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BIBLIOGRAPHIC SECTION

EDITORS NOTE: *Whenever books or articles appear that have a close relation to the subject of a monograph, we plan to include a Bibliographic Section. This will have the primary purpose of directing the reader's attention to items in the existing literature, overt and classified, which in our judgment make a contribution to the development of sound intelligence doctrine. We think the following is one such item.*

Col. Sanford H. Kirtland, Jr., "The Hazards and Advantages of Estimates of Enemy Intentions." Thesis, Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, April 1954. Mss. CONF. 50pp.

also summary in Air Intelligence Digest, January 1955.

In this paper, Col. Kirtland comes frankly and vigorously to grips with the *caveat* in traditional military intelligence doctrine against estimating enemy intentions—or, to put it another way, against breaking down the distinction between enemy capabilities and enemy intentions. Col. Kirtland is far from contemptuous of this doctrine; indeed, he makes an excellent case for it, emphasizing the dangers of second-guessing and of assuming that the enemy will choose to do pretty much what a US commander would do, in a similar situation. He emphasizes, too, the danger of writing up an Estimate of the Situation from even the shrewdest guess of enemy intentions, thus inviting disaster if the guess turns out to be shrewd but wrong. In brief, this thesis is no hatchet job.

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What it is, on the other hand, is a most sensible investigation of the traditional doctrine and an invitation not to fall into a variety of naive traps where the estimative process is concerned. First of all, the author points out that the distinction between capabilities and intentions is sometimes synthetic. The line can be more easily drawn in the abstract than it can in real situations — especially, we might point out, in situations that count the most, when a US commander has to spread out thin resources to meet a variety of possible enemy moves. Any intelligence officer (as Mr. Smith argues above) obviously works from estimates of intentions in that he excludes from his situation-estimate a whole series of outlandish and, from the enemy point of view, self-defeating gross capabilities. If the clear enemy objective is to seize a piece of land, it is not very instructive to point out that he is *capable* of an immediate, orderly retreat.

Second, according to Col. Kirtland, the intelligence officer is forced into estimating intentions (or *probable* courses of action) precisely because the US is no longer in a position of undoubted preponderant power from which it can prepare for and can thwart any and all enemy capabilities. Which is to suggest that the traditional doctrine is outdated. As Mr. Smith says:

There has been much debate, among the military, on whether an intelligence officer should presume to put into his formal estimate an opinion as to which of the enemy capabilities listed is most likely to be implemented . . . Some have even held that the commander himself must not make it, but must treat all enemy capabilities as if they were sure to be carried through, and must prepare to deal with them all. *This latter doctrine is somewhat academic.* (Emphasis added.)

Col. Kirtland and Mr. Smith both seem to be saying that these days the intelligence officer may pay lip service to the traditional military doctrine — may insist that he is follow-

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ing the book on the distinction between capabilities and intentions — but cannot possibly keep the distinction clear in practice.

Finally, the author concludes that there is no inherent drawback in estimating intentions: to do so with reliability simply puts the burden on finer judgment, on better background and training, and on better personnel selection of estimators. He might also have added that since estimating intentions is what the intelligence officer in fact does, some of the time at least, it would be well that he do it consciously. The real danger is that the estimator might think he is dealing with relatively sure and scientific capabilities data (claiming relative certainty for his conclusions, therefore) rather than with speculative premises about enemy intentions.

Col. Kirtland is writing, of course, strictly about military intelligence. But most of what he says can be translated into the frame of reference of the civilian intelligence agency — as Mr. Smith's paper demonstrates — with some valuable instruction for all of us. This is, at the least, a thoughtful contribution to the subject.

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