The Origin of the Failure III: *Management of Intelligence*

In addition to perceptual obstacles, organizational ineffectiveness disturbed the U.S. intelligence to find out the Japanese intention. Even if an intelligence agency collected and analyzed information properly, the effort would be useless if the information was not used. Kam notes that bureaucratic pathology also disturbs efficient measures against a surprise attack. Indeed there were several obstacles in organizational behaviors in the Pearl Harbor case.

Sectionalism

There existed sectionalism within the U.S. intelligence community in pre-Pearl Harbor, which brought about unprecedented catastrophe upon the United States. Firstly, each unit was reluctant to do what was thought to be a non-primary job or another's job. For example, while the major concern of the Hawaiian Army intelligence was to detect sabotage and subversion dictated primarily by Army intelligence tradition and by the presence of a large local Japanese population, in May 1941 General Marshall requested to establish an evaluation branch within G-2 (Army intelligence) to follow activities in the Far East. Consequently, the number of officers on the G-2 staff increased from twenty-two to nearly eighty men by December 1941, thanks to the request. However, even this new specific task did not change organizational priorities and procedures. At the time of the event, the Army intelligence was still "specifically concerned, particularly concerned, and practically solely concerned" with anti-subversive precautions and operations.¹¹⁰ In 1946, in the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, General Miles, Chief of Military Intelligence for the Army, testified:

¹¹⁰ Kam, p.178.

I do not think any Intelligence officer ever thought that he could be sure of picking up a convoy or attack force or task force in Japan before it sailed and know where it was going.

That was beyond our terms of efficiency.¹¹¹

Thus, as Wohlstetter observes, only countersubversive measures occupied Miles' attention.¹¹² He cared little about the enemy's intention despite General Marshall's request to estimate the enemy's activity in the Far East.

Secondly, the problems were seen in coordinating and communicating between complex departments and organizations. For example, in response to the November 27 war warning, General Short, the Army commander in Hawaii, implemented an alert to defend against sabotage and uprising. Later, he stated that he was relying on the Navy to give him information of a hostile force through reconnaissance, which was the Navy's business. On the other hand, Admiral Kimmel testified he did not know the Army was on an alert, and assumed that Army radar was in full operation.¹¹³ Kam observes that people tend to forget that officers in other departments or organizations do not share their own information, missions, and concerns. They often overlook the possibility that people with different background perceive the same message differently.¹¹⁴

The third problem was rival relations between organizations. Conflicts over interests among communities make organizations do unnecessary things or prevent them from doing necessary things. On December 7, for instance, the Army Aircraft Warning Service (AWS) was composed of an information center and mobile radar stations in Oahu. The AWS had been operating on a training basis because the head of the Signal Corps who had "operational control" of the unit as long as it was in training, did not want to give up this control. Whereas, an Operations officer of the Hawaiian Interceptor Command believed that all personnel were ready for the Air Corps to take the control.

¹¹¹ Congress of the United States, Part 27, p.62.

¹¹² Wohlstetter, p.291.

¹¹³ Kam, p.181.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.182.

Having gone through a bitter argument over which Corps should take control of the operation, the Signal Corps won. As a result, the center and the radar sets were determined not to operate a regular 24-hour basis. Likewise, as no liaison officers were assigned for certain periods of time, and there was no chance of correct and rapid identification and interception of aircraft. Because of this time gap between the operations, in fact the Army and the Navy had no preparation for the Japanese air attack. On the morning of December 7, the AWS radar centers were manned from 4 to 7 A.M. When an officer at one of the radar stations found “something completely out of the ordinary” on the screen at 7:02 A.M. and called the information center, no one replied to it and later one inexperienced staff, who happened to stay at the center, called back and told the radar officer that what he was seeing were friendly aircraft and in fact arrived in the middle of the Japanese attack. At about 7:55 A.M. he stepped outside to witness what he saw to be “Navy bombers in bombing practice over at Pearl Harbor.”¹¹⁵ Wohlstetter notes that if this service had been operating on a 24-hour basis, it would probably have warned the Army and the Navy 30-45 minutes prior to the attack.¹¹⁶

Security Problem

In addition to the sectionalism, the sever restriction of the secret information among the U.S. officials became a hurdle in preventing the Japanese surprise attack. As mentioned above, MAGIC was so preeminent that the U.S. never experienced a dominant position over the Japanese intelligence. However, to keep this supremacy, the U.S. government had to limit the officers who could reach MAGIC so as to keep the adversary from awaking or suspecting the U.S. interception and then changing its communication methods. Consequently, only a few government officials were privileged to see these secret messages. Admiral Kimmel, for example, complains that he was not informed of important clues of war: “I was not informed that, upon receipt of the American note of November 26,

¹¹⁵ Wohlstetter, p.7-12.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.12.

the Japanese considered that negotiations had not merely ceased but that relations with this country were ruptured.”¹¹⁷

In addition, this careful security of MAGIC promoted the prevalence of rumors about its feature as a secret weapon, what it could do, who could get it, and so on. And these rumors created mutual-misunderstandings—those who were informed of relatively a small number of MAGIC thought they knew all parts of MAGIC, or those who obtained relatively large parts of MAGIC thought others read more MAGIC.¹¹⁸ As a consequence, Washington mistakenly assumed that General Short received significant information, and sent him an alert as “hostile actions at any moment,” expecting him to deal with a surprise attack. Whereas, Short regarded the warning as the necessity of countermeasures against sabotage in Hawaii.¹¹⁹

And, those who did not reach the MAGIC material but somehow learned of its existence tended to overestimate the capability of MAGIC that the contents were more complete and precise than they actually were.¹²⁰ What’s worse, all the incorrect beliefs erred on the side of optimism that increased the theater commanders’ confidence in Washington’s sensitivity to imminent crises.¹²¹ Kam points out that, in general, selective distribution of information tends to build a wrong assumption that someone else knows what is going on and will handle the emergency. And this reliance, so often unjustified, on other officers may help persist in biased beliefs and ignore inconsistent information.¹²²

Insensitivity

One of the reasons of the failures was the organizations’ routine work, which led to insensitivity to an emergency. In peacetime military officers report anything unusual or suspicious. However, in

¹¹⁷ Husband Kimmel, *Admiral Kimmel's Story* (Chicago: Regnery 1955), p.56.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.180.

¹¹⁹ Kam, p.27.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p.193.

¹²¹ *Ibid*.

¹²² *Ibid*, p.194.

wartime, they are required to do much more on a daily basis and gradually become insensitive to what they would see as an emergency in peacetime.¹²³ On the morning of December 7, 1941, almost everyone in Pearl Harbor worked as usual. Although an hour before the Japanese attack an American aircraft-patrol detected a submarine, the chief of staff did not see a specific threat. The commanders simply felt that they had done their duty by reporting the matter to a high authority.¹²⁴

In addition, institutionalization deprives realistic sense of emergency. At that time, while most armies had long-range plans to handle potential enemy attack, such planning tended to lead to institutionalization. For years before Pearl Harbor, American war plans and tactics in Hawaii took full account of the possibility of a Japanese surprise air raid.¹²⁵ However, even though “surprise attack” was phrased, there was no practical assessment of what surprise would mean, what such an attack could do to American fleets, aircrafts, and ground forces, and no calculation of probable damage to soldiers and equipment.¹²⁶ On the other hand, the Japanese planners had estimated roughly a one-third loss to their officers in the Pearl Harbor attack, perhaps because they needed to build plans realistically for such a risky venture.¹²⁷ As a consequence of this lack of sensitivity, American officers had never tried to patrol the full 360 degrees around the islands by long-distance reconnaissance although it was believed that long-range coverage such as 800 miles was necessary to report the appearance of enemy’s carriers in time so as to take counterattack on the fighters that they would launch.¹²⁸

There was another obstacle called “cry wolf” phenomenon that makes officials and organizations become impervious to crises because of repeated false warnings. Prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, there had been three occasions of extreme tension in U.S.-Japanese relations—in June

¹²³ Kam, p.177.

¹²⁴ Wohlstetter, p.16-17.

¹²⁵ Kam, p.178.

¹²⁶ Wohlstetter, p.69.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p.13.

1940 and again in July and October 1941—that resulted in alerts in Hawaii.¹²⁹ False alarms have a strong impact on individuals and organizations because of high costs of response to the alarms, but there is none. And recurrent alerts which turned out to be false later, exhausts them and leads them to dullness.¹³⁰ At the time of the first warning in Pearl Harbor in June 1940 a formidable enemy assault on Oahu was believed to be probable, but a year later it was considered to be irrational and impossible for the Japanese navy. By the end of 1941 the Pacific Fleet felt tired of checking out Japanese submarine reports near Pearl Harbor; in the week prior to the surprise attack it had checked seven, all of which turned out to be false. In this context, Navy Intelligence in Hawaii did not find a specific threat when they lost the radio transmission of the Japanese carriers after November 16, 1941. The U.S. radio intelligence frequently failed to spot Japanese carriers and warships throughout 1941 and earlier; however, in all these cases the intelligence had correctly concluded that those fleets were heading for home, where they used low-power radio contact. Since these estimations had always proved to be correct, the Navy intelligence did not imagine the loss of signals in December 1941 indicated a long-distance attack.¹³¹

Rigid Group Atmosphere

A group atmosphere is counted in one of the pathologies in the Pearl Harbor case. Before the incident, anyone who urged a necessity of full alert against the Japanese possible assault would have faced becoming a social outcast within each division in Hawaii. They recognized challenging the myth of Pearl Harbor's impregnability would cost them social sanctions. In the mood of apparent unanimity, with no clear-cut indications of Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, even most conscientious military officers would take a risk in seemingly a very low-probability threat of a enemy's surprise

¹²⁹ Kam, p.186.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.188.

¹³¹ Ibid, p.188-189.

attack rather than in the high-probability of being scorned by questioning the group's recent reaffirmations of its commitment to "a business-as-usual and a weekend-leave-as-usual policy."¹³² This psychological pressure was imposed on members of groups and reinforced inflexibility. The suppression of contradictory views can be partly explained by the fact that dissenters are often low-ranking officers and officials. Naturally, their opinions are easily ignored and rejected. For example, on December 4, 1941, Commander Arthur McCollum, Chief of the Far Eastern Section of Naval Intelligence, sought permission to send an all-out alert to the Pacific Fleet at a meeting attended by four senior admirals, but was refused by his superiors to do so on the grounds that the previous warnings to Hawaii were enough.¹³³

¹³² Janis, p.92-93.

¹³³ Kam, p.161.

Chapter 6

Was the Pearl Harbor Attack Unavoidable?

Having considered the above arguments, can we conclude that the Pearl Harbor attack was inevitable? Certainly, Washington recognized that Japan would take military action soon after the breakdown of the negotiations. However, the lack of qualified information caused the failure of detecting the Japanese military's target (*where*) and method (*how*). Then, was it possible for the United States to collect more accurate and reliable information? My conclusion is no, considering the Japanese strict security policy and the shortage of U.S. intelligence sources. Indeed, MAGIC made a significant contribution to the U.S. government's prediction of Japanese hostility. However, since the Japanese security measure was so tight that any nation could hardly collect sensitive information from Japan, it is cruel to blame the U.S. intelligence, lacking diverse sources, for failing to prove the Japanese operational intentions and capabilities.

Then, could the United States have prevented or lessen the disaster had it skillfully *analyzed* and *managed* the collected information? Some people may say if Washington had informed General Short of a possibility of a Japanese surprise attack which Washington had expected, though not necessarily at Pearl Harbor, instead of the obscure alert such as "hostile actions at any moment"; the general might have prepared for the Japanese offence instead of subversion in Hawaii. Or if the U.S. intelligence analysts had been flexible enough to doubt their adherence to Southeast Asia as a target, they may have been inspired by some implications that Pearl Harbor would be the possible target. Or if the Air Corps had won the argument over the operation of the Aircraft Warning Service, it would have been operated 24 hours and thus the Army and the Navy could have avoided the time gap and detected the Japanese air-fighters in advance, and then intercepted them. However, while pointing out intelligence failures *after* an event is relatively easy, it is incredibly difficult for the intelligence

analysts *at the time* to estimate an opponent's intentions and capabilities. Regarding the cognitive biases, predicting the Japanese attack on Southeast Asia was reasonable in a sense, and rational people tend to assume that opponents' plans are rational and feasible because otherwise it is almost impossible to predict opponents' intentions. Kam notes that "Irrational behavior is extremely difficult to predict precisely because it follows a course that makes no sense to the rational mind. Surprise attack often works because it violates the rules of rationality."¹³⁴ Moreover, because intelligence job is not a unilateral game, but a bilateral or multilateral game, enemies usually try to hide their real intentions and deceive their competitors. In fact, the Japanese did a remarkable job in concealing their strategic objectives, for instance, by limiting knowledge about the attack to those who were closely participating in the planning. Therefore, even if the U.S. intelligence agencies had recognized that the Japanese military officers made irrational war plans, singling out Pearl Harbor out of numbers of potential targets must have been difficult. Also, estimating Japan's capabilities was rather tough for American analysts, firstly because the Japanese willingness cannot be measured by certain figures and secondly because U.S. intelligence had little information regarding the progress and state of the Japanese military and naval preparedness and equipment. Moreover, a changing situation led intelligence officers to miscalculate the enemy's ability. Indeed, concluding that the shallow water of Pearl Harbor would prevent a Japanese torpedo attack had not been wrong; however, after the Japanese navy overcame the technical difficulty of torpedo about a month before December 7, this assumption turned to be wrong.

How about the organizational obstacles? Should the U.S. intelligence community have solved the sectionalism in order to confront Japan more efficiently? But the question is whether there was the motivation to reform the agencies. As Kam describes, organizations try to keep the status quo and

¹³⁴ Kam, p.72.

thus tend to discourage rapid changes.¹³⁵ In addition, while reforming organization costs considerable time and money, how can we expect them to do so despite the fact that there had been no big event? As for a dissemination problem, people might say that Washington's senior officers should have informed more officers of the contents of MAGIC so as not to create mutual-misunderstandings. However, dissemination was such a sensitive matter that the whole intercept operation could have collapsed if the existence of MAGIC was somehow leaked. The more intelligence is disseminated, the more useful it is, but at the same time the higher the risk of leaking becomes. Therefore, if MAGIC had been more exploited among the U.S. officials, the Japanese officers could have got aware of the operation. And, it appeared clear that a "cry wolf" phenomenon was seen in the Hawaiian forces. As an organization, responding to all warnings with fully alert would have increasingly cost them and induced insensitivity to the warnings, especially under the prejudice that Japan would take offensive actions toward Southeast Asia. In conclusion, the Pearl Harbor attack was almost impossible to prevent and extremely difficult to diminish the damage.

¹³⁵ Kam, p.176.

Chapter 7

The Lessons from Pearl Harbor

The reasons for the failures seem to originate in the nature of human beings: people want to be comfortable. Once people establish a hypothesis, it is troublesome to reexamine it when the majority regards it as true. Challenging this kind of assumption is hard for an officer because it requires strong evidence to turn over the widely granted view while intelligence per se is not clear enough to disprove the other one in the first place. Analysts tend to pick up the information which is consistent with the hypothesis and ignore, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the information which does not fit their assumption. Reconsidering the hypothesis, especially when it was built by tremendous time and money, requires analysts to start over and give up their previous efforts. Therefore, naturally they are comfortable with sticking to the first assumption. The organizational problems also revealed typical human behavior. People are usually happy with close friends or colleagues, and are reluctant to cooperate with outsiders, particularly if they are competitors. They are not willing to share their fruits, on which they have spent resources, with unfamiliar people.

Therefore, the failures of Pearl Harbor mostly stem from the nature of human beings. The U.S. officials seemed to follow the more comfortable choices in dealing with Japanese aggression. Generally, unless people feel an obligation or a necessity, they are reluctant to do things against human nature. It is not until they experience a shocking incident such as a surprise attack that they change their strong beliefs. Therefore, not having experienced a surprise attack before Pearl Harbor, the U.S. intelligence was not expected to do something to change the situation. Especially, reforming people as an aggregation is quite hard because reshaping a few people's minds is not enough to change an entire organization. Not until the majority of people, specifically senior officers, review their prejudice does an organization adapt itself to a substantial form.

As mentioned above, after the event it is relatively easy to point out what the U.S. intelligence should have done and to learn the lessons at heart from the bitter experience. In other words, even though the Pearl Harbor attack was inevitable, it may be possible to prevent or at least mitigate another Pearl Harbor disaster by reviewing the failures of Pearl Harbor and extract some lessons from it.

Lesson 1—Diversify Intelligence Sources

One of the major U.S. mistakes in Pearl Harbor was not to diversify intelligence sources, especially not to exploit humint. The Americans did not recognize an importance of human intelligence at that time. It is true that MAGIC was a useful tool, but its ability was confined in diplomatic communications and it did not provide strategic information. Coupled with humint or other sources, communication intelligence (comint, e.g. MAGIC) can give meanings. For example, while MAGIC intercepted the Japanese espionage investigating the base at Pearl Harbor, Washington did not take it as a sign of a Japanese possible target. Had the U.S. intelligence gained some information about the Japanese target as the British and the Peruvian Minister somehow did, U.S. analysts might have been inspired that the Japanese concern with Pearl Harbor indicated its intention of a surprise attack on the island. Shulsky and Schmitt emphasize an importance of humint that human intelligence can provide the clues necessary to interpret the raw data collected by a technical intelligence. For example, the meaning of a picture of a building can be understood coupled with explanations supported by human sources; otherwise, it may be ignored and forgotten for the picture itself does not have any meanings.¹³⁶ Likewise, the Japanese investigation into the installation at Pearl Harbor could have revealed as a much clearer signal to U.S. officers had they been briefed about its meaning.

¹³⁶ Shulsky, p.36.

The British and the Peruvian information might not have been reliable and precise since the Japanese attack on U.S. soil was not their primary concern in the first place. However, if the United States itself had seriously maneuvered humint, it could have reached a tip of the secret. While the Japanese secrecy was hard to break, the Soviet Union, evidently, succeeded in penetrating Japanese sensitive information by humint. Richard Sorge, a German citizen and correspondent for a leading German newspaper, spied for the Soviet Union from 1930s until his arrest in the fall of 1941. He managed to get German and Japanese war plans by making a close connection with the staff of the German embassy in Tokyo. Shortly before his arrest, Sorge sent a critical message to Moscow: “the Soviet Far East can be considered safe from Japanese attack.” His message disclosed that Japan had decided not to attack the Soviet Union; instead, it would assault south and east in the Pacific against the United States and the British and Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia. Reassured by Sorge’s report, Stalin could make a decisive decision to transfer hundreds of thousands of units from the Far East to Moscow. Thanks to a series of the conduct, Russia could somehow stop the German massive invasion in 1941-42, which, in retrospect, turned out to be a critical turning point of WWII.¹³⁷ This Sorge’s case demonstrates that humint is considerably helpful despite severe circumstances such as pre-Pearl Harbor Japan. Shulsky and Schmitt insist that regarding political and military intentions and plans, human intelligence collection always was, and still is, essential.¹³⁸ In the Pearl Harbor case, what Admiral Yamamoto thought could not be figured out by MAGIC or radio traffic; but espionage might have been able to detect the Japanese leaders’ ideas and characters. Humint is one of the examples of intelligence sources; there are several other tools such as photint or imint (photographic or imagery intelligence), sigint (signals intelligence), comint (communications intelligence), telint (telemetry intelligence), elint (electronics intelligence), and so on. In sum, political leaders should recognize the importance of diverse intelligence sources and materialize this concept in order to

¹³⁷ Shulsky, p.14.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.35.

collect more qualified information.

Lesson 2—Avoid Mirror Image

How should intelligence officers analyze opponents' intentions? Heuer suggests that although it is quite difficult, understanding foreign leaders' values and assumptions and even their misperceptions and misunderstandings is essential. For example, it was necessary to realize not only the Japanese live-or-die situation but also their miscalculations on American will. The Japanese actually underestimated American will—against the Japanese expectation, the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor turned out to be strengthened rather than weakened American will.¹³⁹ While foreigners' behavior frequently appears “irrational” or “not in their own best interest,” analysts should bear in mind that they tend to view the enemy's intentions from their own eyes (mirror image). To assume, “if I were a Russian intelligence officer...” or “if I were running Indian Government...” can be accurate only when analysts know the Russian officer's thinking or the Indian Government's behavior.¹⁴⁰ The difficult point is how to recognize different kinds of leaders' views. Below are several methods that help avoid a pitfall of mirror image:

Firstly, *role playing* is commonly used to break constraints of one's limited way of thinking. By changing one's substantial environment, the mindset shaped in fixed conditions may drastically change. Usually one's cognition is strongly influenced by the outside environment such as human relations. Therefore, actually imitating others' positions instead of merely imagining how they think and act can lead to breaking habitual patterns and reaching more accurate and vivid conclusions.¹⁴¹ Secondly, consultation with outside experts is particularly important to avoid what Adm. David Jeremiah called the “everybody-thinks-like-us mindset.” Intelligence officers usually spend less time

¹³⁹ Thomson, p.194.

¹⁴⁰ Heuer, p.70.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p.72.

living in and absorbing the culture of the countries they are aiming at than outside experts on those countries. The experts can make up for the lack of knowledge about target countries; otherwise analysts are inclined to see the countries from their own views due to ignorance of the enemy's cultures and habits.¹⁴² Finally, intelligence analysts may find some clues from historical precedents in the same country or similar events in other countries to solve current issues.¹⁴³ Before the Pacific War, President Roosevelt precisely predicted a probability of a Japanese surprise attack on the grounds that they had done a surprise attack on Port Arthur in the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. When a historical event is analogous to ongoing issues in several ways, analysts can fill its similarities and lessons into the present uncertain factors.

Lesson 3—Make Objective Estimates on Capabilities

The American officials overestimated their impregnability and underestimated Japanese capabilities. But how can one objectively estimate one's own and others' capabilities? In fact, assessment of enemies' capabilities is extremely difficult because those are composed of many factors which are not necessarily countable, and are often combined and interacted one another. One way to evaluate abilities is to access quantitative elements: "order-of-battle data, the number of men under arms and the potential of mobilization, the quantities and typed of weapon systems and their performance, some aspects of logistic capacity, and military budgets."¹⁴⁴ These quantitative aspects are more visible, assessable, and accessible. However, invisible factors often determine an outcome of war as history shows. They include "the motivation and morale of the forces; the quality of military leadership and the tactical ability of commanders on various levels; the flexibility of the command structure in unexpected situations; the training and discipline of troops; the quality of military

¹⁴² Heuer, p.181.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p.38.

¹⁴⁴ Kam, p.75-76.

intelligence, control systems, and communications; the quality of maintenance and the performance of arms under wartime conditions; the use of doctrine; staff organization and performance; the geographical relationships of countries and the availability of bases and logistic supply conditions; the ability to absorb casualties; and finally economic and technical capacity, administrative skill, and potential foundations of military power.”¹⁴⁵ Such diverse factors and their combinations make it complicated to assess the enemy’s capabilities. Moreover, the enemy’s capabilities frequently changes as time and situations change. For example, enemies may overcome their shortcomings which they had left, they may not fight to the end due to dismissal of a charismatic leader, or they may be less capable of dealing with something under the situation where they did not expect.

Given this tough condition, there are some better methods to somewhat reduce inaccuracy of evaluation. The first is an aforementioned method: gather quantitative data. The second method is to learn the enemy’s past performance to handle contingencies.¹⁴⁶ The Japanese, for example, attacked China in 1894 and Russia in 1905 which were considered to be stronger than Japan. In tactical levels, the Japanese maneuvered a surprise attack against Russia at the first stage of war and exploited new tactics to annihilate the Russian fleets in the Battles of the Yellow Sea and Tsushima. Having learned from the Japanese past major wars, American analysts may have extracted some clues that the Japanese might desperately attack the greater power, commit a surprise attack, and develop a new tactics. The third method is to continually recheck the judgment on the enemy’s capabilities so as to update the enemy’s improvement and situational changes. Analysts should know that estimating capabilities is incredibly difficult and the estimation changes time after time. Also they should know that people tend to overestimate themselves and underestimate others due to complexity and lack of information. Therefore, continuously questioning and rechecking their estimation is essential to approach more realistic evaluations.

¹⁴⁵ Kam, p.76.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.77.

Lesson 4—Be Open-Minded

The U.S. intelligence analysts as well as policymakers stuck to the assumption that the Japanese would invade Southeast Asia. Indeed, they were so adherent that they could not imagine Pearl Harbor was the real target. This failure originated from a lack of imagination. The critical way to overcome this deficiency is to question the assumption and keep open-minded. Heuer suggests one of the tools: *devil's advocate*. A devil's advocate is someone who defends a minority point of view. The officer has to rebut a major hypothesis and advocate the opposite assumption. In so doing, alternative interpretations and different perspective are exposed. The point is to disprove seemingly universal idea rather than confirm it.¹⁴⁷ Another method is, as mentioned above, role playing, which contributes to diminishing mirror-image. There should be other division officers who are not familiar with the problem but professional analysts so that people can get more fresh ideas.

In addition to challenging an existent assumption, creating a new assumption is useful. As Heuer insists, the most important method creating a new idea is the principle of *deferred judgment*. Evaluation of the new-coming idea should be deferred lest people should not be intimidated from putting forth drastic ideas. One should seek to generate as many ideas as possible without prepossessing *their* common sense. As a general rule, interaction with other people can help generate creative ideas; they stimulate and inspire each other. Group thinking also encourages greater efforts and concentration on the task. The purpose of the team should not be reaching a certain agreement, but should promote brainstorming to make members flexible. Individual thinking is also helpful to make ideas more organized and deep.¹⁴⁸ So, intelligence work should be done through group thinking combined with individual thinking to generate more creative and fresh ideas.

¹⁴⁷ Heuer, p.72-73.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p.76-77.

Lesson 5—Overcome Sectionalism

To overcome sectionalism, should intelligence agencies be integrated into one large organization? By doing so, the organization may be more effective than plural agencies since there will be less friction between divisions and each division will share the same ideas. However, the existence of one centralized, dominant intelligence agency entails some considerable disadvantages. That a dominant organization is not challenged by other agencies means there exist less hypotheses but one dominant hypothesis because it is less likely to be refuted by others. On the other hand, the pluralism of intelligence can offer several hypotheses from different perspectives. Assumptions established by each agency are exposed under competition, thereby reaching more sophisticated hypotheses than a monopolistic estimate.¹⁴⁹ Thus, creating one powerful intelligence agency has several disadvantages in processing intelligence. Whereas, as we have learned, it is true that existence of several organizations causes sectionalism which results in ineffectiveness. Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow observe that while each organization tackles its own problems few important issues fall exclusively within a single organization.¹⁵⁰

One solution to this dilemma is to have leaders coordinate among different sectors in order to dissolve unnecessary competition and complexity. For example, making a joint operation in a certain mission is one way of coordination over different departments. In doing so, friction caused by competition among groups would be reduced and important information would be shared by officers necessary to know in accomplishing objectives. The critical point here is that coordination depends on leaders because only leaders forcefully organize individuals who tend to excessively compete with each other. Graham and Philip argue that government leaders can break propensities and routines of

¹⁴⁹ Kam, p.225-226.

¹⁵⁰ Allison T. Graham and Zelikow D. Philip, *Essence of decision: explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis 2nd ed.* (New York: Longman 1999), p.143.

each organizations.¹⁵¹ In the Pearl Harbor case, the Army and the Navy could have established a joint team for detecting Japanese intentions while the rest of the officers in each department concentrated on their original businesses. This special operation could have been organized by Admiral Kimmel or General Short—the leaders of the Hawaiian theater.

Lesson 6—Disseminate Information without Leaking

The difficult point of security policy is the more sensitive information is disseminated the higher risk of leaking becomes. When reviewing the Pearl Harbor case, one might be aware that Washington possessed many more signals than the theaters regarding Japanese activities and intentions. In reality this gap was not filled because no single agency or individual had access to the total mass of information. Naturally, no one could manage what material should be useful and distributed to Hawaii. As a result, the theater did not receive sufficient information and could not draw a comprehensive picture of the enemy's image.¹⁵² Taking this fault into consideration, firstly there should be some selected officers who are in charge of reviewing all of collected information and determining to whom it should be distributed. Without knowing the entire materials, it is impossible to convey information among officers necessary to be informed. And this improvement would minimize the risk of leakage.

Then, the problem is how conveyers deliver messages to each personnel. Since they are afraid of risking unexpected disclosure, officers are reluctant to share secret information. This fear comes from a structure of dissemination process: leaking information causes criminal, civil, and internal administrative punishment; whereas sharing information does not bring rewards. One of the solutions is to create incentives for sharing intelligence while being cautious about security.¹⁵³ And, in order to

¹⁵¹ Graham, p.173.

¹⁵² Kam, p.193-194.

¹⁵³ *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company Inc. 2004), p.417.

balance between security and dissemination, intelligence reports should begin with the information in its most sharable form, thereby maximum number of recipients can share that part. Then, the further detailed information should be accessible to certain officers who need to know it. In this case, making rules who can access the further information and making it possible to trail who actually accessed the sensitive materials are important.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, counterintelligence (information collected and analyzed, and activities undertaken, to protect the nation (including its own intelligence-related activities) against the actions of hostile intelligence services)¹⁵⁵ is indispensable to secure secrecy. For instance, an intelligence agency should investigate would-be personnel to prevent being infiltrated by the enemy's spies and should ensure that current employees obey the rules of access to classified information.¹⁵⁶ In addition to personnel security, physical security such as a detection alarm and a wall of unauthorized intrusion is useful.¹⁵⁷ More aggressive methods like counterespionage can be adopted, too. Anyway, by strengthening counterintelligence, the dilemma in a dissemination problem could be lessened.

Lesson 7—Keep Sensitivity to Crisis Warnings

The military tends to become insensitive because it receives a number of crisis warnings one after another day by day. One solution to prevent such a syndrome is to qualify warnings. If warnings are accurate and reliable, soldiers need not to respond to unnecessary alerts which otherwise would have been issued. However, if officers become reluctant to issue uncertain warnings, a real surprise attack is likely to be missed. Warnings are more or less attributed to ambiguity no matter how qualified and therefore should not be suspended too much. Besides making warnings more qualified, what should be done is to prevent a “cry wolf” phenomenon. Kam suggests that in order to minimize

¹⁵⁴ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p.417-418.

¹⁵⁵ Shulsky, p.99.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.105.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.107-108.

the infliction of the “cry wolf” effect, the level of response should be adapted flexibly to each level of urgency.¹⁵⁸ For example, the military should take massive and quick responses to high level alerts while it should take less exhaustive preparedness to low level. The point is to respond all warnings in accordance with level of alerts. This method requires decision makers to encourage the intelligence agencies to take the risk of false alarms, and politicians and the press not to accuse decision makers of engaging in extra countermeasures. In doing so, the cost of “cry wolf” phenomenon can be offset by being trained through figuring out signals and noise, and by discouraging enemies to commit a surprise attack because of the quick responses to all alarms.¹⁵⁹

Lesson 8—Make an Open Atmosphere within Groups

The group mindset among the U.S. Pacific Fleet suppressed different opinions and creative ideas. Even though individual officers accurately analyze information, if a group atmosphere is too strict they may be discouraged to loudly voice their ideas. Then, how can one make an atmosphere more open? The outcome depends heavily on leadership because group climates are usually shaped by characteristics of leaders. If leaders are more open-minded and receptive of other opinions, their subordinates feel easy to propose creative idea and policy; otherwise, it is difficult for them to do so. Irving L. Janis suggests that leaders should be impartial instead of expressing their preference and expectations when establishing a hypothesis. Leaders should encourage the members of the groups to make objections and doubts to previous assumptions and should accept criticism of their own judgment.¹⁶⁰

Another safeguard to encourage dissident views is to make several independent teams within an organization. Every team is assigned the same issues and responsible for suggesting its own

¹⁵⁸ Kam, p.233.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Janis, p.210.

perspective. The purpose of this practice is a risk hedge. Even if some leaders of the groups are conservative, the rest of them may be more open to receive challenging opinions. Unlike the existence of one dominant group, minority's view is more likely to be absorbed in this case. Moreover, by dividing an organization into several groups dealing with the same issues, each leader would be motivated to compete with other leaders. This competition would lead to building more sophisticated hypothesis. Yet, to prevent sectionalism and inefficiency, the division should be temporary and only when shaping hypotheses. Otherwise, an escalation of competition may easily lead to sectionalism and a dissemination problem.

Chapter 8

Learning from History: Comparison to the 9/11 Terrorist Attack

These lessons, though not the perfect solutions, would make significant contributions to preventing or reducing surprise-attack casualties. If policymakers and intelligence analysts learn the lessons at heart, another Pearl Harbor tragedy is more likely to be handled properly. In reality, however, learning from historical lessons is still difficult that frequently people cannot deal with contingencies. Sixty years after Pearl Harbor, the United States was devastated by another surprise attack on September 11, 2001. This terrorist attack tells us that intelligence, specifically predicting a surprise attack, is extremely hard no matter how we learn lessons from history. In this sense, we should examine the reasons why the U.S. intelligence was not able to exploit lessons from the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941 and how it should have learned from the case. The 9/11 Commission Report, a report for the recommendations to the President of the United States, the United States Congress, and the American people concerning the September 11 attacks, presents several reasons for failures of the U.S. intelligence. By reviewing the proposals from the commission, we can see if the Pearl Harbor lessons were learned by the Americans. The report enumerates:

1. Lack of “Rational” Thinking

Despite the fact that Osama Bin Laden, head of al Qaeda terrorist group, declared war against the United States, American officers did not put themselves into the terrorist group’s mindset and environment. In May 1998, Bin Laden claimed: “It is far better for anyone to kill a single American soldier than to squander his efforts on other activities.”¹⁶¹ When looking at the

¹⁶¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p.47.

conditions of al Qaeda, we can find that the group compared to nation states is tiny, lacks resources, and is located one of the poorest, most remote, and least industrialized countries on earth.¹⁶² From this reason, conventional military attacks like the Japanese air-strike on Pearl Harbor can be eliminated in terms of a possibility of al Qaeda's warfare. Indeed, al Qaeda has been maneuvering suicide attacks by using vehicles such as trucks, cars, and boats. Hence, that the terrorists may use planes as a suicide attack is not far-fetched.¹⁶³ Nonetheless, the U.S. government did not analyze how an aircraft, hijacked or explosives-laden, might be exploited as a weapon. The 9/11 Commission concludes that America "did not perform this kind of analysis from the enemy's perspective, even though suicide terrorism had become a principal tactic of Middle Eastern terrorists."¹⁶⁴

2. Underestimation and Overconfidence

"U.S. government tended to underestimate a threat that grew ever greater," the report notes.¹⁶⁵ While the U.S. government took the terrorist threat seriously, it did not sense it as the first, second, or even third rank enemy.¹⁶⁶ What's more, U.S. military officers confidently assumed that they could identify the target and intercept it as soon as the enemy attempted to crush airplanes.¹⁶⁷

3. Persistence and Insensitivity

Despite the early warnings, the American leaders could not change their mind and take the alerts seriously. "By 2001 the government still needed a decision at the highest level as to

¹⁶² The 9/11 Commission Report, p.339-340.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.344.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p.347.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p.348.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.340.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p.346.

whether al Qaeda was or was not “a first order threat,” Richard Clarke, the President Terrorism Advisor, wrote in his first memo to Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor, on January 25, 2001. He complained about foot-dragging in the Pentagon and at the CIA, and repeatedly sent a message to Rice just a week before 9/11: “real question” for the principals was “are we serious about dealing with the al Qida threat?... Is al Qida a big deal?” Clarke wrote in this September 4 note, implicitly arguing that the terrorist network could kill a score of Americans every 18-24 months. The commission regrets that “If that view was credited, then current policies might be proportionate.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, the indications did not move the American leaders. This incident demonstrates organizational insensitivity and there may have existed leaders’ persistence of prejudice.

4. Sectionalism

Prior to the 9/11 attack, information was not shared within intelligence agencies because of legal misunderstandings and inadvertence. Analysis was not pooled and effective operation was not pursued.¹⁶⁹ When the NSA recognized the terrorist suspects who later committed the 9/11 attack on the United States, it did not think its job was to investigate these identities. Instead, it regarded itself as a supporter of intelligence consumers such as the CIA. Although the NSA would respond vigorously to any request, it waited to be asked.¹⁷⁰ Likewise, when the CIA was informed by a foreign intelligence agency that one of the suspects was heading for Los Angeles, it did not send the information to the FBI.¹⁷¹

Surprisingly, the above failures are quite similar to those of the Pearl Harbor case. The 9/11

¹⁶⁸ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p.343.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.353.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.354.

Commission concludes:

The methods for detecting and then warning of surprise attack that the U.S. government had so painstakingly developed in the decades after Pearl Harbor did not fail; instead, they were not really tried.¹⁷²

The fact that the Americans endured surprise attacks on its soil twice illustrates the difficulty in learning lessons from history. In fact, even if analysts learn from history, precluding all the failures is impossible because the current situation is not the same as incidents happened before. The U.S. intelligence analysts may make mistakes even though they take the lessons of the Pearl Harbor attack into consideration. A new tragedy may happen due to another factor which has never appeared in the past cases. The 9/11 terrorist attack was apparently different from the Pearl Harbor attack in some points. Their entities and methods are not the same: al Qaeda is a tiny group and its method is terrorism, whereas Japan was a major power and its method was conventional military tactics. What's more, as generation changes, the intelligence officers, who have not personally experienced any bitter failures, may not be able to take historical lessons to heart.

Conclusion

On the eve of Pearl Harbor, Washington expected the Japanese surprise attack. However, the American leaders could not detect the target (and method). The failure stems mainly from a lack of qualified information and secondly from mistakes in analyses and management of intelligence. The Pearl Harbor attack was almost impossible to prevent and was extremely difficult to limit the damage. However, the lessons from Pearl Harbor would help avoid or reduce a surprise-attack casualty in the future.

In conclusion, continuous study is necessary for intelligence, but at the same time what

¹⁷² *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p.347-348.

intelligence officers have to bear in mind is that historical lessons cannot necessarily prevent any attacks. Learning from Pearl Harbor is important, but still not enough to avoid a future attack. This notion remains uncertain and uncomfortable to intelligence analysts, however coping with uncertainty and discomfort is attributed to better intelligence. Once people feel comfortable with established assumption, they tend to avoid painstaking efforts to change it. Hence, continuous efforts, opposite to human nature, are absolutely required to *collect, analyze, and manage* intelligence.

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U.S. Failures in the Pearl Harbor Attack: Lessons for Intelligence

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