

# Deception

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**SECRET**

*Practice to deceive*

In April 1972, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sponsored a week-long Strategic Planning Seminar concentrating on the question of deception. Seminar presentations by participating U.S. Government departments and agencies, and by the Syracuse University Research Corporation (SURC) under contract to the Advanced Research Projects Agency, have been summarized in JCS's *Strategic Planning Seminar 17-21 April 1972, Vol. I* (SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM). They appear in full in a 525-page *Volume II* which is TOP SECRET/ NO FOREIGN DISSEM. *Studies in Intelligence* reproduces the presentation made by Euan G. Davis, Director of the National Indications Center, and prepared in collaboration with Cynthia M. Grabo of the NIC staff, because it relates the question of deception and the entire scope of the seminar to the intelligence warning function.

As an introduction, we also summarize a preceding paper by Prof. Barton S. Whaley, of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, on *Deception and Surprise — the Lessons from History*.

Dr. Whaley has analyzed the element of surprise in 168 battles in 17 wars from 1914 through 1968.\* He comes up with some impressive statistics on the efficacy of surprise:

Out of 50 battles in which intense surprise was achieved, 17 far exceeded the objectives of the initiators, and only one ended in defeat.

Conversely, out of 50 battles fought without the advantage of initial surprise, 30 ended in defeat for the initiators, and only one substantially exceeded the attacking commander's expectations.

The average mean casualty ratio in favor of the attacking force was 1-to-15 when surprise was achieved, but only 1-to-1.7 without surprise. How, then, to achieve the desired surprise? The classic security precautions? Dr. Whaley finds that in 61 battles which achieved strategic surprise, this could be attributed to passive security measures by the attacking force in only four instances. Of 54 cases of tactical surprise, seven at most could be attributed to effective security.

Deception, however, was either the main cause or a significant factor in 82% of all cases of strategic surprise, and 57% of the tactical surprises. "The greater the effort put into the deception plan," Dr. Whaley notes, "the greater the degree of surprise gained."

Thus, Whaley summarizes, "Your chances of obtaining or exceeding your goals are almost four times better if you can achieve at least some degree of surprise. Your chances of gaining surprise are eight times better if deception planning is used. And finally, you can greatly improve on even these most favorable odds, the more comprehensive and sophisticated is your deception."

Another participant in the same seminar cited a statement by Princeton football coach Jake McCandless, worthy of the late Herman Hickman: "An ounce of deception is worth a 240-pound tackle." The language of the gridiron may be unfathomable to potential enemies of the United States, but there is nothing to prevent such enemies from performing the same calculations Dr. Whaley has made, and arriving at the same attractive odds. Indications intelligence officers, accordingly, expect any opposition undertakings to seek maximum deception and surprise.

**Euan G. Davis and Cynthia M. Grabo**

I welcome this opportunity — a rare opportunity, I might add — for some of us in the intelligence field to meet with the operational planners on a subject of mutual interest and great importance to us all: deception.

The subject is a two-faced problem. It may be important for the security and success of our own operations in many cases that we have an effective deception plan. But it may be equally important, and sometimes more important, that we understand what the enemy's deception capabilities may be and what deception he may be practicing at the moment. The latter is peculiarly the function of the intelligence community — and particularly of those elements of intelligence which are concerned with warning. For the perception of the enemy's deception plan, and even the recognition that he may be practicing deception at all, clearly is a most important element in the warning process. In some cases, it could be the most important element in warning, and particularly of strategic warning, of the recognition of the enemy's intention to attack.\*

In his manuscript, Mr. Whaley identifies five general types of deception, noting that there is more than one approach to this problem. The military planner, seeking surprise, may attempt to conceal or mislead as to his:

*Intention*, that is, that he is preparing to attack at all.

*Time* of attack.

*Place* of attack.

*Strength* of the attacking forces.

*Style* of the attack, that is, the form the military operation will take, or the weapons that may be employed.

Now, we in the strategic warning business today are not unconcerned with matters of the time, place and strength of enemy attacks. We do deal from week to week with questions such as a North Vietnamese

attack on Long Tieng, or Israel's response to new attacks by the fedayeen. We deal with these because this is the type of problem which comes up from day to day.

But this is not our primary function. Our primary function is to assess the *intentions* of our enemies to attack us at all, anywhere, at any time in the foreseeable future. We are concerned above all with whether the USSR, the People's Republic of China, North Korea or some other potentially hostile country has begun preparations for, or has taken a probable decision to, attack the United States, our forces overseas, or one of our allies. In practice, we also are concerned with whether they might be preparing to attack someone else — with whether the USSR may attack Communist China, or invade Romania. And we also are concerned with measures short of overt attack which might gravely threaten U.S. interests or alter the balance of power — such as the Soviet attempt to introduce strategic missiles into Cuba, and the potential combat role of Soviet forces in Egypt.

In short, we are concerned above all with the strategic intentions of our enemies and potential enemies, on what they are planning to do at all, not primarily when they may do it or what forces they may commit — although we will also be concerned with that as a secondary priority.

It need hardly be said that the greatest warning failures, and greatest national military disasters, are those in which the intelligence services and/or the national decision makers failed to perceive that an attack was coming at all, and therefore had not taken the requisite counter-preparations either to forestall the attack or to reduce its impact. The recognition that Japan intended to attack Pearl Harbor or other U.S. territory at all obviously could have saved much of the U.S. Fleet. An acceptance that Communist China was preparing for a major offensive in Korea in November 1950 could have resulted in a halt to our offensive and the taking of defensive preparations against such an attack, which could have reduced its impact, and might in fact have forestalled the Chinese offensive altogether.

Since strategic warning is concerned primarily with strategic intention, it will also be concerned above all with strategic deception. In actuality, we attempt to deal with deception, no matter what form it may take. But our greatest worry must be our enemies' broad capabilities for strategic deception, the measures which they might employ and are probably holding in reserve for the day when grave national interests or even

national survival are at stake. These are the measures which we have not seen yet, or only in small part. We can make some estimates, or guesses, as to what they might include from our knowledge of their military theory, doctrine and exercises, political and diplomatic practice, propaganda techniques in critical situations, and particularly from what they may have done in certain crisis situations in the past. But at best we will probably have only a vague and inadequate understanding of what the real deception capabilities of our enemies may be.

There is a widespread popular opinion that the USSR and other Communist nations are so continually engaged in deceitful practices that we never believe anything that they say, and that the intelligence analyst and policy maker alike constantly are expecting and allowing for Soviet hypocrisy in all things. This exaggerates the case. It is true that the USSR and all closed societies are highly security conscious and routinely conceal all sorts of information which is common knowledge in open societies. It is also true that Communist philosophy does not hold objective truth, as we understand it, to be either desirable in principle or practicable in application. It is further true that the historical traditions of Russia and of the countries of Asia which are Communist today are so different from ours that most of us do not really understand them, that they are from our viewpoint all more or less "inscrutable." And finally, it is of course undeniably true that it is much easier for the dictator or leadership of a closed society to plan and to implement a deception program than it is for us. In every way, from the smallest deception gimmick — such as the planting of misinformation in the press — up to secrecy on the national decision-making process, they hold enormous advantages over us.

Now, we do expect and we do allow constantly for certain types of secrecy, security, and day-to-day deceit on the part of the Soviet Union, and perhaps even more so from the Asian Communist nations. No one expects the Soviet budget to reveal actual defense expenditures, or that the USSR will tell us the true unit designations of its forces in East Germany, or their strengths. The USSR nearly always denies travel to Western attachés and diplomats when it is deploying forces, and it has never revealed anything publicly about the buildup of its forces along the Chinese border or even that it has any troops in Mongolia. It has attempted gross deception on the strength of its strategic forces when it knew we had no means of verification. And so forth.

But the USSR is not engaged constantly in an active, positive deception

program designed totally to mislead us as to its intentions and objectives. To do so would be counterproductive to its own interests, and moreover would undermine the effectiveness of a positive deception program when it would be important that we accept it. A prerequisite for effective deception is to establish some degree of credibility. The Soviet Union cannot afford constantly to lie to the President of the United States. It is only because it does so rarely that it could expect that its denials concerning the introduction of strategic missiles into Cuba would carry a degree of credibility.

To cite another and more recent example, the USSR in the summer of 1968 announced a series of military exercises in Eastern Europe simultaneous with, and as cover for, the various deployments of forces and other preparations prior to the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Many analysts accepted these announcements more or less at face value, and duly reported these Soviet "exercises" in current intelligence publications and briefings. This uncritical acceptance of these Soviet statements probably resulted in large part from the fact that for years the USSR had made a practice of announcing major Warsaw Pact exercises in Europe, and sometimes major exercises in the USSR as well, and that these announcements had always been accurate — that is, some type of exercise always had been conducted at the time and in the area specified. Thus, the analysts had become conditioned to accept this type of announcement, which had never proved false in their experience. It is of interest that this conditioning carried over even into the period after the invasion and into post mortems, some of which persisted in referring to these so-called exercises as if they had really occurred even to the extent of reporting the alleged scenarios based on information derived entirely from the Soviet press.

In fact, the entire Soviet deception effort for the Czechoslovak invasion was elementary by any sophisticated standard. It involved little positive military deception, relatively little political deception, no disinformation effort by the KGB, and no true strategic deception, that is, no attempt at concealment of the Soviet objective, which was the restoration of orthodox Communist control in Czechoslovakia. Even military security was not drastically tightened for this operation. There were good reasons for this, which we will not go into here, but the point is that it was probably not a typical Soviet performance or representative of what the USSR might attempt in the field of deception if it were preparing for an attack on NATO.\*

In the Cuban missile buildup, the Soviet deception operation was considerably more sophisticated, and more effective, than for Czechoslovakia. It was also much more important to the USSR that the deception succeed; indeed, the success of the operation in Cuba was largely dependent on misleading the United States as to Soviet intentions. Nonetheless, the deception plan itself was not very complicated, and involved only two types of actions: the issuance of falsehoods and misleading statements, directly and indirectly, concerning what the USSR was doing in Cuba; and rigid security on the nature of the military shipments to Cuba. No one can deny that the plan was superbly executed up to the time we finally discovered the missiles. Even by Soviet standards, it was a masterpiece of security, involving not a single specific leak as to the nature of Soviet plans and decisions, or the below-deck cargoes of the ships. Nonetheless, there was little active military deception of the type which we should expect the USSR to employ in other circumstances. The measures used to conceal the movement of this relatively small military force give us only slight insight into what the USSR might attempt in the way of security and deception in the event it was preparing for a major military operation against NATO, or even Communist China.

Those of us in the warning business are concerned about how little we know of — and how little research has been done on — the deception practices and capabilities of our potential enemies. We feel that we have not seen anything yet, and we are only slightly consoled by Mr. Whaley's conclusion that the USSR has shown itself to be relatively unsophisticated in deception — at least in comparison with Great Britain and Israel. This may be true with respect to what they have revealed to us so far, but there have been some clear indications that Soviet planners and theoreticians are studying the problem. It would be foolish to conclude that the USSR has not learned some lessons from some recent successful deception operations and surprise attacks — including the Israeli blitz in the Six Day War.

I would like to take a few minutes here to explain briefly how warning or indications intelligence actually functions in the U.S. intelligence system today. There is widespread misunderstanding on this, and it is important to set the record straight. Contrary to what many believe, warning intelligence is not a separate element of the intelligence community. It is not to be compared with current intelligence or estimates or military capabilities offices, all of which have large staffs which turn out finished intelligence in large quantities and which are the recognized experts in

their fields. There does not exist in the intelligence community a semi-independent group of indications and warning analysts who report their analysis and conclusions to higher authority. There are in the office which I head, the National Indications Center, nine analysts plus a director and deputy director who may be classified as indications analysts. A very few of them have had enough experience that they might be said to be experts on the subject of warning, insofar as there are any experts on this subject. The major intelligence agencies, CIA, DIA and NSA, have very small indications staffs — three or four people, literally — who serve as liaison and coordinating staffs and provide the administrative support, and sometimes the members, for the U.S. Watch Committee. But the substantive intelligence and backup for the Committee and for the warning effort is drawn from the regular intelligence elements of these organizations. This involves primarily their current intelligence personnel with such backup and expertise as may be required from other components of the organization, such as order of battle, technical intelligence, and so forth.

The National Indications Center produces indications or watch items in draft form for the weekly Watch Report, and it has turned out a variety of other indications papers and analyses. But the final review, revision or acceptance of these drafts is a community function. The Watch Report, and such other papers as may be approved by the Watch Committee, represent a community view, and it is as such that they are forwarded to our immediate superior, the United States Intelligence Board, for consideration and approval.

Thus, it will be evident that indications analysis, and with it deception analysis, is widely diffused in the intelligence community. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this. The primary advantage is that the substantive knowledge of numerous desk experts is brought to bear on the warning problem. The primary disadvantage may be that these substantive analysts, qualified as they may be in their fields, may not necessarily know much about indications analysis, still less about deception.

The average U.S. intelligence analyst today is almost totally unprepared to cope with an enemy deception effort — and this will likely be true also of his supervisor and the policy planner. Our experience of recent years justifies a conclusion that the U.S. Government, at both its intelligence and policy levels, is vulnerable to deception. Is there anything we can do about this, or must we resign ourselves to the fact that the masterful



enemy deception planner almost surely will succeed?

The information scientists have offered some suggestions that various analytic techniques will help the analyst in such circumstances, such as Bayes' Theorem.\* The computer people and particularly salesmen for the computer companies have been leading proponents for the argument that various types of ADP systems are the answer or at least partial answer to our problems.

I am not trying to disparage these efforts. I believe, however, that there are some other methods which are even more important and which we should be considering first. And, furthermore, they won't cost much money.

One major reason that analysts and their supervisors alike are so little prepared to deal with live warning crises and enemy deception is that they lack experience with such problems. They have neither learned the lessons of history from a live experience with a warning crisis — and nothing really can take the place of the live experience — nor have they had any education in intelligence or military schools of the nature of such problems and how to cope with them. Analysts receive some training, and often extensive training, in almost any other field of intelligence before they are permitted to proceed on their own. No one would dream of turning an order of battle analyst loose without some training in the traditional and venerable techniques by which enemy units are finally "accepted" into the order of battle. It is ironic that in the field of warning which is both the most important and the most difficult of intelligence functions there is little provision for the training of analysts.

Unlike other established fields of intelligence research and analysis, the chances for on-the-job training in indications and warning are poor. Unlike other fields in which there is a continuing flow of live and pertinent information from which the analyst can learn, the true warning problem from which the analyst may gain experience is infrequent — and, with the relaxation of tensions with both our major Communist adversaries, it is likely to become more infrequent. Aside from the continuing indications problems in Southeast Asia and such relatively minor conflicts as the Indian-Pakistani war last December, the intelligence system has not had any significant warning problems since the Sino-Soviet border crisis in 1969, which did not lead to major conflict. In 1968, we had a major warning problem — the invasion of

Czechoslovakia. The last significant indications problem prior to these was the Arab-Israeli conflict of June 1967. Note that these various areas are widely separated, and that few current or order of battle analysts would have researched more than one of these problems, and that only a handful of so-called indications analysts in the government have an appreciation of the information which was available in all of them. Virtually none of the analysts working these warning problems in different areas profited from the experiences of the others. Although there is much to be learned on both warning and deception from all of these crises, almost none of the benefits of such an education have accrued to the intelligence community as a whole.

Nor are the intelligence schools doing much to make up this serious gap. Until now, the Defense Intelligence School has offered scant training for analysts on indications and warning, although some of the lectures are highly valuable and related to this subject. At least on the overt side of the house — I do not speak for the covert — the Central Intelligence Agency also is offering minimal training for analysts in warning and the perception of the intentions of the enemy. Very little has been written in the way of training manuals or theory to help the analyst understand what warning is all about, and how indications analysis may differ from current analysis in a crisis situation.

Even our military libraries have done little to help the analyst find the relevant historical literature. There is not a single entry in the card catalogue of the Pentagon Library under either Warning or Deception.

This is one reason that Mr. Whaley's manuscript, hard as it is to obtain, has been so widely read, and that its publication is so eagerly awaited. Some of us want to make it required reading in the intelligence community. I am happy to say also that the Defense Intelligence School next year is planning to incorporate a little more instruction on both warning and deception. So some progress is being made, even though we still have a very long way to go. And, perhaps almost more important, we need to find some means to insure that the supervisory levels and consumers of intelligence, including the operational planners, have a better understanding of both warning and deception, and of what they can reasonably expect and should be asking from the intelligence community.

Some great strides have been made in intelligence collection in the past several years. Although we have lost some good sources, we are also

technically better off than we have ever been to provide some of the hard military data on enemy forces which the planner needs. There has also been a considerable improvement in the sophistication of the human collectors, particularly in the weeding out of unreliable sources and the more careful evaluation of material. This we owe primarily to the CIA.

Insofar as warning has failed us over the past decade or so — and failure is a relative term — it has not been just for want of data. This does not mean that collection has been perfect, or that we could not have done with more high-class information, particularly some penetration of the enemy's decisionmaking councils. But usually, we have had lots of information and lots of indications which would have pointed to the final action as a reasonable, if not likely, course of action. In large measure, our problem in all crises is one of analysis of the data, of perception of what the enemy is most likely to do. Some fundamental analytic errors have been repeated in more than one crisis. At the same time, the growing size of the intelligence establishment, and the number of echelons which separate the working-level analyst from the people at the top, have made it increasingly unlikely that the minority view, and the facts and indications which might support that view, will filter upward to planner and policy maker who may most need to know them. Only those who have worked a live warning problem at the desk level can appreciate how many indications get lost in crisis situations and are never reported to the higher levels of intelligence, let alone the policy maker. This is likely to be true particularly if the view is unpopular or contrary to the accepted "climate of opinion." Needless to say, the analyst who may perceive the enemy's deception plan will quite likely be in the minority.

Particularly in crisis situations, it is imperative that something be done to bridge the gap, one might say chasm, which so often separates the intelligence analysts and the policy planners. We need to improve the communications between them — so that the operational planners on the one hand will know better what information the intelligence analysts really have at hand and what they really think, and whereby the intelligence system on the other hand will better understand what the operational level really needs to know. It would probably be too much of a breach of the bureaucratic process to suggest that analysts and operational planners just talk to each other informally, although this might be tried as a last resort. There are at least two other means which will help, however.

The first is for the operational level to ask the right questions, including requests for detailed listing or analysis of all available indications. No amount of diligent initiative at the working level will begin to take the place of the right questions from the top. Where there is reason to suspect enemy deception — as there will likely be when a crisis is brewing — specific questions from those who have experience in deception may elicit useful information which would otherwise not be reported to them.

Secondly, the operational level must recognize that intelligence cannot always anticipate its needs if it does not know what the operational people are doing. The secrecy which surrounds most operational planning and of necessity will surround any deception plan may present critically difficult communications problems. The analyst who does not know that anything is going on by our side will tend to overlook or set aside information which he would regard as important, perhaps critically important, if he really knew what was happening. There have been some historic incidents of the calamitous consequences of such a breakdown of communications between collector, analyst and planner, and the potential consequences in the future could be even more disastrous. The policy level of the government has recognized this in theory, and there is in existence a National Security Action Memorandum (No. 226) which states in part: "all appropriate departments and agencies of the Government are authorized and directed by the President ... to keep the Watch Committee of the USIB informed concerning significant diplomatic, political, military, or other courses of action by the United States, approved for immediate implementation or in process of execution, which might bring about military reaction or early hostile action by the USSR, or its allies, thus endangering the security of the United States." Unfortunately, the existence of this directive has not guaranteed its implementation, and it has often been honored in the breach. We can only hope that the operational and policy levels of the government would recognize the importance of adequate communication with the intelligence community in a crisis where national security interests were at stake.

I would conclude by saying that this seminar in itself represents a real step forward in this field of communication between us, and that the inclusion of representatives from the intelligence community, and particularly its warning element, is particularly welcome to us. May we hope that there will be more such communication in the future. Thank

you for your attention.

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## Footnotes

\* Whaley's *Stratagem: Deception and Surprise in War* was issued as a manuscript by Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1969. It will soon be published in book form.

\* On the general subject of warning, see Davis, "A Watchman for All Seasons," *Studies* XIII/2; on the timing factor in strategic warning, see Grabo, "Strategic Warning: The Problem of Timing," *Studies* XVI/2.

\* For a further discussion, see Grabo, "Soviet Deception in the Czechoslovak Crisis," *Studies* XIV/1.

\* See Jack Zlotnick, "Bayes' Theorem for Intelligence Analysis," *Studies* XVI/2.

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