

# Trials by Fire: Strategic and Operational Intelligence in the Korean War

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

Trials by Fire: Strategic and Operational Intelligence in the Korean War, by MAJ Max R. Rovzar, US Army, 39 pages.

This monograph examines the intelligence warfighting function at the operational and strategic levels during the Korean War utilizing the Joint Intelligence Process and the Joint Intelligence Principles of prioritization, perspective, and unity of effort to examine the dichotomy between success at the operational level and intelligence failure at the strategic level. The case studies for this research are the onset of the conflict, the defense of the Pusan perimeter, the Inchon landing, and the Chinese intervention. This monograph demonstrates that intelligence failed at the strategic level because it lacked focus, was poorly resourced, and was based on deeply flawed assumptions. Intelligence succeeded at the operational level because intelligence operations focused on requirements, were adequately resourced, and were integrated effectively. This research highlights the dangers of over reliance on assumptions with regard to an adversary for modern intelligence professionals.

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## Acronyms

AAL	American Airlines
ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
AFOSI	Air Force Office of Special Investigations
AFSA	Armed Forces Security Agency
BG	Brigadier General
CCF	Chinese Communist Forces
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIG	Central Intelligence Group
COMINT	Communications Intelligence
COMSEC	Communications Security
DC	District of Columbia
DCI	Director of Central Intelligence
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DNI	Director of National Intelligence
DOS	Department of State
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
FECOM	Far East Command
G-2	Intelligence Section
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
IMINT	Imagery Intelligence
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JDN	Joint Doctrinal Note
JP	Joint Publication
JPSOG	Joint Strategic Plans and Operations Group
KLO	Korean Liaison Office

KMAG	Korean Military Advisory Group
KMT	Kuomintang of China
KNP	Korean National Police
KPA	Korean People’s Army
MG	Major General
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
LTG	Lieutenant General
NIPF	National Intelligence Priorities Framework
NSA	National Security Agency
NSA47	National Security Act of 1947
NSC	National Security Council
ODNI	Office of the Director of National Intelligence
OE	Operational Environment
ORE	Office of Research and Evaluation
OSINT	Open Source Intelligence
OSO	Office of Special Operations
PHOTOINT	Photographic Intelligence
PIR	Priority Intelligence Requirement
PMESII-PT	Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical Environment, Time
ROK	Republic of Korea
ROKA	Republic of Korea Army
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
TLO	Tactical Liaison Office
UAL	United Airlines

UN	United Nations
UNC	United Nations Command
UNTCOK	United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea
US	United States
USCIB	United States Communications Intelligence Board
USNORTHCOM	United States Northern Command
USS	United States Ship
WWII	World War Two
WWIII	World War Three

## Introduction

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 nineteen Al-Qaeda terrorists boarded four commercial flights in three different airports along the Eastern seaboard of the United States. In Boston, American Airlines Flight Eleven (AAL 11) departed for Los Angeles at 7:59 a.m. Fifteen minutes later, the five hijackers had gained access to the cockpit. At 8:26, AAL 11 turned South and twenty minutes later crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City.<sup>1</sup>

Also departing from Logan Airport, United Airlines Flight One Hundred Seventy-Five (UAL 175) departed at 8:24 a.m. Shortly after reporting a suspicious transmission from an unknown aircraft (an errant transmission from a terrorist onboard AAL 11 urging passengers to remain calm), five terrorists breached the cockpit. At 8:59, UAL 175 assumed a heading towards New York City and crashed into the South Tower five minutes later.<sup>2</sup>

At 8:20 a.m., American Airlines Flight Seventy-Seven (AAL 77) departed from Dulles International Airport outside of Washington, DC. Shortly after reaching its cruising altitude at 8:46, five terrorists wielding box cutters hijacked the flight. At 8:54, the flight deviated from its heading and turned South with its transponder turned off. At 9:37, AAL 77 crashed into the western side of the Pentagon.<sup>3</sup>

United Airlines Flight Ninety-Three (UAL 93) departed from Newark, New Jersey at 8:43 a.m. At 9:28, the terrorists had breached the cockpit and after a brief struggle, they adjusted

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Kean and Leigh Hamilton, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2004), 4-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

the autopilot to an Easterly heading. At least five passengers were notified of the events in New York City by friends and relatives via air phone and realized that their situation must be related. The thirty-four passengers took a vote, and at 9:57 they initiated their effort to take control of the cockpit. Despite efforts to subdue the passengers with erratic rolling and pitching of the aircraft, the passengers continued their assault. Realizing that they would soon be swarmed, the terrorists deliberately crashed the aircraft into an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania at 10:02.<sup>4</sup>

The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> give credence to the theory of James J. Wirtz regarding the issue of surprise and intelligence failure between belligerents with significant differences in military capability. When a significant imbalance of power exists between two belligerents, strategic surprise and intelligence failure are more likely to occur. Or, as Draft Joint Doctrinal Note (JDN) 1-17 acknowledges, “Time and again, superior powers have learned that skilled, determined, and creative adversaries can find ways to minimize their opponent’s superior capabilities and create leverage of their own that creates a level playing field.”<sup>5</sup>

Similar strategic intelligence failures have occurred throughout US history. The Korean War offers two examples of strategic intelligence failure that occurred within five months of each other. It also offers examples of intelligence success at the operational level of war. This monograph analyzes the dichotomy between intelligence at the strategic and operational level during Korean War. This monograph demonstrates that intelligence failed at the strategic level because it lacked focus, was poorly resourced, and was based on deeply flawed assumptions. Intelligence succeeded at the operational level because intelligence operations focused on requirements, were adequately resourced, and were integrated effectively.

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<sup>4</sup> Kean and Hamilton, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 10-14.

<sup>5</sup> James Wirtz, *Understanding Intelligence Failure: Warning, Response, and Deterrence* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 9-20; US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Draft Joint Doctrinal Note (JDN) 1-17, *Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 34.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 achieved strategic surprise and fundamentally changed many aspects of the American way of life. Apart from the Gulf War, these attacks were the only significant challenge to US hegemony in the post-Soviet unipolar era. They disrupted air travel, the economy, and the US global perspective. They also forced a complete overhaul of physical security measures from baseball parks to airports, and everything in between.

In addition to security reforms, the attacks spurred significant transformations in the national security enterprise. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), are just a few of the organizations established to ensure that terrorist attacks of this magnitude never strike the homeland again.

Reforms to the intelligence community in the wake of a perceived intelligence failure are not unprecedented. A similar overhaul of the US intelligence community occurred following WWII. The *casus belli* for US involvement in the war was the Japanese attack on the US fleet in Pearl Harbor. A similar sentiment of “never again” permeated both the executive and legislative branches of the US government following the capitulation of Germany and Japan. The National Security Act of 1947 (NSA 47) sought to address the perceived shortcomings in the administrative structure of the armed forces as well as to establish permanent strategic intelligence capabilities within the executive branch. The act established the National Security Council (NSC), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the position of Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) to ensure that strategic intelligence failures akin to Pearl Harbor would not occur in the future.<sup>6</sup>

The establishment of the NSC provided a permanent council to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to national security. A permanent NSC staff was mandated to ensure executive branch leaders were well informed on

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<sup>6</sup> Public Law 253-343, The National Security Act of 1947, 80<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1947, sec. 101-103.

the strategic implications of US policies. The NSC was further tasked with identifying risks to national security and providing policy recommendations in the interests of national security.<sup>7</sup>

Under the NSC was the United States Communications Intelligence Board (USCIB). This was an early effort at unified control of US Communications Intelligence (COMINT). This came as an affront to the Service chiefs who did not believe that the COMINT activities of their Services warranted subjugation to civilian authority outside of military channels. In May 1949, the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) was formed subordinate to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The AFSA was responsible for both communications security (COMSEC) and COMINT of the three Services. The physical and administrative merger was completed within six months, but questions about its authorities and relationships would remain until the formation of the National Security Agency in 1952.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to NSA 47, the CIA was known as the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), an agency consisting of 100 full-time employees that garnered little respect from other government agencies or the military Services. In establishing the CIA, NSA 47 charged the Agency with five broad tasks: advising the NSC on matters related to national security, making recommendations to the NSC regarding the coordination of intelligence activities related to national security, correlating and evaluating intelligence related to national security, performing services for the benefit of existing intelligence agencies, and performing such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as directed by the NSC.<sup>9</sup>

Within the CIA, the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) was established to produce national estimates and the Office of Special Operations (OSO) was established for espionage and

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<sup>7</sup> Public Law 253-343, The National Security Act of 1947, sec. 102.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Burns, "The Origins of the National Security Agency: 1940-1952," *United States Cryptologic History* 5, no. 1 (1990): 45-76, accessed August 19, 2017, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB278/02.PDF>.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Karalekas, *History of the Central Intelligence Agency* (Laguna Hills: Aegean Park Press, 1977), 1-15.

counter-espionage. Despite the seemingly complementary nature of their structure (OSO for collection and ORE for analysis), the two offices struggled to synergize their efforts. The OSO's reporting was highly compartmented and the ORE relied on open source intelligence (OSINT) or Department of State (DOS) reporting to produce intelligence estimates. The principal consumer of ORE analysis was President Harry S. Truman in his daily briefings. These briefings were tailored to his requests, narrow in scope, and rarely entailed long term assessments.<sup>10</sup>

The establishment of the DCI was another significant development brought about by NSA 47. The DCI was responsible for the integration and synthesis of all elements in the US intelligence community. This responsibility remained with the DCI for more than sixty years, until the establishment of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) in 2004. Unsurprisingly, Admiral Roscoe H. Hillenkotter, the DCI from May 1947 to October 1950, struggled with the enormous undertaking of integrating and establishing unity of effort within the US intelligence community. However, under his leadership the CIA quickly made inroads and had early success as an intelligence producing agency.<sup>11</sup>

NSA 47 also had profound impacts on the US military. The act created the National Military Establishment and the position of the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF). The independent Services with their respective Service secretaries and the newly independent US Air Force were codified. The act created a war council consisting of the Service chiefs with the SECDEF presiding. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), consisting of the Service chiefs, and a Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, if one were to be appointed, was formed. The JCS were responsible for strategic plans, joint logistics, the establishment of unified commands, policies for joint training, education of service members, readiness requirements, and representation to the United Nations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Karalekas, *History of the Central Intelligence Agency*, 14-20.

<sup>11</sup> Public Law 108-458, Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2004, sec. 1071; Karalekas, *History of the Central Intelligence Agency*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Public Law 253-343, The National Security Act of 1947, sec. 201-214.

The global strategic context of the post-WWII era also greatly strained resources as the United States was demobilizing and cutting budgets to a sustainable peacetime level. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created, the Soviet Union detonated its first atomic bomb, and Mao Zedong triumphantly established the People's Republic of China. This strategic environment was ripe for what many intelligence scholars refer to as the low signal to noise ratio that can result in intelligence failure. In other words, too much information to allow for adequate analysis within the intelligence community.<sup>13</sup>

At the strategic level, the US military and intelligence community were in a great state of transition in the late 1940s. Army doctrine identifies phasing and transitions as an element of operational art. While doctrine focuses on the transition between phases of an operation or the transition to subsequent operations, known as branches and sequels, it emphasizes that the force is vulnerable during transitions—which is certainly applicable to the intelligence community at the strategic level in the aftermath of WWII.<sup>14</sup>

The Korean War was selected for this case study for several reasons. The Korean War presents an excellent case for examining the linkage between strategic and operational intelligence. First, the war contained several perceived strategic intelligence failures that overshadow intelligence success at the operational level. Second, it was the first limited war of the Cold War and created precedent for military intervention in pursuit of the strategic aim of containment. Lastly, the US military and intelligence community were in a state of transition that made them extremely vulnerable. At present, the US Army is in a similar period of transition as

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<sup>13</sup> Uri Bar-Joseph and Jack Levy, "Conscious Action and Intelligence Failure," *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 461-488.

<sup>14</sup> US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 2-8.

we shift our attention from counter-insurgency warfare to multi-domain battle with both asymmetric and strategic threats on the rise globally.<sup>15</sup>

The Korean War has also received far less attention from military historians and the American public than other twentieth century conflicts. The conflict was the first military engagement of the Cold War and resulted in a stalemate that remains a contentious geopolitical issue with an omnipresent threat of a resumption of hostilities. This monograph analyzes the intelligence processes of the United States during specific historic events of the Korean War to identify the primary internal and external factors that contributed to the success and failure of the intelligence processes at the strategic and operational levels of war.

## Methodology

The strategic and operational levels of warfare overlap. They also both seek to link tactical actions to strategic objectives. Joint Publication (JP) 1 recognizes the ambiguity in this construct, acknowledging that there are no finite limits or boundaries between the levels of warfare. For the purposes of this research project, the strategic level will relate to national policy and theater strategy. The operational level will relate to campaigns and major operations.<sup>16</sup>

This research utilizes a complex historical case study to analyze the intelligence processes at both the strategic and operational levels of war. Four key events in chronological order are used to analyze the performance of the intelligence process at their respective levels. These events are well documented and are appropriate to the levels of warfare pertinent to this study.

The onset of the conflict was selected as it is widely regarded to have caught the Truman Administration off guard. Despite all of the reforms to our strategic intelligence community, a

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<sup>15</sup> US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1-17.

<sup>16</sup> US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), I-7.

nuclear-capable United States was once again the victim of strategic surprise by an inferior power in the Pacific.

The Pusan perimeter was selected as it marked a successful transition from defensive to offensive operations—enabled by successful intelligence operations at the operational and tactical levels. The Pusan breakout in concert with the Inchon landing turned the tide of the conflict and led to the United Nations (UN) counteroffensive and the destruction of the preponderance of the Korean People’s Army (KPA) combat divisions.

The Inchon landing was selected as it was another operational success that enabled the UN counteroffensive, severed the KPA lines of communication, and led to the recapture of the South Korean capital of Seoul. An amphibious operation of this magnitude has not occurred since, and the intelligence process that accompanied this operation undoubtedly warrants study by modern intelligence professionals.

The Chinese intervention was selected as it was the second perceived intelligence failure at the strategic level of the Korean War. United Nations forces were overwhelmed by the initial onslaught and driven back to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The stalemate that ensued continues to this day and has recently become more contentious with the North Korean development of nuclear weapons as well as ballistic missiles that threaten the continental United States and a number of our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

The intelligence process, or intelligence cycle, as it is commonly known outside of joint doctrine, serves as a lens to evaluate the efficacy of the intelligence functions at the strategic and operational levels during the Korean War. The term intelligence cycle first appeared in the 1948 book, *Intelligence is for Commanders*, by LTC Robert R. Glass and LTC Phillip B. Davidson. The intelligence cycle espoused by these Command and General Staff College instructors consisted of four steps: direction of the collection effort, collection of information, processing of

information, and use of intelligence. There is evidence that the intelligence cycle existed prior to 1948, but was referred to as a process.<sup>17</sup>

The intelligence cycle of 1948 is remarkably similar to the current joint intelligence process despite the enormous technological, doctrinal, and theoretical advances throughout the last seventy years. The modern intelligence process consists of five steps: planning and direction, collection, processing and exploitation, analysis and production, and dissemination and integration. The modern intelligence process will be the lens utilized to analyze the performance of intelligence at the strategic and operational level to make the analysis of this research more relevant to the modern practitioner.<sup>18</sup>

This study evaluates the intelligence processes at the operational and strategic level of the Korean War according to the joint intelligence principles of prioritization, perspective, and unity of effort.<sup>19</sup> Joint Publication (JP) 2-0 indicates that prioritization “offers a mechanism for addressing requirements and effectively managing risk by identifying the most important tasks and applying available resources against those tasks.”<sup>20</sup> At the operational level of war, prioritization is placed on informing the decision points of battlefield commanders. At the strategic level of war, prioritization should reflect the will of policy makers and the national command authority and is expressed in the National Intelligence Priorities Framework (NIPF).

Perspective refers to the ability to understand all aspects of the operational environment (OE). At the operational level of war, this is typically analyzed by the framework of the

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Phythian, ed., *Understanding the Intelligence Cycle* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 10.

<sup>18</sup> US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 2-01.3, *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), I-7.

<sup>19</sup> “There are nine principles of joint intelligence. Synchronization, integrity, excellence, prediction, agility, and collaboration were not selected for evaluation criteria as they are difficult to quantify.” US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 2-0, *Joint Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office 2013), xi-x.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

operational variables— political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, time (PMESII-PT). At the strategic level, perspective is closely linked to prioritization as it is impossible to understand all aspects of a global environment and prudent risk should be accepted in low priority areas.<sup>21</sup>

Unity of effort is centralized planning and decentralized execution of intelligence operations to allow for efficient and effective processing, exploitation, and dissemination of intelligence products. At the operational level, this is the domain of collection managers who strive to collect on the priority intelligence requirements of their commander. At the strategic level, this is the duty of the DNI, who leverages the intelligence community to collect on the priorities of the President and the National Security Council.<sup>22</sup>

This research analyzes the dichotomy between intelligence success and failure at the operational and strategic levels of the Korean War. This analysis attempts to inform a modern audience on the significance of an effective intelligence cycle and adherence to the joint principles of intelligence.

## Onset of the Conflict

The origins of strife on the Korean peninsula can be traced back over hundreds of years. This research will begin with the Potsdam Conference of July 1945. Although not formally agreed upon, military planners anticipated the surrender of Japanese forces on the Korean peninsula. The planners sought to de-conflict the acceptance of surrendering Japanese troops with Soviet forces. Military planners recognized the importance of securing two deep water ports to logistically support this eventuality. They divided the Korean peninsula accordingly near the 38<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), x.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., xi.

parallel just North of Seoul. This eventually was codified by General Order 1, by Harry S. Truman and subsequently approved by the British and Soviet governments.<sup>23</sup>

The surrender of Japanese forces was not particularly remarkable and concluded by September of 1945. However, the dissatisfaction of the Korean people over the division of their country quickly manifested itself. The United Nations General Assembly established the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) in November of 1947 to aid in the establishment of a sovereign government, however they were denied entry into Soviet-occupied North Korea. From this point forward, the two Koreas embarked on divergent paths. In the South, the National Assembly adopted a constitution and elected Syngman Rhee as President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in July of 1948. In the North, the People's Assembly adopted a constitution and appointed Kim Il-Sung as Premier of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in September of 1948.<sup>24</sup>

The Republic of Korea was recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in December of that year. The Assembly further recommended the withdrawal of the US and Soviet occupying forces. The Soviet Union announced that its forces were to be withdrawn by Christmas; the United States initiated its withdrawal in March of 1949 and it was completed by July, save the five hundred advisors of the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG).<sup>25</sup>

The first two years of the Rhee regime were marked with challenges to its legitimacy. These challenges took several forms. The South Korean Labor Party, the Kangdong Institute guerillas, the Democratic Front, and countless communist cells throughout South Korea attempted to subvert the Rhee regime through terrorism and unconventional warfare.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Roy Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Nakong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1986), 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5.

<sup>25</sup> Allan Millet, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 190.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-253.

The Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) and Korean National Police (KNP) engaged in an aggressive counter-insurgency campaign. With limited assistance from the United States, and the help of KMAG advisors, the insurgency was largely quelled by the Spring of 1950. The limited military aid provided to the ROKA enabled it to be an effective internal security force. More robust military equipment was withheld as it was believed that equipping the ROKA for offensive operations would lead to an invasion of the DPRK. This belief was due in large part to the bellicose statements of President Rhee.<sup>27</sup>

The DPRK invasion on June 25, 1950 was the first strategic intelligence failure of the Cold War. It caught analysts, senior military officials, and policy makers completely by surprise. Assessing this strategic intelligence failure through the lens of the intelligence cycle and joint principles of intelligence may indicate how the United States was once again the victim of strategic surprise.

In terms of planning and direction, Korea was not very high on policy makers' radars. In June of 1950, the Department of State, not the Department of Defense, was responsible for Korea. It was also outside of the geographic area of responsibility of Far East Command (FECOM) in Tokyo. Despite this suboptimal strategic arrangement, military officials within KMAG and FECOM had fairly accurate order of battle information on the Korean People's Army (KPA). The order of battle of the KPA grew significantly throughout 1950 and by June the KPA was a modern combined arms force with significant numbers of Soviet armor, artillery, and air support to complement its infantry divisions.<sup>28</sup>

This intelligence was not significantly disputed at any level and gave a firm indication of the capabilities of the KPA to conduct offensive operations. The intent of an adversary is a

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<sup>27</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950*, 238.

<sup>28</sup> Allan Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951: They Came from the North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 29-35.

significantly more complex problem to ascertain than capabilities. Collection on the Korean Peninsula was limited both by modern and contemporary standards. The KMAG had no organic collection capabilities. Only two intelligence collecting entities were on the Korean peninsula in June of 1950: the Korean Liaison Office (KLO), established by Major General Charles Willoughby in 1949, and an Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) detachment.<sup>29</sup>

The KLO produced human intelligence (HUMINT) largely relying on host nation sources. The veracity of this intelligence was questioned at FECOM headquarters as host nation HUMINT reporting was not held in very high regard (a phenomenon that is not unique to the Korean War). The dire nature of the reporting emanating from the KLO was likely perceived by policy makers as a reflection of the Rhee regime's desire for more military and financial aid.<sup>30</sup>

The AFOSI detachment under Chief Warrant Officer Donald Nichols produced some raw signals intelligence (SIGINT) as well as HUMINT reporting relying on South Korean sources as well as North Korean defectors. The intelligence collection efforts of these two organizations was admirable but could do little to negate the lack of strategic imagery intelligence (IMINT) and SIGINT capabilities that could have corroborated their reporting and given legitimacy to South Korean HUMINT.<sup>31</sup>

The exploitation of KPA defectors by the ROKA intelligence section (G-2) further confirmed the mechanization and expansion of the KPA. Exploitation of communist infiltrators led to more arrests by ROK counter-intelligence agents but failed to produce accurate information regarding the timing of a KPA offensive. This failure to accurately predict the timing of an offensive led to erroneous warnings of an invasion throughout the Spring of 1950.

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<sup>29</sup> John Finnegan, "The Evolution of US Army HUMINT: Intelligence Operations in the Korean War," *Studies in Intelligence* 44, no. 2 (2000): 58.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951*, 40; Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 7-32.

The KLO produced over four hundred analytical reports warning of the pending offensive in the year leading up to the invasion. Critics have argued that this analysis was watered down at FECOM headquarters by the G-2, MG Willoughby. This charge is baseless, and an example of what Eliot Cohen and John Gooch have termed the dogma of individual responsibility, the desire of historians and contemporaries to blame individuals for organizational failure.<sup>32</sup> The adoption of a more conservative assessment by higher headquarters is commonplace and to label this tendency as an intelligence failure is a shallow argument. MG Willoughby was conducting his analysis under the assumption that approval from Moscow would precede invasion. He was correct in his assumption, however, he did not know that this approval had been given prior to June 1950. Had anyone in the intelligence community been aware of this fact, the indicators for a pending offensive would have been starkly more alarming and conclusive.<sup>33</sup>

The dissemination of intelligence relating to the pending invasion appears to have been efficient save for the fact that it mirrored the unusual command and control relationships on the peninsula. KMAG reports were submitted directly to the JCS in Washington. KLO intelligence products were submitted to the FECOM G-2 and then relayed to Washington. The intelligence reports of the AFOSI were submitted to FECOM. This bifurcation of intelligence reporting channels was not in and of itself problematic, but it likely contributed to the poor integration of analytical products to policy makers.

At the strategic level, Korea was not a priority in 1950. This is reflected by the allocation of forces and intelligence assets, budgets, and public statements of political officials. The foremost priority for strategic intelligence was the Soviet Union. Inside the Pacific theater, the priorities were focused along the “defensive perimeter.” This perimeter included the Aleutians,

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<sup>32</sup> Cohen and Gooch, *Military Misfortunes*, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951*, 40-45.

Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines. The Korean peninsula lies just outside of this defensive perimeter and accordingly, it was not an intelligence priority in 1950.<sup>34</sup>

Strategic intelligence priorities were thus focused along the priorities of policy makers in 1950. A fair criticism of the intelligence community would be a failure to convey the significance of the emergence of a combined arms force north of the parallel. Had they articulated this threat as the dominant narrative, US Asia policy may have been more aggressive, and not conceded that military means could not stop subversion and penetration in the Pacific theater.<sup>35</sup>

The combined perspectives of the KLO, the AFOSI, FECOM, and KMAG advisors provided a holistic perspective not only of North Korean capabilities, but also the significant asymmetry of military capabilities. These combined operational perspectives formed a strategic perspective that indicated conflict was imminent. Despite this strategic intelligence perspective, US policy did not adjust to the emergent threat of North Korea in any impactful way. This was due to the universally accepted and deeply held assumption that communist offensive action anywhere would be directed by Moscow and part of a global communist offensive—WWIII.<sup>36</sup>

Unity of effort of the strategic intelligence community was discernibly absent in regards to developments on the Korean peninsula. This is reflected in the lack of collection, bifurcated intelligence reporting, and the ad hoc nature of reporting. This was a symptom of the Korean peninsula being outside just outside of US geostrategic interests, the infancy of the strategic intelligence community in the wake of NSA 47 reforms, and the low priority assigned to Korea by policy makers.

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<sup>34</sup> Dean Acheson, “Speech on the Far East” (speech, National Press Club, Washington, DC, January 12, 1950), 1-3, accessed December 12, 2017, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/speech-on-the-far-east>.

<sup>35</sup> Acheson, “Speech on the Far East,” 1-3.

<sup>36</sup> P.K. Rose, “Two Strategic Intelligence Mistakes in Korea, 1950: Perceptions and Reality,” *Studies in Intelligence* 45, no. 5 (Fall-Winter 2001): 60.

The focus of strategic intelligence was not on the Korean peninsula in June 1950. The focus of collection was on Moscow and Europe, the historic overseas area of interest for the United States. Outside of these two areas, policy makers and senior intelligence analysts gave little direction to the focus of strategic intelligence. Dean Acheson in his speech to the National Press Club, clearly articulated that Korea was outside the geostrategic interests of the United States in the Pacific theater. In the FECOM AOR, intelligence focused on the Aleutians, Japan, the Ryuku Islands, and the Philippines.<sup>37</sup>

Assets were allocated according to this policy. Far East analysts at AFSA were cut by over 50% from June of 1946 to December of 1949. The remaining 112 analysts focused collection on the requirements of the Nationalist Chinese. There were only two part-time analysts devoted to Korean targets at the time of the invasion. In terms of HUMINT collection the existence of only two ad hoc intelligence entities on the Korean Peninsula in June 1950 further confirms the focus of policy makers in their meager allocation of resources to the Korean Peninsula.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to not having focus and being poorly resourced strategic intelligence analysis was crippled the most by relying on two inherently flawed assumptions relating to the outbreak of hostilities on the Korean peninsula. Senior policy makers and analysts believed that any communist offensive action would be indicative of global warfare and not be limited in nature. They further believed that communist action anywhere was centrally planned and executed according to the wishes of Josef Stalin. Dietrich Dorner recognizes this phenomenon as failure

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<sup>37</sup> Acheson, "Speech on the Far East," 1-3.

<sup>38</sup> Guy Vanderpool, "COMINT and the PRC Intervention in the Korean War," *Cryptologic Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (October 1998): 8.

gradually developing its own logic, where individuals develop habits of thought that set failure in motion from the very beginning.<sup>39</sup>

## Pusan Perimeter

The ROKA, well equipped and trained for counter-insurgency warfare, was ill-prepared to conduct defensive operations against a modern, Soviet-equipped, combined arms force. The Seven divisions of the KPA rapidly descended upon the South Korean capital of Seoul. President Rhee, elements of KMAG HQ, and members of the US mission narrowly escaped the city and crossed the Han River. The bridges of the Han River were quickly destroyed and the KPA advance was halted for a week as it consolidated gains in and around the ROK capital.

The United Nations and the Truman Administration were quick to respond to the invasion. On 27 June, 1950, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 83, condemning the offensive as a breach of the peace and recommending that member states furnish assistance to the Republic of Korea to repel the attack and restore peace. Three days later, President Truman appointed General MacArthur commander of UN forces and authorized the commitment of American ground troops to South Korea.<sup>40</sup>

MacArthur committed Eighth Army, the constabulary force occupying Japan, to the Korean peninsula. Eighth Army, under the command of Lieutenant General (LTG) Walton Walker, was experiencing the systemic personnel and equipment issues of the post WWII Army.<sup>41</sup> The initial elements of Eighth Army joined ROKA elements South of the Han River. The

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<sup>39</sup> Dietrich Dorner, *The Logic of Failure: Recognizing and Avoiding Error in Complex Situations* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), 10.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations, *National Security Council Resolution 83: Complaint of Aggression Upon the Republic of Korea* (Lake Success: United Nations Security Council, 1950), 1.

<sup>41</sup> “The Army ground and air forces began partial demobilization of its approximately 8,290,000 soldiers in May 1945 and by the end of 1948 had 554,000 soldiers.” David McCormick, *The Downsized Warrior* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 10.

combined force initiated an operational delay, trading space for time, to allow for the commitment of additional forces into the theater.<sup>42</sup>

For the most part, US forces fared no better than their Korean counterparts throughout the month of July as they, too, were ill-equipped to deal with a modern combined arms threat. They eventually occupied a defensive line from Pohang in the East, to Taegu in the West, and along the North-South running Naktong River to Masan. This defensive position was one of three recommended by the JCS, but the only feasible defensive position for Eighth Army in terms of battlefield geometry (the fusion of the military aspects of terrain with mission variables). The position contained the blue water port of Pusan, the point of debarkation for inbound United Nations Command (UNC) troops and supplies.<sup>43</sup>

Planning and direction for intelligence collection inside the perimeter at the operational and tactical levels was a far more black and white task than pre-war collection at the strategic level. The Eighth Army faced thirteen KPA divisions, descending upon their positions from the North and West. The priority for LTG Walker was detection of the enemy main effort. This would allow him to reposition his forces to prevent a significant penetration and the collapse of the defensive perimeter.

Eighth Army's predicament quickly rose in priority for intelligence collection. The AFSA surged its collection capability against North Korean forces expanding collection from two to twelve outstations. This increase in collection greatly expanded both the quantity and quality of COMINT intercepts resulting in hourly, round the clock, intercepts at AFSA headquarters in Washington.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 59-76.

<sup>43</sup> Patrick Weadon, *SIGINT and COMSEC Help Save the Day at Pusan* (Washington, DC: Center for Cryptologic History, 2016), 2, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.nsa.gov/about/cryptologic-heritage/historical-figures-publications/publications/korean-war>; Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-90, *Offense and Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-2.

In addition to COMINT, the need for greater HUMINT collection was also identified. The Headquarters of the KLO absorbed personnel from 441<sup>st</sup> Counter-Intelligence Corps to increase collection. Unlike HUMINT collection prior to the invasion, this reporting could be easily corroborated by Fifth Air Force assets and Eighth Army elements in contact. The Fifth Air Force also provided a means for the infiltration of HUMINT assets behind enemy lines to collect on intelligence requirements.<sup>45</sup>

The surge in capacity at AFSA was not only directed on collection, but processing and exploitation as well. Teletype forwarding was implemented to reduce the amount of time from the interception of radio traffic to dissemination and integration. North Korean radio traffic was now forwarded to AFSA within twelve hours of intercept and forwarded to customers shortly thereafter. AFSA Korean analysts expanded from two part-time employees and one Korean language enthusiast, to 15 analysts in a full time operations center.<sup>46</sup>

AFSA analysts quickly ascertained the North Korean order of battle. By 10 July, AFSA analysts had identified the principal command net of the KPA and subsequently recognized the two corps command structure bearing down on Eighth Army. Throughout the month of August, they were providing Eighth Army with translated COMINT intercepts regarding unit identification, troop movements, logistical re-supply, and detailed tactical orders. They also provided intelligence during the lull in fighting prior to the KPA offensive of 31 August, the last large scale, coordinated KPA offensive against Eighth Army in Pusan.

To bolster the dissemination and integration of intelligence, the KLO established Tactical Liason Offices (TLOs) at the division level. The TLOs augmented the capabilities of the existing

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<sup>44</sup> Jill Frahm, *SIGINT and the Pusan Perimeter* (Washington, DC: Center for Cryptologic History, 2016), 4-5, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.nsa.gov/about/cryptologic-heritage/historical-figures-publications/publications/korean-war/sigint-and-pusan-perimeter.shtml>.

<sup>45</sup> Finnegan, "The Evolution of US Army HUMINT," 59.

<sup>46</sup> Jill Frahm, *SIGINT and the Pusan Perimeter*, 2-7.

intelligence staffs of these organizations and augmented the flow of information both vertically and horizontally. The TLOs also became heavily involved in the recruitment of sources for intelligence gathering behind KPA lines.<sup>47</sup>

In terms of prioritization, the crisis on the Korean peninsula rapidly became a focus for the intelligence community. All available resources at the strategic and operational level were refocused on developing and refining intelligence estimates of the KPA forces. Strategic risk was incurred, particularly by AFSA, in reallocating resources away from Chinese and Soviet targets to North Korean targets. At the operational level, inside Eighth Army, after a month and half of retrograde operations, intelligence enjoyed a singular focus identifying the main effort of the KPA, and when and where they would attack.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout the summer of 1950, all sources of intelligence made significant progress towards understanding the relevant aspects of the operational environment. The relatively singular perspective of intelligence at the strategic and operational level led to the development of detailed intelligence estimates. Strategic SIGINT identified the enemy mission command structure and contributed to an accurate enemy order of battle. HUMINT and the exploitation of detainees provided insight into enemy capabilities and morale. Aerial observation, and photographic intelligence (PHOTOINT) corroborated SIGINT and HUMINT reporting and subsequently led to the targeting of enemy logistic depots and troop concentrations.<sup>49</sup>

The singular perspective presented by the KPA invasion afforded Eighth Army great unity of effort in intelligence operations. Unity of effort in intelligence operations is characterized by centralized planning and decentralized execution to allow for effective and efficient processing, exploitation, and dissemination. In the defense of the Pusan perimeter, this was

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<sup>47</sup> Finnegan, "The Evolution of US Army HUMINT," 59.

<sup>48</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., x.

demonstrated at the strategic level by the reorganization at AFSA and at the operational level by the KLO integrating with tactical level formations through the creation of TLOs. These two efforts were essential to the development of an effective and efficient common operating picture on the Korean peninsula.<sup>50</sup>

The intelligence cycle throughout the summer of 1950 was significantly more cohesive than the intelligence cycle leading up to the invasion. Intelligence at the operational level was focused on requirements. This focus on requirements enabled the feedback and evaluation of intelligence products that is necessary for intelligence to be effective and relevant. This dialogue led to the construction of a significant intelligence framework on the Korean peninsula and the development of intelligence products to support the combat operations of Eighth Army. Throughout the summer of 1950, Eighth Army transformed from a survival learning organization to an adaptive learning organization. Eighth Army's focus on requirements prompted a transformation of its intelligence warfighting function to enable a successful perimeter defense and eventually set the conditions for a successful transition to offensive operations.<sup>51</sup>

The resources that were re-allocated to Eighth Army inside the Pusan perimeter contributed greatly to the successful defense. The surge in AFSA collection, exploitation, analysis, and dissemination established a common operating picture for Eighth Army forces and allowed LTG Walker to maintain an economy of force inside the perimeter. With such a complete intelligence picture, he judiciously re-allocated forces to reinforce against enemy objectives, and allowed units not in contact to refit and reorganize with the addition of reinforcements from Japan.

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<sup>50</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency, 1990), 14; US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 2-7, 2-8.

The integration of COMINT to tactical units within twelve hours of intercept as well as the establishment of KLO liaisons at the tactical level allowed intelligence to drive operations. KLO liaisons were responsive to the tactical requirements at the division level and allocated HUMINT collection accordingly. Eighth Army also was able to validate the veracity of host nation HUMINT reporting through HUMINT-PHOTOINT correlation with Fifth Air Force reconnaissance missions. This integration of intelligence from the strategic to tactical level allowed Eighth Army to succeed in its operational delay, and enabled the boldest tactical action of the Korean War.

## Inchon Landing

An amphibious operation to sever the KPA lines of communication and culminate their offensive was not an intelligence driven operation. The Inchon landing was a product of the *coup d'oeil* of Douglas MacArthur who recognized Inchon as a decisive strategic point one week into the KPA offensive.<sup>52</sup> The unique geography of the Korean peninsula, MacArthur's experience with amphibious operations in the Pacific theater of WWII, and the proximity of Inchon to Seoul were likely the key drivers to this operational approach.<sup>53</sup>

Planning for the Inchon landing began in earnest during the first week of July when General MacArthur directed his chief of staff, Major General (MG) Edward Almond to begin considering plans for an amphibious landing. The FECOM G-3, Brigadier General (BG) Edwin Wright, led the planning effort of the Joint Strategic Plans and Operations Group (JPSOG) and developed three plans for amphibious landings on the Korean peninsula. Plan 100-B called for an amphibious landing at Inchon, Plan 100-C an amphibious landing at Kunsan, and Plan 100-D a

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<sup>52</sup> “*Coup d'oeil* is French for the cut of the eye. Carl Von Clausewitz's term for military genius.” Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 102-103; “Decisive strategic points are those which are capable of exercising a marked influence either upon the result of the campaign or a single enterprise.” Antoine Henri De. Jomini, *Roots of Strategy: Art of War* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books), 688.

<sup>53</sup> Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 488.

landing at Chumunjin-up on the East coast. To the dismay of the many Navy and Marine Corps Officers involved in the planning process, it became evident that MacArthur was determined to execute plan 100-B.<sup>54</sup>

Reservations about the plan related to the tides, hydrology, and the complex terrain of Inchon harbor, issues that MacArthur deemed to be purely mechanical and not insurmountable. Throughout the remainder of August, MacArthur was able to overcome skeptics and received the forces and approval to execute Operation Chromite on September 15<sup>th</sup>, the only viable date for an amphibious operation until October 11<sup>th</sup> due to the severe tidal anomalies of Inchon harbor.<sup>55</sup>

From an intelligence perspective, the sole focus on Inchon provided clear direction to the intelligence staffs of the joint force and allowed them to direct their collection on Inchon and the surrounding 100 miles (the area of operations for Operation Chromite). This intelligence collection began in July and was greatly accelerated in parallel with planning efforts throughout August and September.

Collection in support of Operation Chromite came primarily from aerial reconnaissance and HUMINT. Aerial reconnaissance focused on hardened defensive positions along the Inchon-Seoul mobility corridor. HUMINT collection was driven by Navy Lieutenant (Lt.) Eugene Clark, who developed a network of local Koreans to answer priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) regarding the status of Flying Fish Channel, the 53-mile maritime approach into Inchon harbor. They also reported on the composition and disposition of enemy forces on Wolmi-Do Island, Inchon harbor, and the surrounding area.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Edwin Simmons, *Over the Seawall: U.S. Marines at Inchon* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 2000), 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 18; Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 501; Allan Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951*, 241.

This information was processed and exploited continuously throughout late August to the eve of the operation on September 14<sup>th</sup>. This allowed for the further refinement of initial intelligence estimates and helped to drive the preparation of the objective through air and maritime fires. Preparatory fires were limited to 48 hours prior to D-Day to maintain operational security and not “burn” Inchon as an amphibious landing site. The further measure of devoting 60% of fires to areas North and South of Inchon also contributed to the deception effort as did feints at other possible amphibious landing sites.<sup>57</sup>

This all-source intelligence was analyzed by the Tenth Corps Intelligence Section and resulted in the production of an initial intelligence estimate on 28 August. This product estimated 6,500 enemy forces in the Seoul-Inchon area. Continuous collection and analysis further refined this estimate to 2,500 troops in the Inchon-Kimpo region to include two battalions of the 226<sup>th</sup> Independent Marine Regiment and two companies of the 918<sup>th</sup> Artillery regiment. The fusion of HUMINT collection and aerial reconnaissance identified 106 hard targets in the region that were nominated for joint targeting.<sup>58</sup>

The intelligence products developed in support of Operation Chromite were disseminated down to the battalion level and integrated into tactical plans. 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, armed with intelligence regarding the defensive positions and legacy Japanese caves on Wolmi-Do Island, brought tanks equipped with bull dozers and flame throwers to mitigate the threat and expedite the clearing of defensive positions. The preparatory fires successfully reduced organized resistance in the vicinity of Inchon, and the amphibious landing was completed with 20 killed in action, 1 missing in action, and 174 wounded. Enemy prisoners numbered approximately 2000, a testament to the validity of the intelligence estimates.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Simmons, *Over the Seawall*, 24-26; Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951*, 244.

<sup>58</sup> Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 500; Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951*, 248; Simmons, *Over the Seawall*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Simmons, *Over the Seawall*, 26-29, 43.

The intelligence warfighting function from the FECOM staff to Tenth Corps and subordinate elements was exclusively focused on making the Inchon landing successful. This singular focus allowed for intelligence collection to be effectively prioritized and not subject to the competing requirements that frequently occur in the crucible of combat. All available resources were thus applied to address the information requirements and intelligence gaps to turn Plan 100-B into an executable amphibious operation that would break the back of KPA forces in the South.

The prioritization of the Inchon landing led to collection on all relevant aspects of the operational environment. This holistic perspective was developed and refined throughout August and September through all-source intelligence operations. The terrain of Flying Fish Channel, Wolmi-Do Island, Inchon Harbor, the city of Inchon, the surrounding hills, and the Inchon-Seoul mobility corridor were obtained through HUMINT and aerial PHOTOINT. The weather was closely monitored and the departure of the United States Ship (USS) Mount McKinley was accelerated by 24 hours, to account for Typhoon Kezia on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps most impressive was the identification of anti-communist villagers on Yonghung-Do Island. These villagers were able to infiltrate the entire maritime avenue of approach and collect on the most pressing priority intelligence requirements of Tenth Corps, namely, the locations of mines, the extent of mud flats, the heights of seawalls and the disposition and composition of enemy elements in and around the objective.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the initial skepticism to Operation Chromite from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and senior officers familiar with the complexity of amphibious operations, it received great unity of effort from the intelligence warfighting function. In fact, the inherent difficulty of Inchon harbor as an amphibious landing site mandated the application of collection capabilities along with efficient and effective processing, exploitation, and dissemination of intelligence.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi.

Throughout August and early September, intelligence collection was solely focused on answering the intelligence requirements and filling in the information gaps that related to Operation Chromite. This focus allowed for the refinement of requirements and led to intelligence estimates that were extremely accurate, even by modern standards. The fusion of HUMINT and PHOTOINT painted a complete picture of the enemy and terrain along the maritime avenues of approach to Inchon harbor and beyond to the follow-on objective of Seoul.<sup>62</sup>

The inherent complexity of Inchon as a landing site and the enormous attention the operation drew from the Joint Chiefs of Staff led Tenth Corps and FECOM to have all the intelligence resources required to make this operation successful. The continuous collection of aerial reconnaissance as well as HUMINT operations from the initiation of planning to the eve of the landing enabled the operation's success. Without this continuous collection, the landing may have succumbed to the complex terrain of Inchon harbor and the UN counter-offensive may have culminated before the main body of Tenth Corps hit the beach.

Detailed intelligence products were in the hands of planners down to the battalion level in the landing force. This integration of intelligence to the lowest level was vital to the success of the operation. Perhaps the best example of the integration of intelligence was 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, who stormed Wolmi-Do Island with detailed intelligence regarding the locations of legacy Japanese fighting positions. 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion equipped their tanks accordingly, with plows and flame throwers, and cleared the island in 90 minutes taking 45 prisoners in the process.<sup>63</sup>

## The Chinese Intervention

The Inchon landing was a tremendous tactical success. Once ashore, Tenth Corps began a deliberate and methodical offensive towards the South Korean capital of Seoul. This offensive

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<sup>61</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>63</sup> Simmons, *Over the Seawall*, 27-28.

quickly severed the logistical lines of communication to KPA forces in the vicinity of Pusan. This complementary tactical action enabled the breakout of Eighth Army after one week of the Tenth Corps ground campaign to the North. The two elements linked up on the evening of September 26<sup>th</sup> and three days later, Gen MacArthur joined Syngman Rhee for a ceremony in the National Assembly Hall in Seoul.<sup>64</sup>

That same day MacArthur was informed by the newly appointed Secretary of Defense, George Marshall, that “We want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to proceed north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel.”<sup>65</sup> Unconstrained by limitations from senior leadership, UN forces drove North of the parallel on October 9<sup>th</sup>. Despite fierce resistance by the two remaining KPA Divisions, Eighth Army elements pressed their advance and seized Pyongyang on October 19<sup>th</sup>. Despite the growing intelligence indicators of Chinese intervention, UN forces continued their advance and closed on the Yalu River.<sup>66</sup>

The Communist Chinese Forces (CCF) achieved complete tactical and strategic surprise during the first and second phase offensives of October and November of 1950. The second phase offensive—a commitment of 30 divisions totaling over 300,000 soldiers rapidly overwhelmed elements of Eighth Army and Tenth Corps and quickly erased the belief that UN forces would be home by Christmas. The war dragged on for another three years, ending in a stalemate that remains contentious to this day.<sup>67</sup>

Planning and direction for strategic intelligence continued to focus on Moscow and Europe throughout the fall of 1950. Senior policy makers believed that any communist action

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<sup>64</sup> Russel Stolfi, “A Critique of Pure Success: Inchon Revisited, Revised, and Contrasted,” *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 2 (April 2004): 509-512; Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 537, 595.

<sup>65</sup> Eliot Cohen, “The Chinese Intervention in Korea, 1950,” *Studies in Intelligence* 32, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 50.

<sup>66</sup> Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 622-625.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

around the globe was at the behest of Josef Stalin. This assumption also led policy makers and senior intelligence officials to believe that any intervention in Korea, Soviet or Chinese, would also lead to a global conflict and WWII.<sup>68</sup>

COMINT collection first began to detect the movement of Chinese troops to the Korean border on July 17<sup>th</sup>, when AFSA synthesized thirty-five Chinese civil messages indicating that the Fourth Field Army was moving to Manchuria. This message was erroneously interpreted by the Army G-2, Major General Stafford Irwin, as an indicator of a pending Chinese invasion of Taiwan. This initial report was followed up by second report on September 1<sup>st</sup>, indicating that the 13<sup>th</sup> Army group as well as the 42<sup>nd</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Armies were deploying to the Korean border.<sup>69</sup>

Prior to the Chinese first phase offensive, AFSA was also able to collect on the communications of foreign diplomats in China. Intercepts of both the Dutch and Indian envoys revealed that Zhou Enlai, the Premier of the People's Republic of China had stated that China would intervene if US forces crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Dutch and Indian governments both later related these messages to the State Department through diplomatic channels. AFSA also detected the first indications of Chinese presence in North Korea on 27 September through intercepts of KPA radio traffic indicating the presence of a Chinese regiment.<sup>70</sup>

PHOTOINT along the border was not a collection priority for MacArthur. The limited aerial reconnaissance platforms were dedicated to the bombing campaign that was focused on destroying the industrial and transportation infrastructure of North Korea. This resulted in Eighth Army only receiving an average 3-4 PHOTOINT reports a day for October and November of

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<sup>68</sup> Rose, "Two Strategic Intelligence Mistakes in Korea," 57-61.

<sup>69</sup> Vanderpool, "COMINT and the PRC Intervention in the Korean War," 11.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 14.

1950. Although it did identify the build-up of up of 75-100 combat aircraft at Dandong airfield by October 15th.<sup>71</sup>

HUMINT reports prior to the first phase offensive were primarily from sources within the Chinese Nationalist (KMT) forces in Taiwan. This reporting was largely dismissed by analysts for their alarmist and circular nature. Once the offensive began, detainees provided the majority of HUMINT reporting to Eighth Army Headquarters.<sup>72</sup>

The processing and exploitation of HUMINT and PHOTOINT products appear to have been sub-optimal. The processing and exploitation of COMINT on the other hand, were spectacular. With sub-optimal starting conditions (AFSA had less than half of the analysts devoted to Far East Targets than it did in 1946) it was still able to process and exploit enough Chinese messages to develop an accurate CCF order of battle.<sup>73</sup>

Analysis and production in regards to Chinese intentions and capabilities was fundamentally flawed. All of the indicators that a Chinese offensive was imminent were discounted or watered down to support the flawed assumption that Chinese intervention would lead to a global Communist war effort at the behest of Moscow. The build up of forces along the Korean border was initially discounted as a partial commitment of forces (COMINT could not prove that all of the troops were present in those formations). Subsequently, it was regarded as a defensive measure to protect hydro-electric infrastructure along the Yalu River. This belief was held until the onset of the second Chinese offensive when the reality that 30 Divisions—over 300,000 CCF soldiers—was finally acknowledged at the tactical and strategic levels.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Cohen, “The Chinese Intervention in Korea,” 53.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>73</sup> Vanderpool, “COMINT and the PRC Intervention in the Korean War,” 8.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

The strategic assumptions about the likelihood were compounded by tactical assumptions regarding the asymmetry of capabilities between UN forces and the Chinese. MacArthur falsely believed that his air power would decimate any Chinese elements advancing into North Korea. This would prove to be a tragically false assumption. Analysis of Chinese order of battle highlighted what they did not possess. They were far less modern a force than the KPA had been. The ability of the Chinese to infiltrate and surround UN forces was never considered.<sup>75</sup>

The flawed intelligence products, developed at all levels, were effectively disseminated and integrated for both tactical planning and strategic decision-making. Various false assumptions underpinned the analysis in these products and the divergence with reality inherent in these products did not emerge until UN ground elements were in contact with CCF elements. This is an example of the phenomenon described by systems theorist, Charles Perrow, who identified that failure at one level can have immediate and adverse repercussions on another.<sup>76</sup>

The prioritization of collection was flawed throughout October and November of 1950. However, there was sufficient collection to produce ample indications of Chinese intent and capability. If more resources were allocated to answering the intelligence requirements regarding Chinese intervention it is likely that more indicators would have been discovered. Whether or not overwhelming evidence of an impending Chinese intervention would have enabled analysts and policy makers to overcome their cognitive dissonance is a hypothetical that cannot be answered.<sup>77</sup>

The perspective of intelligence analysts was fundamentally flawed. They falsely perceived the geostrategic environment and analyzed Chinese decision-making through a Western perspective. Had intelligence analysts considered how the Chinese viewed themselves and how

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<sup>75</sup> Cohen, "The Chinese Intervention in Korea," 57; Rose, "Two Strategic Intelligence Mistakes in Korea," 61.

<sup>76</sup> Cohen and Gooch, *Military Misfortunes*, 23.

<sup>77</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi.

Mao Tse Tung perceived US forces approaching Chinese territory the true inter-relationships among strategic actors may have been recognized. The failure to implement any group think mitigation measures to this false assumption resulted in an incorrect understanding of the basic sociocultural aspects of the operational environment.<sup>78</sup>

The intelligence warfighting function displayed unity of effort throughout the fall of 1950. It was focused on the destruction of KPA elements throughout North Korea. Unity of effort implies that the intelligence war fighting function is doing things right. It does not imply that the intelligence warfighting function is doing the right things or has a holistic understanding of the operational environment. The advance of US forces across the Yalu and the subsequent Chinese intervention illustrates the theories of Dietrich Dorner who identifies applying corrective measures too aggressively and ignoring premises that should have been considered as recipes for failure. The intelligence community failed to take either of these measures into account.<sup>79</sup>

The focus of intelligence throughout the fall of 1950 was not on the possibility of Chinese intervention. The focus of strategic collection remained on Moscow and Europe for indications of the onset of worldwide conflict. Chinese intervention was also discounted at the operational level and collection focused on the bombing campaign and the destruction of North Korean infrastructure. The exception to this was the small number of AFSA analysts who accurately articulated the impending offensive through COMINT intercepts of civil and military broadcasts.

The commitment of additional strategic resources to assess the possibility of Chinese intervention may have informed policy makers and analysts of Chinese intentions in the fall of 1950. However, policymakers and analysts were still operating under their deeply flawed

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<sup>78</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi; US Army Training and Doctrine Command, *The Applied Critical Thinking Handbook 8.0* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 71.

<sup>79</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi; Dorner, *The Logic of Failure*, 2; US Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-0.1, *Army Design Methodology* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 1-7, 3-1.

assumption that China, as a client state, could not intervene without the direction of Moscow and the initiation of a global war. The fact that these false assumptions survived the North Korean invasion indicates that the reality models of analysts and policy makers alike were deeply flawed.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

This monograph analyzed the intelligence warfighting function at the strategic and operational levels during the Korean War. The Korean War was selected to assess the dichotomy between intelligence success at the operational level of war and failures at the strategic level of war. Several case studies were selected to analyze the intelligence process at the strategic and operational levels. The onset of the conflict was selected as the first example of strategic intelligence failure. The Pusan perimeter and Inchon landing were selected for analysis of intelligence success at the operational level. The Chinese intervention was selected as the last case study for strategic intelligence failure.<sup>81</sup>

These case studies were examined through the lens of the joint intelligence process to evaluate the efficacy of the intelligence functions at the strategic and operational levels of war. These intelligence processes were further evaluated according to the joint intelligence principles of prioritization, perspective, and unity of effort. These intelligence principles were selected over the other six as they are more objective than the others to serve as evaluation criteria for the efficiency of the intelligence process.<sup>82</sup>

The analysis of the onset of the conflict revealed that planning and direction of intelligence collection on the Korean peninsula was poor. This was due to limited assets and the prioritization of Moscow, Europe, and the Pacific defensive perimeter over the Korean peninsula.

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<sup>80</sup> Dorner, *The Logic of Failure*, 42.

<sup>81</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 1 (2017), I-7.

<sup>82</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-01.3 (2014), I-5 - I-9; US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), x-xi.

This planning and direction was in accordance with the priorities of senior military officials and policy makers alike. The two intelligence organizations on the peninsula prior to the invasion developed detailed order of battle information on the KPA, but struggled with collection on enemy intentions.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to intelligence operations on the Korean peninsula being poorly resourced, and outside of US geostrategic interests, intelligence at the strategic level suffered the most from inherently flawed assumptions about the possibility of hostilities on the Korean peninsula. Throughout the strategic level of government individuals believed that any communist offensive action would not be limited—but total in nature, and part of a centrally planned global offensive directed by Moscow.<sup>84</sup>

The analysis of the Pusan perimeter by the intelligence process reveals the surge in collection dedicated to Eighth Army by the AFSA and the KLO. This surge in collection was matched by surges in processing, exploitation, and dissemination and integration. This surge led to the restructuring of the intelligence architecture within the Pusan perimeter to achieve greater unity of effort.<sup>85</sup>

The intelligence warfighting function was ultimately successful inside the Pusan perimeter because it focused on requirements, was well resourced, and was well integrated with tactical operations. These three factors resulted in an efficient intelligence process with efficient prioritization, a holistic perspective of the operational environment, and unity of effort in the intelligence process.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi; US Joint Staff, JP 2-01.3 (2014), I-5.

<sup>84</sup> Vanderpool, “COMINT and the PRC Intervention in the Korean War,” 15.

<sup>85</sup> Frahm, *SIGINT and the Pusan Perimeter*, 2-7; US Joint Staff, JP 2-01.3 (2014), I-7 – I-9; US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi.

<sup>86</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi; US Army, ATP 5-0.1 (2015), 1-7.

The analysis of the intelligence process for the Inchon landing indicates that the singular focus on intelligence requirements and information gaps resulted in the production of intelligence estimates that were continuously refined throughout August and September of 1950. This resulted in highly accurate and detailed intelligence estimates developed through HUMINT-PHOTOINT correlation. These products were disseminated down to tactical levels and greatly assisted in the success of the operation by developing shared understanding particularly in regards to the terrain and enemy forces.<sup>87</sup>

Intelligence collection for Operation Chromite was focused on requirements. The inherent difficulty of Inchon harbor as a landing site, as well as the involvement of senior officials in the planning process resulted in a well-resourced intelligence effort. The integration of intelligence estimates into the operations process was the ultimate key to the success of the amphibious operation.<sup>88</sup>

Planning and direction for strategic intelligence collection during the Fall of 1950 remained as flawed as they had been in the Spring of 1950. The priority for collection remained on Moscow and Europe. Collection at the operational level was focused on enabling the bombing campaign in North Korea. The exception to this was AFSA which managed to collect on the marshalling, staging, and eventual infiltration of the CCF into North Korea. The intelligence process was severely hampered by analysis of reports regarding the prospect of Chinese intervention. The strategic assumptions of senior officials and policy makers were projected down to tactical level leaders who believed they possessed an overwhelming asymmetry of capabilities over the CCF.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-01.3 (2014), I-7 – I-9; US Army, ATP 5-0.1 (2015), 1-7.

<sup>88</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-01.3 (2014), I-9.

<sup>89</sup> US Joint Staff, JP 2-01.3 (2014), I-5; US Joint Staff, JP 2-0 (2013), xi; Dorner, *The Logic of Failure*, 42.

The focus of strategic intelligence and the vast majority of its resources were not committed to collection on Chinese intentions. It is unlikely that a re-prioritization of resources would have prevented this strategic failure due to the false assumptions that pervaded analysis at the strategic and operational levels.

This monograph demonstrates that an efficient intelligence cycle and adherence to the joint principles of prioritization, perspective, and unity of effort do not determine success or failure. The case studies in this monograph demonstrate that intelligence failed at the strategic level because it lacked focus, was poorly resourced, and was based on deeply flawed assumptions. Intelligence succeeded at the operational level because intelligence operations focused on requirements, were adequately resourced, and were integrated effectively. Modern intelligence professionals must ensure that their intelligence operations are focused on requirements, are adequately resourced, are integrated effectively, and that their mental models do not overly rely on assumptions with regards to an adversary.

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