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**In Search of the Center of Gravity:  
Operational Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield**

**A Monograph  
by  
Major James A. Marks  
Military Intelligence**



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**School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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Finally, I will conclude by providing some thoughts on the link between operational IPB and campaign planning as well as implications for the Army in the 1990's and beyond.

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Major James A. Marks

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Approved by:

Lowell L. Day Monograph Director  
Lieutenant Colonel Lowell L. Day, M.ED

William H. Jones Director, School of  
Colonel William H. Jones, MA, MMAS Advanced Military  
Studies

Philip J. Brookes Director, Graduate  
Philip J. Brookes, Ph.D. Degree Program

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## ABSTRACT

IN SEARCH OF THE CENTER OF GRAVITY: OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE PREPARATION OF THE BATTLEFIELD by Maj James A. Marks, USA, 53 pages.

This study is about intelligence at the operational level. Specifically, it discusses intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) and its relationship with campaign planning. At the tactical level of war, the Army feels rather comfortable with intelligence architecture, the IPB process, and battle planning. At the operational level, however, IPB in support of campaign planning is not as clear or as codified in doctrinal writings.

To determine how operational level IPB supports campaign planning I must first look at current doctrine on intelligence preparation of the battlefield at both the tactical and operational levels of war. I will follow this with a brief review of the origins and evolution of operational art as well as a study of the theoretical literature of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz to demonstrate that operational IPB has its roots in their seminal works.

Next, I will analyze historical examples to establish the cause and effect relationship between operational IPB and operational success or failure in a theater of operations. I will examine two operational successes: the Wehrmacht during the initial days of the Fall of France in May 1940 and the US landing at Inchon in September 1950. I will also discuss two failures: the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain during August - October 1940 and the Viet Cong in the TET offensive in February 1968.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

The examination of the operational level of war and operational art is still evolving. Although the Army tends to produce better tacticians than it does operational artists, operational art is not simply higher level tactics. It is not lower level strategy either. But the operational level, however, does exist between tactics and strategy. Although "there is no theory or construct of war to which all armed forces...agree,"<sup>1</sup> the examination of the operational level of war is gaining a greater audience.

This study hopefully adds to that growing body of knowledge on the operational level of war. Specifically, it is about intelligence at the operational level. It discusses intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) and its relationship with campaign planning. At the tactical level of war, the Army feels rather comfortable with intelligence architecture, the IPB process, and battle planning. There are ample field manuals (FM) that discuss the tactical application of intelligence as a combat multiplier. At the operational level, however, IPB in support of campaign planning is not as clear or as codified in doctrinal writings.

By definition, a campaign is defined as "a series of joint actions designed to attain a strategic objective in a theater of war."<sup>2</sup> If IPB is a necessary

precondition at the tactical level it should be at the operational. However, this has not always been the case. Resultantly, intelligence preparation may be absent and fail to provide any direction to the campaign plan at all.

The purpose of this study is to determine how operational level IPB supports campaign planning. To accomplish this I will first look at current doctrine on intelligence preparation of the battlefield at both the tactical and operational levels of war. The operational paradigm for IPB will be the basis for my examination of the link between operational IPB and campaign planning. I will briefly review the origins and evolution of operational art, looking specifically at Napoleon and U.S. Grant. This will be followed by a study of the theoretical literature of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz as I attempt to demonstrate that operational IPB has its roots in their seminal works.

Next, I will use historical examples to establish the cause and effect relationship between operational IPB and operational success or failure in a theater of operations. I will examine two operational successes: the Wehrmacht during the initial days of the Fall of France in May 1940 and the US landing at Inchon in September 1950. I will also discuss two failures: the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain during August - October 1940 and the Viet Cong in the TET offensive in



February 1968.

Following the historical examples, I will analyze each campaign using the limited doctrinal writings on operational IPB as the criteria for my analysis. I will conclude by providing some thoughts on the link between operational IPB and campaign planning as well as implications for the Army in the 1990's and beyond.

Tactical IPB results in staff estimates, specifically the intelligence estimate and wargames of the potential friendly and enemy courses of action (COA). More than a mechanical process, whose result is a staff estimate, tactical IPB is a thought process that leads the commander to some conclusions about his adversary and his own capabilities to disrupt his opponent. To capture these "conclusions," a decision support template (DST) is created "for the most likely enemy course of action and probable branches and sequels"<sup>2</sup> to the friendly tactical plan.

Tactical IPB is crucial to friendly course of action development vis-a-vis the enemy. As such, it becomes "a combat synchronization tool"<sup>4</sup> that helps reduce the inevitable uncertainty of battle. Tactical IPB consists of five steps performed continuously and simultaneously (Figure 1):

- battlefield area evaluation
- terrain analysis
- weather analysis
- threat analysis
- threat integration

Briefly, battlefield area evaluation "involves assessing the battle area with regard to...friendly and enemy forces and the operating environment."<sup>5</sup> Terrain analysis determines the effects of "natural and man-made terrain"<sup>6</sup> on planned military operations and results in the identification of key terrain, possible avenues of approach, line of sight analysis, and obstacle overlays. Weather is analyzed "to determine its effects on friendly and enemy operations"<sup>7</sup> and is inseparable from terrain analysis. Threat evaluation is a detailed look at "enemy capabilities and limitations."<sup>8</sup> It is an objective examination of the enemy's force structure, doctrine, and weapons. The threat integration step takes the enemy's capabilities and limitations and integrates this information "with the analysis of the weather and terrain."<sup>9</sup> It produces a situational picture of the enemy and how he "might actually fight within the specific battlefield environment."<sup>10</sup>

The process continues. Following this situational snapshot of the enemy, anticipated events, both friendly and enemy, are analyzed to reveal indicators of probable enemy courses of action. Following this, friendly COA are wargammed against the most likely enemy COA resulting in a DST - "essentially a combined intelligence estimate and operations estimate in graphic form."<sup>11</sup> This process demonstrates that

tactical IPB drives the planning for battle.

At the operational level, the IPB process is similar to the tactical, but there are distinctions (Figure 2):

- theater area evaluation
- analysis of the characteristics of the theater
- threat evaluation
- threat integration

The theater area evaluation is essentially a political evaluation or area study of the region. It concerns the demographic, economic, and political aspects of the region.

Theaters of war...include many independent nations of diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds; and involve varied industrial and economic bases, with differing perceptions among citizenry concerning the severity of the political and military threat posed by an enemy.<sup>12</sup>

Analysis of the characteristics of the theater is not only analysis of the terrain and weather but also "topography, hydrography,...seasonal climatic conditions [that] often dictate when to launch campaigns and limit the strategies employed."<sup>13</sup> It includes the regional infrastructure of transportation, communications means, extent of urbanization, degree of modernization, and types of social systems.

Threat evaluation at the operational level is a broad focus on enemy capabilities and limitations. It must address "all forces available to the enemy in a theater of war...[their] composition, strength, location, and disposition...and effectiveness of its

reconstitution-sustainment effort."<sup>14</sup> Additionally, at this level, the personality of the enemy commander becomes a key element in the determination of his operational norms and the vulnerability of his normative behavior to disruption.

Operational level threat integration, much like its tactical counterpart, results in a DST of sorts. Unlike the tactical DST, the operational one is probably not a graphic representation of friendly and enemy courses of action. However, its result, identification of the enemy's center of gravity, is the impetus for campaign planning.

As the tactical DST drives battle planning and the synchronization of combat power to defeat the enemy's most likely course of action, operational threat integration focuses "on the sequence of actions necessary to expose and defeat operational and strategic centers of gravity."<sup>15</sup> Whereas the tactical commander understands his objective involves translating "potential combat power into victorious battles and engagements...between opposed maneuver forces,"<sup>16</sup> the theater commander must fully understand the political objective and determine "the suitable military means to be used."<sup>17</sup> Identification of the enemy's center of gravity is a necessary precondition to the design and execution of a campaign plan.

If battles and engagements comprise the realm of

tactics and major operations and campaigns do similarly for operational art, it is imperative to establish the operational level of war as unique and distinct from tactics. A glance at some definitions and the origins and evolution of the operational level of war is in order.

## Chapter II: The Operational Level of War: Origins and Evolution

It is generally agreed that the US hierarchy of war (not to be confused with the Soviet view on the same subject)<sup>18</sup> consists of the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Strategy and tactics seem to elicit congruence of definitions and terms. Operational art, on the other hand, generates little more than debate. FM 100-5, Operations, defines operational art as the

employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations.<sup>19</sup>

The only problem with this definition, which otherwise appears unambiguous, is that it requires a definition of "campaign" for complete clarity. Separately, FM 100-5 defines campaign as "a series of joint actions designed to attain a strategic objective in a theater of war."<sup>20</sup>

This definition of operational art is not final. One must acknowledge that "there will exist a wide variety of interaction between and among the levels of war."<sup>1</sup> As we try to define the operational level of war as a distinct entity, it is safe to say that the operational level exists between tactics and strategy and translates tactical actions into strategic objectives.

Operational art, as the practice of war at the operational level, can trace its origins to Napoleon, the great captain and military practitioner. He expanded the divisional "cordon" system into corps because of the inherent limitations of the cordon's size. Napoleon took the corps and created the "Grand Arme," a force of immense size, 250,000-400,000, and flexibility. It was mobile, and with its added size, capable of exploiting the opportunities that good fortune and the enemy provided. An army of this magnitude provided the freedom to seek battle and generally to ensure that battle was on favorable terms. It expanded and deepened the battlefield.<sup>2</sup>

This was the birth of "grand tactics,"<sup>3</sup> the embryonic form of operational art. Operations conducted successively on separate pieces of terrain throughout the battlefield by these larger units gave depth to what had previously been shallow and linear battle.<sup>4</sup> Not only was depth added, but also the coordination of

efforts throughout this depth. Events occurring in one location on the battlefield were tied to events occurring elsewhere. There was no loss of command and control with the increased size of units. In fact, synergy was achieved through the sequencing and simultaneity of actions. The attainment of strategy through tactics achieved form. This form was operational art.

The transition to operational art during the time of Napoleon was possible because of coincident changes in demography, politics, and technological advances. Demographically, Europe's population was growing. With the increased pool from which to draw soldiers to fill the ranks, the armies got bigger. Resultantly, they covered more ground both laterally and horizontally, thereby, providing greater linearity as well as the added dimension of depth to the battle. Politically, Europe was a tapestry of entangling alliances and shifting borders. These larger armies acquired a multinational complexion and were capable of fighting on several fronts simultaneously. A "theater of war," which could include an entire continent, evolved from the battlefield. Opposing nations' fortunes could no longer be resolved in a single, pitch battle.

Finally, technological advances created weapons of greater lethality. The rifled musket, the Minie ball, the breechloading mechanism, and the magazine ushered

in an era of speed and rapidity of destruction heretofore unprecedented in warfare. Armies concentrated at the risk of greater loss. The battle became a series of battles throughout the depth of the theater of operations."<sup>66</sup>

This notion of sequential and simultaneous actions unified in their intent, if originated with Napoleon, evolved with U.S. Grant during the American Civil War. Two examples revealed Grant's vision of operational art and placed him in history as a practitioner of operational art as it is now understood.

The first example was Grant's vision of a Union campaign in the Spring of 1864 described in his letter to General W.T. Sherman. Grant wanted to design a campaign that "would unite all military actions east of the Mississippi into an integrated chain of operations."<sup>67</sup> His intent was clear. W.T. Sherman was to move from Chattanooga toward Atlanta, the hub of Confederate rail traffic, and cause damage to the enemy's rear. Nathaniel P. Banks was to conduct a supporting attack from Mobile toward Atlanta. Grant would move to Richmond and fix Lee. His move to Richmond included Franz Sigel's mission to cut the Lynchburg-Petersburg railroad, Coerge Meade's movement south to fight Lee's forces, and Benjamin Butler's effort along the James River to threaten Richmond from the rear.<sup>67</sup> Grant tied all the seemingly disparate



actions together for a common end.

The second example demonstrated Grant's ability to grasp an operational concept in its entirety. On his move toward Atlanta, Sherman needed a demonstration in Alabama to protect his flank. Although an independent cavalry action was agreed to, Grant "enlarge[d] its scope"<sup>22</sup> and gave its new commander, Major General James Harrison Wilson, "permission to make the campaign on his own terms."<sup>23</sup> The mission had grown from a demonstration to a mission to strike at and destroy the enemy's center of gravity - its depots, sources of manufacturing and lines of communications and supply. The operation was a success.

Grant understood the need to synchronize actions in a theater of operations, but, more importantly, he grasped that "integrated" actions not focused toward the source of the enemy's strength would not necessarily fail but certainly would not decisively defeat the enemy. Grant knew that the enemy's center of gravity had to be destroyed or disrupted enough to deny its efficacy. Events had to be structured to "bring about the cascading disintegration of the enemy's center of gravity"<sup>24</sup> while protecting and maintaining coherence of friendly strength.

Identification of the enemy's center of gravity had to precede a campaign design of "integrated" actions as envisioned by Grant. But Grant did not

divine the enemy's center of gravity; it took a calculating process that if followed would uncover indicators of enemy vulnerability and strength.

### Chapter III: Operational Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield

It is not enough simply to list the elements of operational IPB as the means, that if used properly and without prejudice will reveal the enemy's center of gravity. It is essential at this point to establish the validity of the IPB process as an effective tool to determine the enemy's center of gravity. To do this, I plan to examine first the writings of Sun Tzu in the Art of War, to see what he said about, in doctrinal parlance, theater area evaluation, analysis of the characteristics of the theater, threat evaluation, and threat integration. Next, I will look at On War to see what Clausewitz said about the end product of the operational IPB process, the center of gravity, a term for which he is credited.

Sun Tzu addressed the need for a theater area evaluation in two ways. When closely examined, they correspond to the political, demographic, and economic aspects of a region. First, he discussed the influence of politics on a nation that had to conduct coalition warfare when he wrote "look into the matters of his alliances and cause them to be severed and

dissolved."<sup>21</sup> He realized that a nation's army did not always fight alone but supported or were in concert with the forces of another nation.

Second, a brief proclamation of Sun Tzu's has wide interpretation, "thus a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle."<sup>22</sup> If as stated, an army could be victorious without engagement, then that army represented a force so formidable and imposing that battle became irrelevant or its results preordained. That force was either the state itself or the army. He no doubt envisioned a state of economic strength and stability, one of abundant natural resources or access to those of a neighbor and with a population committed to and supportive of the state's interests. More simply, he may have seen an army, by virtue of its size, that was capable of exacting any price from its opponents.

Sun Tzu described, in his own words, the need for a thorough understanding of the characteristics of the theater of war with "know the ground, know the weather, your victory will be total."<sup>23</sup> He then went on to describe in detail the various types of terrain and how each dictated the terms and the objectives of battle waged upon them.<sup>24</sup>

As precise as his description of the characteristics of the theater of war were, Sun Tzu's comments on threat evaluation require no further

elaboration. "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."<sup>35</sup>

Knowledge of the enemy and his capabilities is critical to success in battle or in politics.

His descriptions of threat integration get at the heart of the operational IPB process and were as imaginative as his writings were colorful. Sun Tzu said "the primary colors are only five in number but their combinations are so infinite that one cannot visualize them all."<sup>36</sup> In context with this, he said "seize something he cherishes and he will conform to your desires."<sup>37</sup>

With these two proclamations, Sun Tzu described the essence of the operational IPB process. The "combinations" had to be reduced; the most likely "combination" would reveal "something he cherishes." The IPB process provides the guide to filter out the noise, or "combinations," so that identification of the enemy's center of gravity can be accomplished. If this can be done with a sufficient degree of certainty, then a campaign plan can be designed that will get the enemy "to conform to your desires."

Clausewitz, like Sun Tzu, knew that one could get an opponent to conform, but realized that this objective depended ultimately on combat power but, initially, on the direction in which that combat power was ruthlessly and aggressively hurled. He stated that

one must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement.<sup>20</sup>

This implied an understanding of the enemy and his intentions acquired through some process of study, experience, or both. Armed with this knowledge, a campaign to get at his "hub of all power," his center of gravity, could be designed.

For Alexander, Gautavus Adolphos, Charles XII, and Frederick the Great, the center of gravity was their army. If the army had been destroyed, they would have all gone down in history as failures. In countries subject to domestic strife, the center of gravity is generally the capital. In small countries that rely on large ones, it is usually the army of the protector. Among alliances, it lies in the community of interests, and in popular uprisings it is the personalities of the leaders and public opinion. It is against these that our energies should be directed...Blow after blow must be aimed in the same direction.<sup>20</sup>

The direction the campaign takes is a result of the operational IPB process. The product of this process is the identification of the enemy's center of gravity. However, determination of the enemy's center of gravity was and remains today a difficult endeavor. History is usually the final arbiter of whether the enemy's center of gravity was identified correctly.

#### Chapter IV: Campaign Execution

Many historical case studies can be cited to demonstrate the link between operational IPB and campaign planning and execution. The following four

examples were chosen because, in each case, the campaign design intended to strike a blow at the enemy's center of gravity. Two were successful; two were not. My plan for this historical examination is to use today's terminology for the operational IPB process to show how the current process would work and probably did work when the campaigns occurred.

### The Fall of France

By 1935, Hitler was well in control in Germany, and the Versailles Treaty, designed to disarm Europe, in fact, rearmed it. A rejuvenated Germany, nationalistic and zealous, under the thumb of its maniacal leader marched through Europe exacting territorial claims on its neighbors.

In 1938, Germany forcibly unified with Austria in March and annexed Czechoslovakia in two bites, the Sudetenland in September and the "rump" in March the following year. Poland fell in September 1939 and Norway in April 1940.

Temporarily assuaged by its alliance with Italy and its buffer to the east, Hitler turned west. The low countries of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg as well as France and Britain stood to face the German war machine. ←

Supreme confidence marked Germany's execution of its Plan Yellow, the assault through the low countries on 10 May 1940. (Figure 3) The German forces were

divided into Army Groups A, the main effort in the center; B, a deception designed to portray strength in the north; and C, the effort to hold the allies in the south. The intent of the German plan was to defeat the allied center of gravity, its ground forces, at the point of its greatest vulnerability or decisive point, the gap between the Maginot line and the intended forward battle positions of the allies in Belgium. This point was Sedan.

The Germans knew that the French wanted to defeat them in Belgium not France. Allied forces, hinged on the northern most part of the Maginot line adjacent to the Ardennes, would wheel from the French frontier into prepared defensive positions in Belgium. The door would slam on fortress France and in the face of the Germans, denying them a route into France. However, if the door could be unhinged, the movement would collapse. The Germans recognized the hinge to be Sedan.<sup>41</sup>

On 10 May, Germany launched its blitzkrieg against France. Plan Yellow "had a decisive objective: to cut off and destroy Allied forces north and west of Sedan."<sup>42</sup> The allies were accommodating. "The pivot of the entire maneuver"<sup>43</sup> of forces into Belgium was just north of Sedan an area opposite the seemingly impassable Ardennes. Additionally, the French had committed their 7th Army, previously the strategic reserve, to the defense beyond the French frontier. The

German forces emerged from the Ardennes, crossed the Meuse River, and the door slammed shut, not in the face of the German forces as intended, but behind the French and British. They "wedged themselves into a trap." German success was complete; France was defeated in short order.

### Inchon

By April 1950, the US had established its objectives and program of national security in National Security Document #68 (NSC 68). In it, the US committed itself to a policy of containment of communism, a strategic defense to hold the line of communist influence from further expansion. NSC 68 was the classified version of the strategy articulated by Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Specifically in the Pacific, Acheson indicated that US interests extended along the rim of islands from the Aleutians through Japan and to the Philippines, excluding Korea. It took little time for the communist government in North Korea to interpret what appeared to be an unequivocal message from the US - Korea was not in their sphere of interests. The North Korean Army (NKA) attacked south across the 38th parallel on 25 June 1950 to unify the peninsula.

The NKA was a tough, well trained force that was "stiffened with combat veterans" who had experience with the Chinese communists in World War II and during



the communists' revolution against the nationalists. However, the NKA displayed suspect generalship during their initial assault and drive south toward Pusan. Their efforts were piecemeal and not well synchronized. They quickly stretched their lines of communication and supply to a potential breaking point and provided little security for their tenuous link to the rear. The vital logistics center of Seoul lay virtually unprotected. The rate at which the Republic of Korea (ROK) forces had crumpled encouraged the pell-mell pace of the NKA campaign.<sup>47</sup>

Although the US quickly committed ground forces from the Eighth Army in Japan to the action in South Korea, their efforts provided little more than time as the NKA continued its drive south. However, as early as June, just several days after the invasion, General MacArthur, the Supreme Commander, Allied Powers (SCAP), in Tokyo, "realized that the North Koreans were in danger of outstripping their lines of supply, most of which flowed through the city of Seoul."<sup>48</sup> An amphibious operation to flank and disrupt the enemy in his rear "appealed to MacArthur's sense of grand tactics."<sup>49</sup> (Figure 4)

MacArthur's amphibious operation to cut the enemy's precariously thin supply lines began on 15 September 1950 at Inchon, 18 miles from Seoul on the west coast of the peninsula. MacArthur's evaluation of

the enemy was correct. The NKA provided little resistance to the landing, partly because the amphibious assault at Inchon was a complete surprise and because the NKA concentrated their combat forces for the offensive.

The US X Corps landed the 1st Marine Division which accomplished its objectives in no time. The 7th Infantry Division then passed through the Marines and linked up south of Seoul with elements of Eighth Army that had broken through the NKA lines to the south. The North Korean forces were decisively defeated.

#### Battle of Britain

Hitler did not intend to subject Britain to German military domination; he would have preferred to make peace under his terms. However, the British did not acquiesce to his desires and declared war on the Third Reich following its invasion of Poland. Hitler was shocked; England had to be defeated. A ground invasion was necessary.

The Fall of France in May was simply a precursor to his plan, Operation Sealion, to invade England. Hitler needed the channel ports and airfields from which to launch his assault. However, Germany's primary concern was Britain's naval superiority. The "Kriegsmarine" could not directly challenge the British Navy, yet mastery of the air could allow the Germans to neutralize the British during the crossing and within

the invasion area. The Luftwaffe had to defeat the Royal Air Force (RAF), the enemy center of gravity.

The campaign against the RAF began in August 1940 (Figure 5). Its intent was "to lure the RAF fighters into combat"<sup>22</sup> by attacking British airfields and forcing the RAF to defend them. The Germans intended their campaign to focus solely on the RAF and its capability to provide the third dimension to the defense of the British isles. In fact, Hitler was convinced that "victory over Britain in the air would bring about the end of the British resistance"<sup>21</sup> and possibly make an actual invasion unnecessary. Without actual mention of a center of gravity, Hitler focused his campaign on the enemy's source of strength, the RAF.

Within about three weeks, campaign execution by the Germans no longer reflected campaign planning. Germany shifted "the focus of their attacks from the airfields to London"<sup>22</sup>. This provided the RAF and the airfields an invaluable respite. German fighters, no longer focused and untethered to attack British fighters, escorted German bombers on their raids against the capital. The RAF reclaimed the initiative. Hitler had "misjudged [British] will power"<sup>23</sup> to resist his bombing efforts and underestimated the RAF's ability to strip away the fighter cover. His bombers exhausted themselves during the blitz on London.

The German air campaign never maintained its focus against the enemy's center of gravity, the RAF. There was a clear lack of will by the German High Command to see the campaign through to completion. Although it did bloody the RAF as well as the British people,<sup>54</sup> it was an unqualified failure for Germany, "a tale of divided counsels, conflicting purposes, and never fully accomplished plans."<sup>55</sup>

### TET 1968

By 1968, the little war in Vietnam had evolved into a big war. The US could no longer afford to pursue it as relentlessly as it had intended, and it felt increasingly less sanguine about extricating itself from it. General Giap, the military leader of communist North Vietnam, accurately assessed that America was "overextended - its resources strained"<sup>56</sup> not only within Vietnam but also domestically and in terms of its global defense responsibilities.

To the communists, the defeat of the south would necessarily follow a collapse of the alliance between the governments in Saigon and Washington. If Washington was either unwilling or unable to continue to keep the government in the south erect, Saigon would collapse of its own corrupt weight. The north believed that the south was "ripe for revolution,"<sup>57</sup> infected with a disgruntled, weary, and fractious population. Success for Hanoi would come by attacking the alliance, the

decisive point. This would instigate a catharsis of revolution from the people, the enemy center of gravity. Hanoi's plan was to attack the alliance, and the people would fall.

The communists took advantage of the Tet (Chinese New Year) celebrations to infiltrate large numbers of units and equipment into the south. In early morning darkness on 31 January 1968, the assault began throughout the south (Figure 6). The north knew that the Americans and their allies would honor the Tet cease fire agreement. Without the restraints of a western protector, the communist north, "after centuries of internecine turmoil, were innured to duplicity."<sup>50</sup> To launch an assault during a declared cease fire was not a problem to Hanoi.

The north wanted to avoid a repeat of the conventional fights that had already cost them dearly. Therefore, the insurgent, unconventional tactics of the Viet Cong were used in this campaign. Very little of the south was immune from the offensive. But in its efforts to uncover American and South Vietnamese vulnerability everywhere, the Viet Cong failed to show strength anywhere. In a pure military sense, the offensive "represented a disastrous failure for the Communists."<sup>51</sup>

The American and South Vietnamese alliance remained strong, and because the alliance won, the

anticipated popular uprisings in the south never happened. Tet gave the US and South Vietnam forces an opportunity, of which they availed themselves, to kill large numbers of Viet Cong forces as they surfaced to hit their objectives and inspire the people to rise up against the government in the south. Hanoi's miscalculation cost them approximately 50,000 insurgents killed as well as the Viet Cong hierarchy in the south.<sup>60</sup>

The communist efforts failed

despite the fact that nearly seventy thousand Communist soldiers had launched a surprise offensive of extraordinary intensity and astonishing scope...surging] into more than a hundred cities and towns including Saigon, audaciously shifting the war for the first time from its rural setting to a new arena - South Vietnam's supposedly impregnable urban areas.<sup>61</sup>

In an interview after the war, General Giap, shedding light on his abilities to identify and then destroy the enemy's center of gravity, spoke with amazing candor by acknowledging that he had set objectives "that were beyond our [Viet Cong] actual strength."<sup>62</sup> A misconceived campaign plan resulted in flawed execution.

#### Chapter V: Operational IPB Results: Successes and Failures

These four historical case studies are representative of the utility of operational IPB to

drive the design of a campaign. In each example, the campaign achieved its final form after a methodical process that resulted in what was considered to be proper identification of the enemy's center of gravity. Each campaign design changed or evolved as the elements of the IPB process changed. Analysis of those changes was required; the form the analysis took was the IPB process.

Each element of the IPB process contributes to the identification of the enemy's center of gravity. However, in each campaign one of the four elements may appear to assume primacy over the others. My desire in this chapter is to discuss the element or elements of the IPB process that seem to point most critically toward the identification of the enemy's center of gravity without ignoring the contributions of the others. However slight the analysis of some of the elements, it is not intended to deny their importance or contribution to the effort to identify the enemy's center of gravity.

#### The Successes

##### The Fall of France

The picture that the Germans constructed in May 1940 was of a vulnerable yet, ironically, very militarily capable France. Germany had to exploit these seemingly mutually exclusive characteristics to their advantage.

Germany's theater area evaluation and analysis of the characteristics of the theater favored their desires for conquest of the west. Britain and France assisted by the Low Countries were united against Germany. Belgium, for example, understood the inevitability of war on its soil having experienced first hand the horrors of World War I. However, it refused to allow the stationing of allied forces there. Only the initiation of hostilities by Germany would spring Belgium into war.

Belgium has always been less a military prize than a geographical unfortunate. It temptingly offers some of the best terrain and facilities in northern Europe for tank and motorized columns.<sup>63</sup>

The fight would occur in Belgium.

On the surface, threat evaluation favored the western alliance. They outnumbered the Germans in all categories of weapons except air power,<sup>64</sup> the vital factor in Germany's blitzkrieg. Additionally, the French, despite the impression of a defensively oriented force that the Maginot Line projected, had an offensively spirited Army, enthusiastic and professional.

However, scenes of the Army along the French frontier were "horribly depressing."<sup>65</sup> France had been engaged in a "Phoney War against the Germans for years - full mobilization, false alarms, resentment within the enlisted ranks for the elitist officers and



detached civilian population, boredom. These and other viruses were "sapping military morale."<sup>66</sup> The French and their military were not committed to the eventuality of war; they were exhausted before the first shot was fired.

The Germans saw a strong yet jaded French military that wanted to avoid a repeat of the destruction of French soil and youth of World War I. Therefore, the Franco-British plan "meant that the main striking power...was to be committed to whatever might transpire in Belgium and Holland."<sup>67</sup> The hinge to that "main striking power" into Belgium or Holland lay in Sedan.

By securing Sedan, the Germans were positioned to accomplish several sequential tasks that laid bare the allied strength and revealed its vulnerabilities. The Germans hit the allies in an economy-of-force area just north and west of the Maginot Line with the bulk of their strength at a time when the allies were rushing east into Belgium. The Germans quickly crossed the Meuse River then turned to entrap the allies in a pocket that stretched from the channel coast to Sedan. The war ended swiftly.

The center of gravity for the allies was their ground forces poised along the frontier with Germany and the Low Countries. The decisive point was the area just north of Sedan. If this area had been held and denied to the Germans for several days, the entire

course of the war might have been different. The Germans would have been bunched up in the Ardennes, the access to Sedan from the east, with forces vulnerable to attack from the air or a flanking movement by the allied ground forces. Sedan was key; it was clear that the German command knew this. With iron will, they went after it.

### Inchon

MacArthur knew how he wanted to attack the North Koreans only several days after their assault to the south.<sup>60</sup> Although the success at Inchon could be argued to be the result of MacArthur's genius or perspicacity, an IPB, albeit truncated, did occur. After his many years in the region, MacArthur had knowledge of the theater, characteristics of the theater, and the enemy. It is not surprising that MacArthur had a vision of the campaign design so soon after the invasion from the north. His IPB of the situation on the Korean peninsula before the execution of the amphibious landing at Inchon, however, did focus primarily on the evaluation of the theater and the threat itself.

MacArthur knew the theater, its regional actors, and their goals. The US committed itself to ground combat in Korea based largely on the belief of the SCAP that neither the Chinese Communists nor the Soviets would commit ground forces to aid their client in Pyongyang, the capital in the north. He was proven

wrong later in the war when he crossed the 38th parallel and pushed north to Pyongyang. However, during his campaign at Inchon, he was absolutely correct. Neither the Chinese nor the Soviets would get involved at this point.

The push toward Pusan overextended the North Korean lines of supply; the lines were critical to success yet vulnerable. Without them, the offensive would dry up from a lack of supplies, command and control, and fresh units to continue the drive down the length of the peninsula. What few roads and rail nets there were oriented on Seoul. The North Koreans left them unprotected, choosing instead to send their combat forces to the offensive in the south.

The NKA was exposed to the rear with nothing to protect it. Additionally, they possessed no naval capability to threaten MacArthur's planned movement of amphibious ships and combatants toward Inchon. The North Korean center of gravity, their lines of supply, lay exposed and vulnerable; MacArthur went after it.

Despite the immense obstacles, the Inchon tides, the parochial hesitance of the Navy to assume the risk of the landing, the operational conservatism of the Joint Chiefs, and the lack of a clear strategic vision of what this campaign was to accomplish,<sup>69</sup> the landing at Inchon hit the enemy hard in his rear and routed him completely.

The campaign was synchronized toward the accomplishment of a single goal, to paralyze the enemy by hitting his lines of communication. The enemy's center of gravity drove campaign planning and execution never deviated from the plan's intent; a tribute to both the genius of the plan and the will of its architect.

### The Failures

#### The Battle of Britain

It is quite tempting to lay the failure of the German air campaign at the feet of Hitler alone. Hitler's "tactical" level meddling during the ground and air campaigns of the war is well documented.<sup>70</sup> Arguably, Hitler's personal decision to redirect the efforts of the Luftwaffe away from the RAF and to concentrate on bombing London was the single greatest blunder in execution of what seemed to be a sound campaign plan. However, German failure was not Hitler's. It was linked to its operational IPB, specifically its evaluation of the threat.

The air campaign against Britain occurred for one reason: to achieve a secure rear as Germany sought its great prize, Russia and "lebensraum" for the German people. Success in the air campaign was a necessary precondition to an invasion of the British Isles. Germany had to defeat the RAF.

In the summer of 1940, Germany's IPB of Britain

was not entirely correct. They did understand the theater and Britain's isolation in Europe. As well, they understood Britain's historic sense of security as an island, naturally protected and aloof. Finally, Germany viewed the British military as inept, in disarray and beaten on the coast of France in May of that year.

It was only the temporary 'nakedness' of the British forces, after losing most of their arms and equipment in France, that offered such a...possibility of success...as Goring assured him [Hitler] that the Luftwaffe could check the British Navy's interference [in a cross channel invasion] as well as drive the British out of the sky.<sup>71</sup>

However, Germany's perception of the ineptness of British ground forces at Dunkirk colored their objectivity. The RAF fighter pilots had no experience equal to those in the Luftwaffe. The Germans knew this and were supremely confident in their abilities. Additionally, German estimates of British fighter production were extremely low "allowing for 180-300 a month-whereas it actually rose to 460-500"<sup>72</sup> in August. Even during the bombings of the centers of industrial production later in the campaign, these figures did not drop off.

A month into the campaign,<sup>73</sup> the Germans shifted their emphasis to the bombing blitz of London principally for two reasons. First, the British bombed Berlin in retaliation for a bombing run on London by

the Luftwaffe which the Germans defended as the mistake of a lost bomber. Hitler, unaware of his "first strike" against London, thought the British had provoked him. The "attack enraged [him]."74 Hitler lost sight of the center of gravity and changed the focus of the campaign to the defeat of the British people, their will to resist. Second, German estimates of their kills against the RAF were a study in hyperbole - a frequent phenomenon of battle damage assessment associated with air campaigns. The Germans thought that they had delivered a knockout blow to the RAF. Their estimates of kills far exceeded the actual by a factor of more than three - 915 actual British losses versus the German estimate of 3058.75

The combination of London's "first strike" against Berlin and German estimates of RAF kills prompted a shift in the effort of the air campaign. Germany thought that it had defeated the British center of gravity, the RAF, and that it could no longer resist. It shifted the campaign to bombing.

The operational IPB conducted by the German High Command did drive the campaign plan. However, the campaign's main effort shifted without sufficient justification or further evaluation of the threat. The Luftwaffe underestimated RAF capabilities and fighting ability. Any respect the German military might have had for British military acumen was lost on the beaches of

Dunkirk in May.

Finally, Germany's threat integration was incomplete. Nazi fascism served to coalesce rather than divide the British people. Their will might have been broken, but an air campaign alone, even if its combat power had not been diluted with attacks on disparate targets, was probably insufficient.<sup>76</sup> The Luftwaffe's failure was not the exclusive property of Hitler's whimsy. Germany's operational IPB, specifically its threat evaluation and integration was inadequate. A more thorough IPB might not have changed the German identification of the enemy's center of gravity or its campaign planning, but it certainly would have changed the campaign design in the allocation of combat power and the duration of execution of the air campaign against the RAF.

#### TET 1968

The communist offensive in February 1968 intended to destroy the alliance between the governments in Saigon and Washington, the decisive point. In turn, the south's center of gravity, its people, would fall. Hanoi believed that the people would lose confidence in Saigon if the alliance fell. However, Hanoi failed to strike at the alliance and instead went after the enemy's center of gravity. This failure can be traced to an inaccurate assessment of the theater evaluation and concomitantly a failure to integrate the threat.

The communist Vietnamese in 1968 were convinced the the South Vietnamese people were ready to shed the yoke of American domination and "to topple the Saigon regime."<sup>77</sup> Coincident to this, the north viewed the alliance between Saigon and Washington as precarious and vulnerable. Hanoi was convinced that an attack aimed at the alliance would cause it to fall and propel the latent energy of revolution in the south into action.

However, Hanoi failed in its theater analysis to "correctly evaluate [the] specific balance of forces"<sup>78</sup> within the military, political, and economic elements of national power in the south's alliance with the US. The depth of US involvement in the make-up of the government in the south was underestimated by the north. The government in Saigon reflected Washington's intentions to provide it with "stability and viability."<sup>79</sup> Compared to the early 1950's when "the American imprint on South Vietnam was barely visible,"<sup>80</sup> by 1968, US influence was omnipresent. However, the people of the south, more used to American than communist Viet Cong presence in the countryside and more inclined to go with the present winner than side with ideology, had no ideological affiliation with the communist north. They were not ready to join the revolution.

If the communist intentions were to encourage a



"restive southern population"<sup>21</sup> to struggle against the aggressors from America and the corrupt government in Saigon, they failed to integrate the threat with the realities of the conditions in the south. In other words, Hanoi misjudged the South Vietnamese political preparedness for revolution. The people in the south did not care. Hanoi's miscalculation of the south's recalcitrance to join the struggle pushed the communists to execute their campaign with tactics of pure terror and abomination.

The VC had lost, and VC terror and destructiveness of fighting had stood in sharp contrast to communist promises of a secure and happy future for every Vietnamese. By calling the prospect of victory into question and betraying the promise of a better future, the Tet offensive had stripped away the VC's two most alluring claims to popular support and compromised the integrity of their propaganda.<sup>22</sup>

Communist Vietnamese operational IPB resulted in a proper identification of the enemy's center of gravity as the people. They figured they would exploit this source of strength with a campaign designed to attack the alliance between the south and the US. However, campaign execution changed from attacking the alliance, the decisive point, to attacking the source of strength, the people. The campaign not only alienated the people but also evolved into seemingly random displays of tactical acumen and stupidity by the VC. "They fought stubbornly, sometimes blindly, and frequently abandoned their flexible tactics to defend

untenable positions."<sup>33</sup> The VC expended themselves throughout South Vietnam without operational result.

By 1968, the communists had been bloodied in battle by the US; they could not directly beat this leviathan. But they could have beaten its client, the south, and its military forces if they had stuck to the campaign plan. If Hanoi had concentrated its efforts against the military forces of South Vietnam, the weaker partner of the alliance, and not shifted its focus to the population, the US would have stood alone, the people having gone the way of the winner. The communists, however, did not understand the people of the south as well as they thought. Their campaign was ill conceived, and it failed.

#### Chapter VI: Conclusions and Implications

At the operational level of war, campaign design must have clear direction and purpose. The "noise" of the tactical battle must translate into strategic success. As stated by Clausewitz, the "principal effect lies in the realm of tactics, but the outcome is a matter of strategy."<sup>34</sup> This can only be accomplished through the design and execution of campaigns. The inspiration for campaigns is the identification of the enemy's center of gravity. Once known, the enemy's center of gravity drives the design of the campaign. The clarity of the commander's vision of the enemy's

center of gravity must not be affected by the inevitable fog of war; execution must stay the course.

The process of an operational level IPB is intended to provide the campaign not only with design but justification as well. The end product of such an IPB process at the operational level is the enemy's center of gravity. However, the IPB process may result in an enemy center of gravity that exceeds one's ability to disrupt it, like the communist TET offensive, or a center of gravity that is inappropriately attacked by military means.

In this case, the IPB process is an invaluable tool. As stated by Sun Tzu, "If not in the interest of the state, do not act. If one cannot succeed, do not use troops."<sup>25</sup> These words have never been more appropriate than they are today with the communist world in retreat and resultantly, a US military, specifically the Army, getting smaller with fewer forward deployed forces. Operational IPB is now more, not less, important.

Although there are "unprecedented changes occurring in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries, other intricate and dangerous challenges are emerging."<sup>26</sup> While the prospects of high intensity conflict in Central Europe abate with the possible withdrawal of some of the forward deployed air and ground strength, low intensity conflicts involving many

actors jockeying for regional primacy of their principles, their ideology, or access to regional resources will become more prevalent. The US military will "play a predominantly supportive,"<sup>87</sup> not its heretofore leading, role.

With forward deployed forces, the enemy's center of gravity is its military forces, its capability to wage war in the theater. The placement of troops a priori indicates a willingness to assume battle to achieve ends. However, as the US Army moves back from its military forward deployed presence and into a "contingency Army,"<sup>88</sup> efforts to insure the security of national interests in a particular region of the world may be more appropriately handled economically or diplomatically. The use of military forces for conflict resolution must now be viewed and questioned critically. It can no longer be accepted as the means of choice.

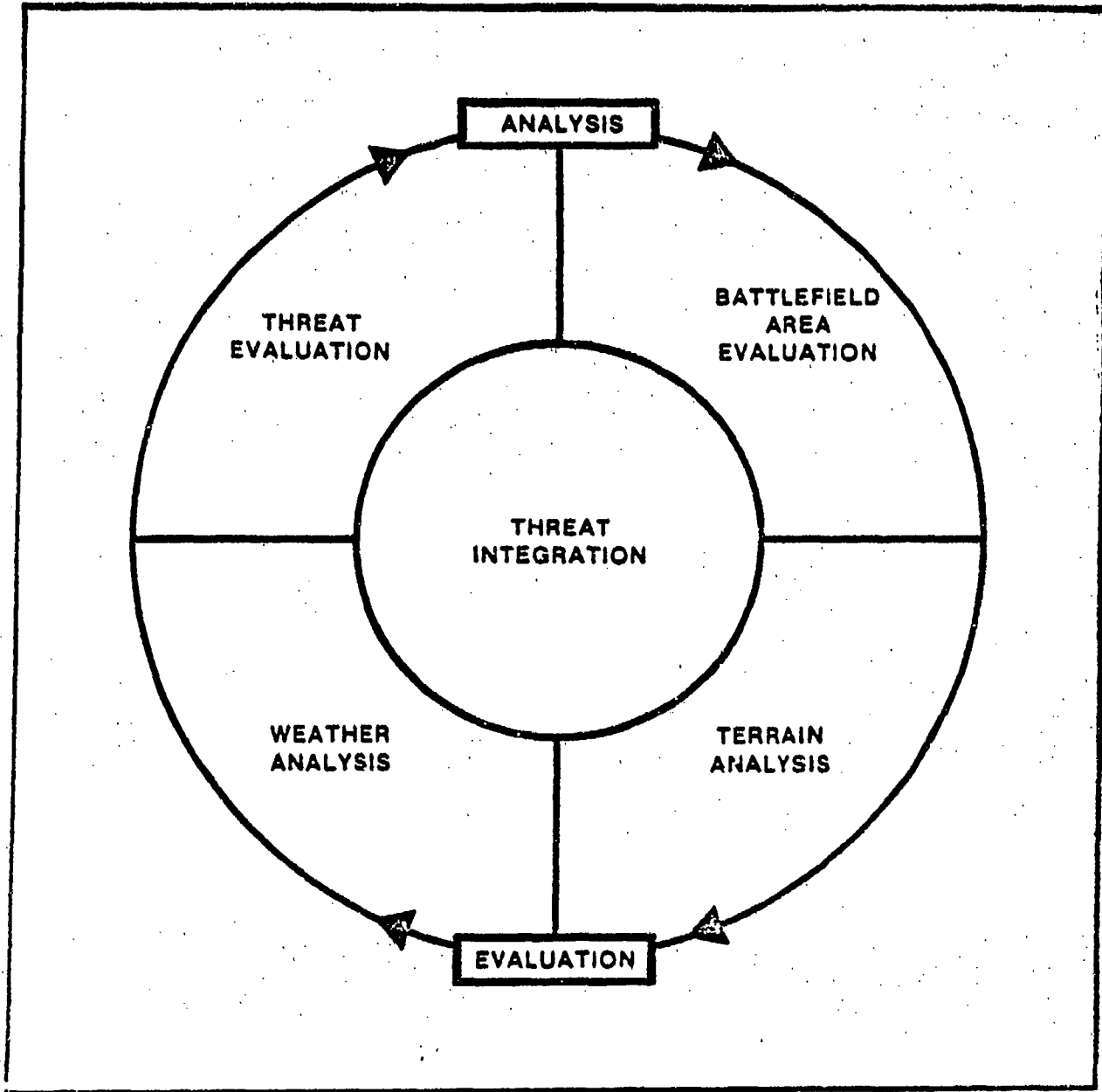
The use of Army forces in a contingency role will remain, however, a viable means to secure or preserve US interests. But the contingency role must not be entered into blindly. The Clausewitzian analogue is his description of flank operations. He stated that "forces sent to operate against the enemy's flank are not available for use against his front."<sup>89</sup>

The "contingency Army" is getting smaller and will continue on its path of fiscal austerity. There are

fewer forces to commit to the "flanks" or regional conflicts and, once committed, not available elsewhere without some loss in responsiveness and capability. The Army must understand fully the nature of the next potential enemy before the decision to commit forces to combat, an act of "great physical and moral superiority."<sup>90</sup>

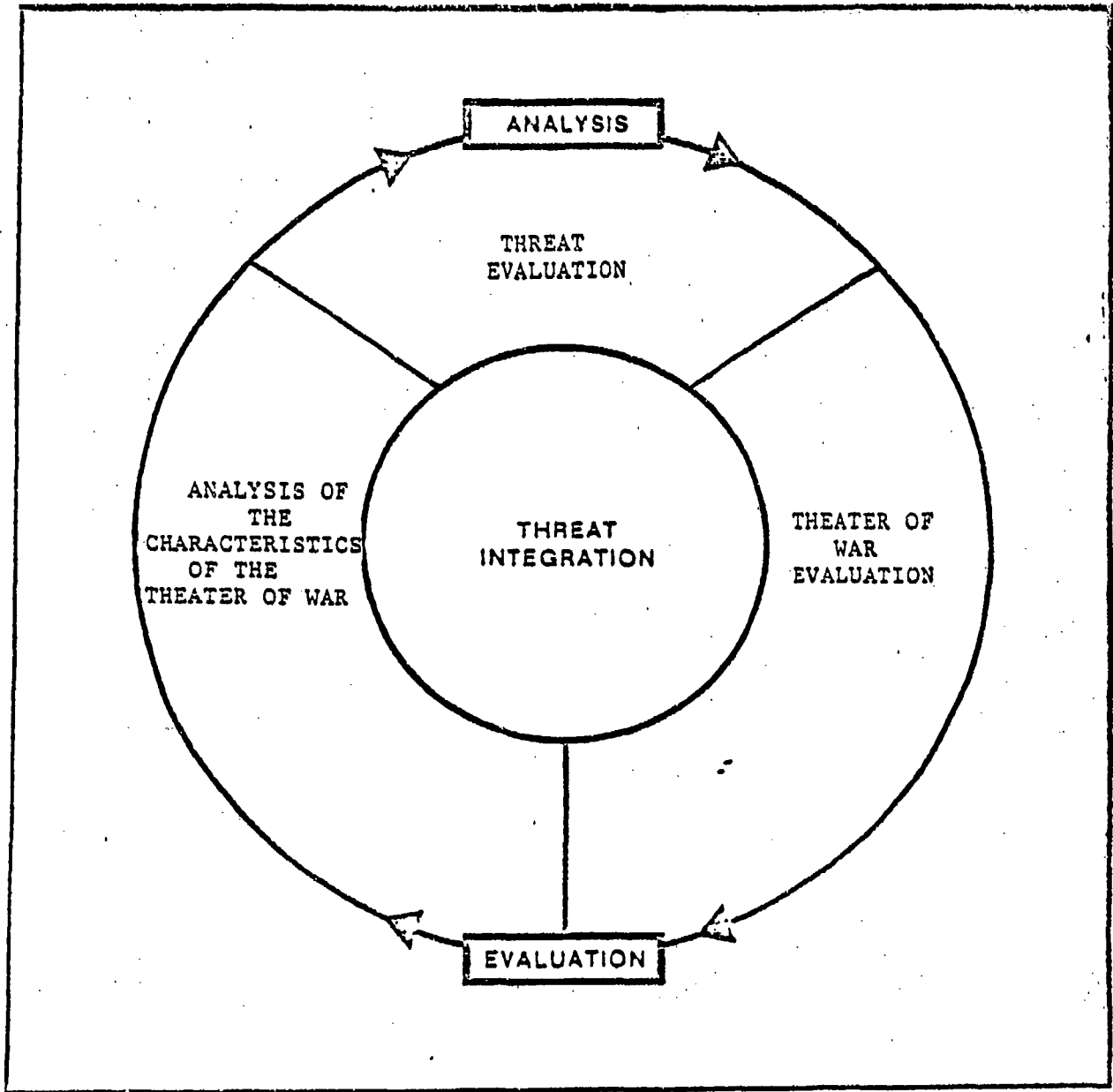
Operational IPB, now more than ever, is an essential tool to assist the operational level commander know the enemy and help him identify the enemy's center of gravity. The halcyon days of a known, quantifiable threat are no more. We are challenged by a world of disparate and often inexplicable enemies whose motivations may be unclear. The campaigns we design to meet these challenges must be driven by knowledge of the enemy's center of gravity, the holy grail of the operational level intelligence preparation of the battlefield, and go after it.

FIGURE 1: TACTICAL IPB PROCESS



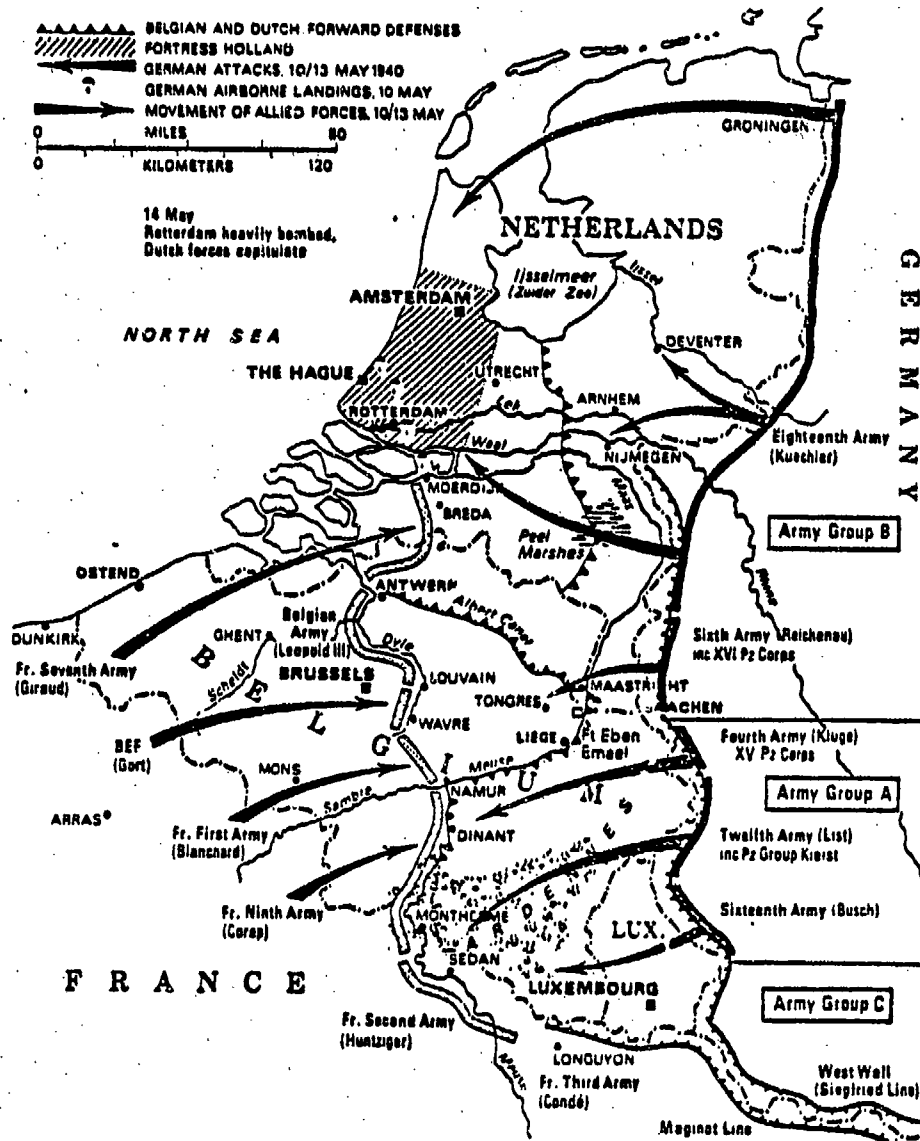
Extracted from FM 34-130, Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, p.4-2.

FIGURE 2: OPERATIONAL IPB PROCESS



Steps delineated in FM 34-130, IPB, were put into graphic form by the author.

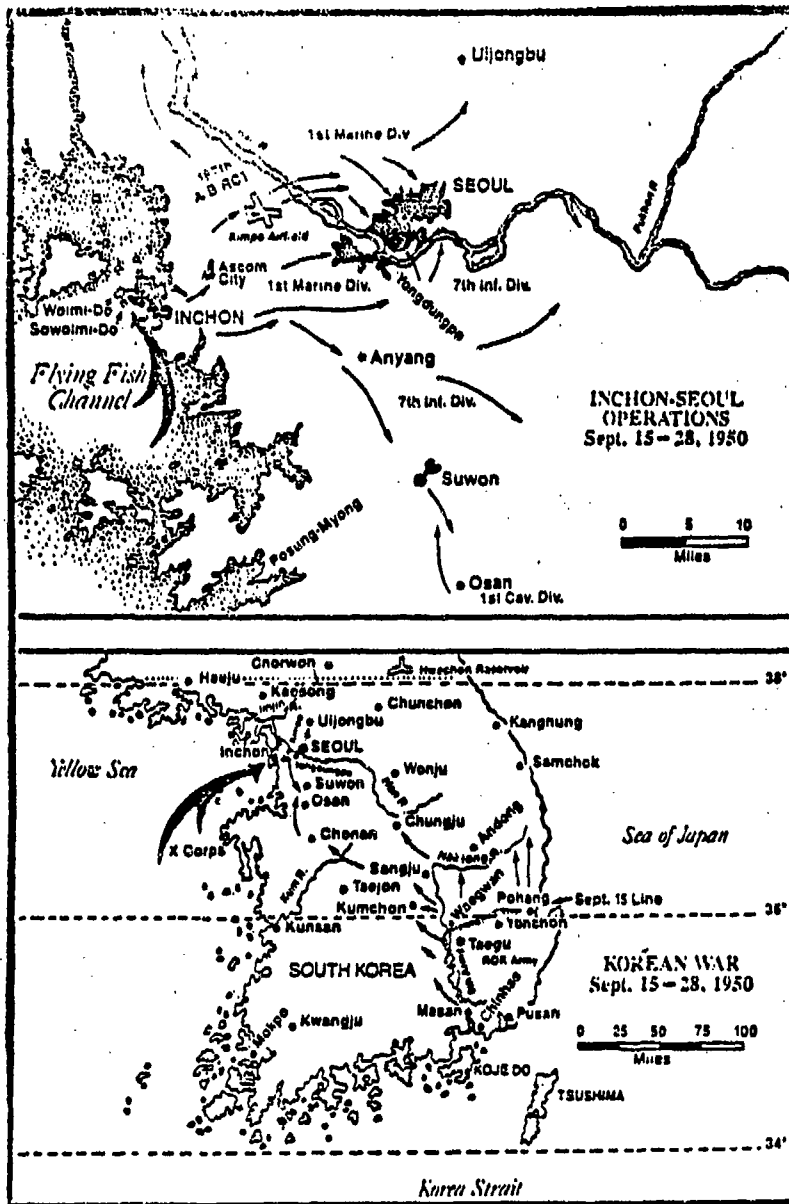
FIGURE 3: THE FALL OF FRANCE



Extracted from Atlas of World War II, p.20.

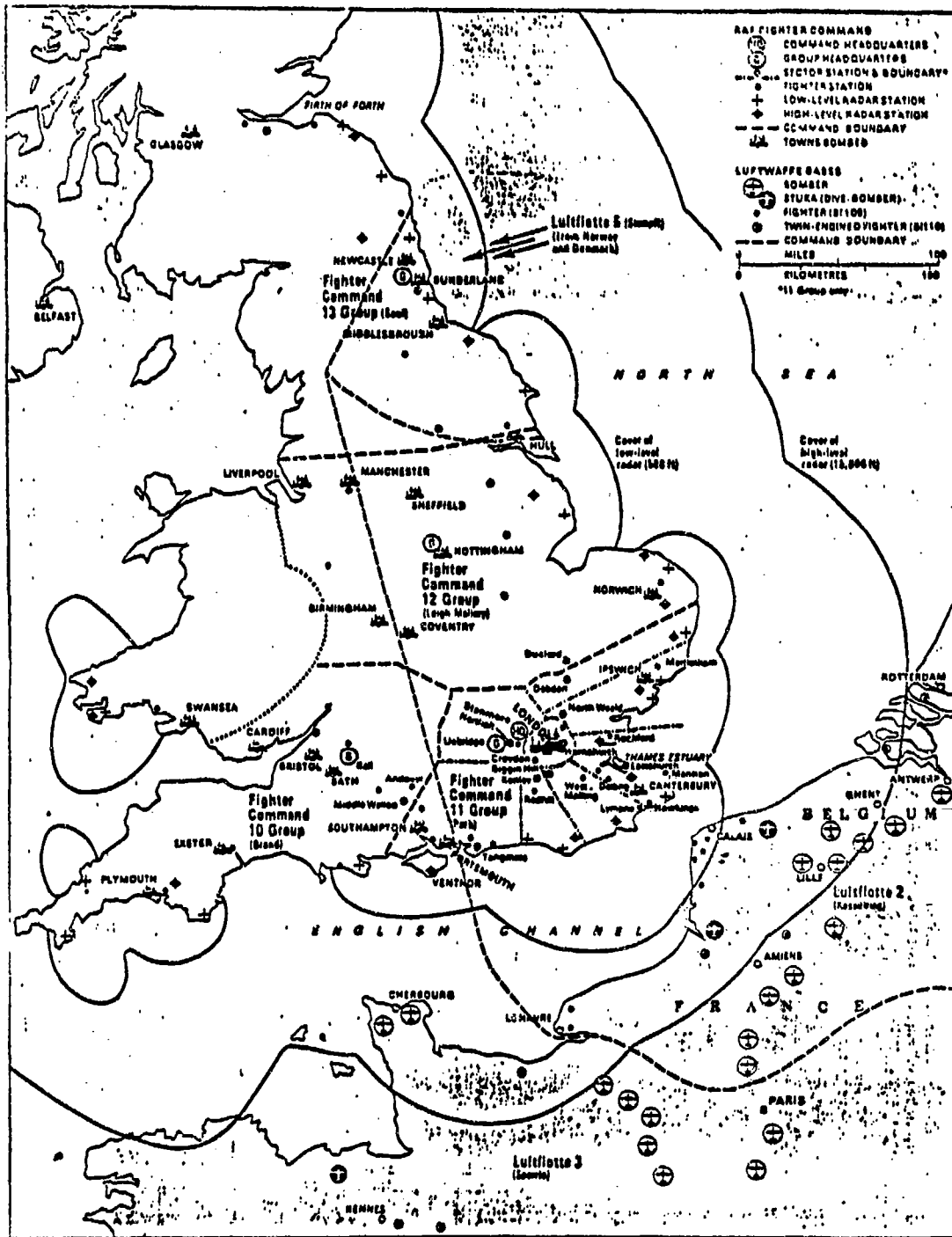


FIGURE 4: INCROPS



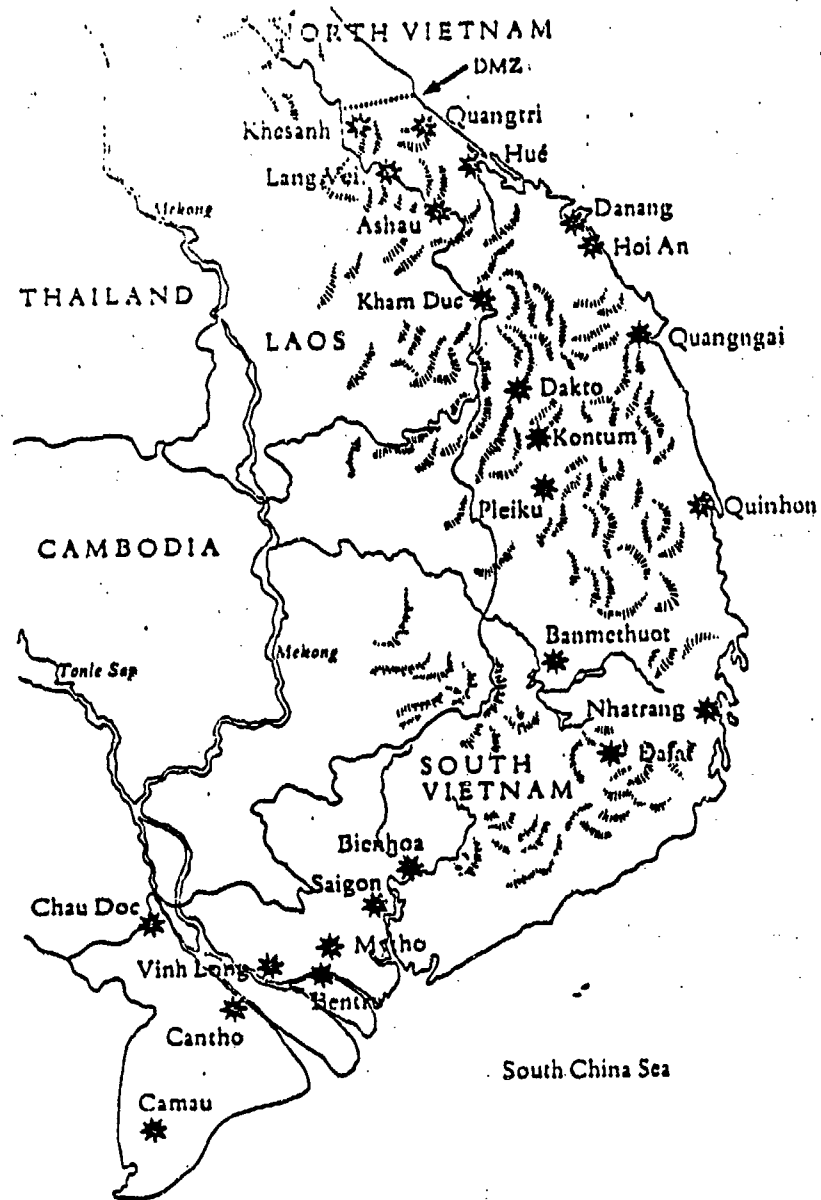
Extracted from The Years of MacArthur, Volume III, Triumph and Disaster, p.477.

FIGURE 5: THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN



Extracted from Atlas of World War II, p.27.

FIGURE 6: TET OFFENSIVE



Tet Offensive, 1968

\* Major Battles

Extracted from Vietnam, p.524.

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