

# **Strategic Culture and Japanese Military Intelligence during the Pacific War, 1941-45<sup>1</sup>**

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During the opening stages of the Pacific War, when Japan achieved a continuous spate of victories against the Allied forces in Southeast Asia and the western Pacific regions, one of the key factors which contributed to the Imperial Army's success was the highly developed state of its intelligence capabilities. Japanese commanders had ample data on the location of British and American forces, as well as the layout of their bases and military installations. Propaganda and subversive operations in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies were also carried out efficiently, as evidenced by the large number of local inhabitants who acted as fifth-columnists and scouts for the Japanese invaders. Yet, by the latter stages of the Pacific War, as Japan's hold on its conquered territories crumbled against the Allied counter-offensive, the weaknesses of the Imperial Japanese Army's (IJA) intelligence apparatus became increasingly evident. The main shortcoming was an inability to conduct an objective assessment of the material and technological resources that were available to the US and British forces, and a subsequent failure to comprehend the fighting capabilities of the forces that were ranged against the Imperial Army. The problem stemmed largely from the fact that the Japanese military establishment followed a strategic culture which did little to encourage the rank and file to develop a realistic view of its opponents.

Intelligence was one of many factors which determined the outcome of the Pacific War. The IJA lost mainly because it did not have capacity simultaneously to subdue the Chinese on the Asiatic mainland, hold the American advance in the Pacific theatres, and halt the British in Southeast Asia. At the same time, weak intelligence did lead the Japanese to embark on a venture for which they were ill-

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prepared, and misperceptions of their enemies played an important part in preventing them from properly reforming their methods.

## Strategic culture and intelligence assessment – an analytical framework

The influence of strategic culture on intelligence activities and military practice has become a contentious subject, and its value in studying the history of warfare is open to debate. Strategic culture has been defined as ‘a habit of behavior’ (Gray, 1999, 138), a ‘distinct and lasting set of beliefs [and] values’ regarding the use of force (Macmillan, Booth and Trood, 1999, 8), a set of basic assumptions concerning the threat posed by one’s adversaries, and the accepted theories a nation holds on how it can confront the challenges. (Johnston, 1995, 46-48) The term is used interchangeably with ‘military culture’, and the notion that strategy is linked to culture stems from the hypothesis that humans base their actions on the principles prevailing in their environment. (Gray, 1999, 140) The policies pursued by military organizations are inevitably influenced, to a certain degree, by the values supported by their parent societies. Subsequently, cultural differences play an important role in determining how nations develop their particular attitudes on how to use armed force to defend of their interests.(Macmillan, Booth and Trood, 1999, 3; Murray, 1999, 27) In warfare, certain attitudes are more likely to produce successful results than others. Organizations which seek to formulate a realistic assessment of strategic realities, while encouraging steps towards innovation in order to deal with the prevailing circumstances, have better prospects of overcoming their rivals. (Millett, Murray and Watman, 1986, 37-71) One can thus contend that the effectiveness and weaknesses of a defense establishment often hinge largely on the strategic culture which pervades it.

On the subject of cultural factors and their effect on intelligence assessment, the existing literature provides a few guidelines for analysis.<sup>2</sup> The paper will examine five key features: 1) the value placed on obtaining a realistic image of one’s adversaries, 2) the type of information which military officials seek, and the functions of the intelligence apparatus, 3) the influence of intelligence on strategic and operational planning, and 4) the way in which military commanders use

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<sup>2</sup> See R. Bathurst, *Intelligence and the Mirror: on creating an enemy* (London, 1993); M. Handel, *War, Strategy and Intelligence* (London: Frank Cass, 1989), Chapter 5; M. Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge: CUP / London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996); also, for works on how cultural factors influence threat perception, see K. Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976).

intelligence to improve the tactical performance of their forces. In all four areas, the Japanese performance was inadequate, mainly because its military establishment had what was a minimal experience in carrying out the intelligence activities that were necessary to prosecute a successful war effort against a coalition of powerful enemies, over a protracted time period.

### **Value placed on intelligence activities: traditions and historical experience**

Starting from its creation during the late nineteenth century, the Imperial Army's culture held intelligence in low regard. The situation was largely a product of Japan's historical experience. As an insular nation which had purposely secluded itself until 1854, Japan was inexperienced in key intelligence tasks such as gauging the mindset and capabilities of foreign powers. (Sajima, 1999, 76) Military calculations were not based on facts, but the notion that Japan would eventually create a new East Asian order where it played the dominant role, and the Western Powers were to acquiesce in a *fait accompli*. (Chapman, 1987, 168-9) The preconception originated from the Meiji era of the late nineteenth century, when the ruling elite, in an effort to promote public unity and establish a base of mass support, concocted a national ideology proclaiming that Japan had the preordained right to become Asia's leading power.<sup>3</sup> The swift victories against China in 1894-95 and Russia in 1904-05 reinforced the Japanese faith in their ascendancy. Thus, a cornerstone of Japan's culture was an embedded belief that its people were a superior race, (Morgan, 2003, 64-65, 174) and this aspect impeded its ability to properly evaluate its rivals.

Because the Japanese did not attach a high value to obtaining information on their opponents, the development of military intelligence had made minimal progress during the years prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War. The IJA's attitude towards intelligence was summed up by Prince Kan'in, chief of the general staff during the 1939 Nomonhan border clashes against the Soviets, who remarked, 'to rate the foe too highly tends to breed defeatism and cowardice and to erode friendly forces' morale'. (Coox, 1985, 1027) Social mores forbade any expression of doubts regarding the imperial armed forces, and to ponder over information on

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<sup>3</sup> See W.G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism, 1894-1945* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), Chapter 3; R. Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: patterns in Japanese culture* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1946), Chapter 4; C. Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: ideology in the late Meiji period* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), especially Chapters 1-2, and 8

enemy strengths was a job more suited to the weak and over-cautious. Neither characteristic befitted military traditions which demanded a constant show of gallantry. Morale, rather than knowledge of the enemy, was the most valued asset. The 1925 revision of the field service regulations restated the IJA's general principle, 'military discipline is the lifeblood of the army. Its strictness of discipline or lack of it is the cause of victory or defeat'.<sup>4</sup>

Assessments of potential adversaries reflected an unmasked contempt, and the IJA's views of the Anglo-Saxon powers were particularly denigrating. In spite of its economic power, America was considered too isolationist and pacifist to instill a sufficient level of martial spirit among its populace. (Hayashi, 1959, 23) Britain was deemed to be senile and a power in decline, and therefore unlikely to attempt a reconquest of its empire if Japan seized Malaya and Burma. Thus, the main problem facing Japanese intelligence was that military commanders tended to view the practice of formulating a calibrated appraisal of their opponents as a tedious task.

### **Organization and functions of the intelligence apparatus**

Because Japanese military officials did not promote measures to secure information on the overall fighting capabilities of foreign armed forces, intelligence organizations were mainly assigned to collect data needed for immediate planning, and were not equipped to support an extended conflict. The IJA's prewar intelligence thus had covered a narrow domain, and focused on collecting and utilizing battlefield intelligence, that is information needed for planning and executing operations. The practice stemmed from a tradition handed down from the *samurai* warlords. For centuries, Japan was a war-torn feudal society where spies, information-gatherers and 'purveyors of secrets' were in demand. (Nish, 1987, 129) The track record for the years leading up to 1941 suggests that the Japanese achieved commendable progress in certain areas. The US War Department's intelligence division once described the IJA's espionage as

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<sup>4</sup> United States National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, MD (NARA 2), RG 165, M-1216, Roll 19, MID 2023-670, Revisions in Field Service Regulations, Translated document provided by US Military Attaché (Tokyo), 19 May 1925. The principle was articulated in the Japanese army's infantry manual as early as 1909. See Humphreys, 1995, p.15.

‘superior’, because it had provided information which played a vital role in facilitating Japanese operational planning in China.<sup>5</sup>

The area where the IJA excelled was human intelligence. Colonel Tsuji Masanobu, chief of the operations and planning staff for the 25<sup>th</sup> Army in Malaya, recalled how his officers conducted a detailed survey of the beaches where the landings were scheduled, and meticulously verified the possible routes for the inland advance. (Tsuji, 1993, 6, 24-26, 33-41; Swinson, 1968, 92-93) Propaganda and subversive operations also achieved alarming success. When the Japanese entered the Dutch East Indies and Philippines, the colonial administrations collapsed almost overnight. (Elphick, 1995, 3-4, 48-51, 215-18) In Malaya, the Japanese recruited a network of fifth-columnists who performed a range of tasks, acting as guides and scouts for the IJA, and using visual signals to help pilots locate their bombing targets.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, when one looks at the broader picture, the IJA did not pay much attention to long-term intelligence concerning its enemies’ war potential. For example, when Japan’s leaders were finalizing their decision for the southward advance, the War Ministry’s Second (Intelligence) Division was not asked to assess the quality of the US and British armies. (Barnhart, 1984, 428-9) Only after the decision for war had been made, was the division ordered to collect information to help the army execute its operational plans.

The talents and skills of individuals who had a knowledge of the US and Britain were squandered. The IJA had operated a special centre for training agents at the Tokyo suburb of Nakano since 1938. By the eve of the war, the school had produced a dedicated cohort, many of whom held a sophisticated understanding of western military practices. Unfortunately, the Nakano school, like all its Japanese counterparts, operated within ‘a hostile military culture’ which held a scant regard for its endeavors, unless they involved covert actions such as espionage, sabotage and subversion. (Mercado, 2002, 23)

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<sup>5</sup> NARA 2 RG 165, War Department, Military Intelligence Division, Regional File, 1922-1944, Box 2131, File 6000, *Japanese Army Monograph*, prepared by G-2, Undated, ?? Spring 1941

<sup>6</sup> United Kingdom National Archives, London, (UKNA), WO 208/2261, ‘Fifth Column in Malaya’, Annex 2 to War Office Weekly Intelligence Summary No.139, 15 April 1942

The Japanese also never established a centralized intelligence body. The IJN and IJA operated their own intelligence arms, with few channels available for inter-service communication. The organization of net assessment prior to Pearl Harbor has been described as ‘relatively unsophisticated, parochial, fragmented, adamantine, spasmodic and often vague and waffling to boot’. (Coox, 1992, 298) The army general staff based its conclusions mostly on information provided by their operations bureau. Neither the navy chiefs nor civilian members of the cabinet were consulted until a very late stage. Within the army, the general staff did not establish a central intelligence organization which could coordinate the various activities, including the production of estimates on Allied forces, codebreaking, and photographic reconnaissance.<sup>7</sup> The system did not permit a balanced estimate of Japan’s adversaries.

The swift triumphs which the IJA achieved against the Allies during the opening stages of the Pacific War negated any incentive for improvement. Japan’s forces began to suffer ‘victory disease’, and became convinced that they were invincible. (Willmott, 1982, 454) As a result, the military invested a minimal effort in intelligence. Between 1941 and 1945 expenditure for such activities amounted to no more than 0.5% of the defense budget. (Allen, 1987, 560) The United States Strategic Bombing Survey’s (USSBS) post-war survey noted how most intelligence positions were filled by ‘inferior personnel’, thereby reflecting the general lack of appreciation regarding the potentialities of information-gathering and the secondary role it played in Japanese military planning.<sup>8</sup> The development of intelligence was also hampered by the lack of a dedicated training program, and within the army war college, there were no special courses on the subject. Officers assigned to intelligence tasks were expected to learn from their duties in the field. In spite of efforts made by chief of army intelligence to increase the number of officers assigned to the intelligence division of the general staff, it was not until the end of the war that some 40 new men were attached. Consequently, the army’s ability to gauge its opponents declined as the conflict progressed, and its ability to anticipate Allied counter-offensives was severely handicapped. Field manuals did warn, ‘if a person does not know himself and the enemy, he will lose

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<sup>7</sup> US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA (MHI), United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Japanese Military and Naval Intelligence Division*, April 1946, (hereafter, USSBS, *Japanese Military and Naval Intelligence Division*)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

no matter how many times he fights'.<sup>9</sup> The truth of the matter was that Japanese units simply did not have the means to obtain accurate data. A post-war study by the US War Department's military intelligence service noted how the Japanese were 'consistently unable to determine the forces opposing them' before actual contact had been made.<sup>10</sup> Except for information compiled from combat operations, the IJA had been unable to produce a substantially accurate order of battle list of Allied dispositions in any theater. Predictions of Allied strategy were wide off the mark, mainly because the Japanese were not successful in reading any high-grade US or British cyphers, and consequently, the only sources of information were signals traffic analysis and observations of the general operational situation. The Solomon Islands detachment commander described the Guadalcanal operation as a 'surprise landing', and the American marines were able to land almost unopposed.<sup>11</sup> The IJA's intelligence on the British Fourteenth Army in India fared little better. During the attack against the Imphal-Kohima area during spring 1944, General Mutaguchi Renya, the commanding general of the Fifteenth Army, drew up a plan which overlooked the increase in British strengths which had taken place since the Japanese staged their invasion of Burma. Army officers had no intelligence apart from a 1:125,000 map which detailed the topography of the Imphal-Kohima region.<sup>12</sup>

Any accurate assessments were more the result of intelligence guesswork than good intelligence. In summer 1945, army intelligence predicted that the Allies would initially stage their invasion of the home islands at Kyushu, and was even able to determine some of the beaches where the landings were to take place. (Coox, 1991, 197-201) The forecast was not based on hard evidence, but on conjectures as to which areas US forces were likely to choose as the most favorable points for launching an operation.

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<sup>9</sup> UKNA WO 208/1446, Special bulletin, Extract from captured Japanese document on necessity of being prepared for the enemy, Allied Translation and Interrogation Section (ATIS) Bulletin No.87, 28 October 1943

<sup>10</sup> United States Naval War College, Newport, RI, Manuscript Collection, Papers of Edwin T Layton, Box 22, Military Intelligence Service, *The Japanese Intelligence System*, 4 September 1945

<sup>11</sup> UKNA WO 208/2275, 'Japanese Military Intelligence', War Office Weekly Intelligence Review (WOWIR) No.2, 26 August 1943

<sup>12</sup> UKNA WO 208/2280, 'Japanese failures and mistakes in the attack on India', WOWIR No.69, 6 December 1944

The Japanese continued to discount Allied fighting capabilities even when their declining fortunes discredited their sense of superiority. Military planners had been ‘corrupted by their own propaganda’ which proclaimed that the Japanese had a ‘divinely bestowed’ gift of superiority, and as a result, information was suppressed to the point where officials became ‘blind to objective intelligence’.<sup>13</sup> In an organization which maintained an unquestioned faith in victory, few people were likely to pay attention to their enemy’s prowess until defeat became unavoidable.

### **Effect of intelligence on strategy**

Within Japan’s defense establishment, intelligence was unlikely to have a positive impact on strategic planning, mainly because decision-makers preferred not to ponder over evidence which suggested that their forces might face difficulties. To complicate the situation, the Japanese based their military practices on historical experiences, which had given rise to an accepted notion that wars could be won by dealing a knockout blow at the onset, and waiting for their enemies to offer peace, in the same way the conflicts against China and Russia at the turn of the twentieth century had been conducted. Military officials assumed everything hinged on the initial operations, and did not give much thought to what might transpire thereafter. The concept of a limited conflict was unlikely to work against enemies who insisted on fighting a total war, where superiority in armaments production and deployment played a decisive role. The army leadership in particular lacked experience in tackling the critical questions of industrial production and military potential. The Japanese failed to heed one of the cardinal principles expounded by Clausewitz, that statesmen and commanders were ‘to establish... the kind of war on which they are embarking’, rather than mistaking it for the war they *wanted* to fight. (James, 1986, 715)

Japanese war plans were rarely based on sober calculation. Decision-makers engaged in what Michael Barnhart (1984) has described as ‘best case analysis’, where they composed a script outlining how they expected the conflict to unfold, and made no allowance for contingencies. In formulating their strategy for the Pacific War, Japan’s leaders were preoccupied with their overriding concern, namely, to solve the dilemmas caused by the Western embargoes. Japan’s

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<sup>13</sup> USSBS, *Japanese Military and Naval Intelligence Division*

stockpiles of oil and essential raw materials could maintain its operations in China for no more than two years. Under the circumstances, the only means to avoid an economic collapse were to find alternative supplies by annexing British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, and thereby face hostilities against the western powers, or meeting US conditions for a lifting of the sanctions, which were a withdrawal from Indochina and negotiating an armistice with Nationalist China. Military leaders saw the latter as one that entailed an unbearable loss of pride, since it required Japan to concede to blackmail, and forego any tangible gains from its ventures on the Asian mainland. By August, the army and navy general staffs conceded that hostilities were inevitable if Japan failed to secure a rapprochement. (Butow, 1961, 246-47)

Because the occupation of Southeast Asia was considered essential for national survival, any information which suggested that the action might incur problems was downplayed. (Morgan, 2003, 174) At a liaison conference held on 6 September, Japan's leaders ratified 'The Essentials for Carrying Out the Empire's Policies', which stated that if they failed to negotiate a lifting of the Western embargoes, the only recourse was to seize the oil and mineral resources of Malaya and the Dutch East Indies.<sup>14</sup>

The possibility that such moves entailed an armed confrontation against the US and Britain was acknowledged, but what followed was a sanguine appraisal of how the war might develop. Admiral Nagano, the navy chief of staff, explained that Japan needed to avert a protracted war against America and Britain, since it could not win by conquering either nation. However, Nagano suggested that, if Japan took key strategic areas and sources of raw materials in Southeast Asia and the western Pacific at the onset, its forces could prepare for an extended war of attrition. The IJA proved to be a stronger advocate of war, and General Sugiyama, the army chief of staff, argued that Japan needed to seize the initiative at the earliest opportunity. If it remained idle, by spring 1942 Allied military preparations were likely to render their forces more difficult to defeat.

Both assessments by the service chiefs were noteworthy because they did not seriously consider the outlook in a long-term war. The reference document used

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<sup>14</sup> Record of Imperial Conference, 6 September 1941, in Ike, 1967, pp.135-51

to answer potential questions at the conference, prepared by representatives of the war and navy ministries, presented a most evasive explanation of how Japan was to win. While an American surrender was ‘well-nigh impossible’, Japan could ‘not exclude the possibility that the war may end because of a change in [US] public opinion, which may result from such factors as the remarkable success of our military operations in the south or the surrender of Great Britain’.<sup>15</sup> At the imperial conference of 5 November, the final decision for war was ratified. Sugiyama offered yet another vague prediction, that Japan’s forces would endeavor to establish a ‘strategically impregnable position’, and thereby frustrate the Allies ‘by one means or the other’.<sup>16</sup>

Japanese policymakers also dismissed evidence which pointed to their precarious economic position. In October, shortly after rising to power, Tojo asked the cabinet’s planning board to investigate the empire’s supply of war materials. (Barnhart, 1984, 449) Lieutenant-General Suzuki, president of the board, warned that unless shipbuilding was maintained at a sufficient level, Japan could not provide the merchant shipping needed to transport the resources from Southeast Asia and thereby keep its industries afloat (Morley, 1994, 296-97).<sup>17</sup> The statement apparently did not raise worries. Tojo retorted that, because the emphasis in the army’s preparations was on the Soviet Union, the materials used in the south represented only a small proportion of the available resources, and the army could ‘somehow manage in 1942 and 1943 if [it had] the same allocation as before’. On the question of funding the war effort, the finance ministry representatives stated that Japan’s monetary strength was sufficient, so long as the supply of raw materials was adequate. (Butow, 1961, 317) Neither the service chiefs nor Tojo probed for explanations of what the assessment meant, or what constituted an ‘adequate supply’. Japan thus entered the war with a vague idea of how its material requirements were to be sustained.

When the Pacific War broke out, the Japanese continued to follow a plan founded on confusion and idealism, and their conduct of the can be best described as uncoordinated. In early 1942, the main dilemma was to decide how to secure

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<sup>15</sup> Reference Materials for Answering Questions at Imperial Conference of September 6 regarding ‘The Essentials for Carrying Out the Imperial Policies’, in Ike, 1967, p.153

<sup>16</sup> Record of Imperial Conference, 5 November 1941, in Ike, 1967, p.226

<sup>17</sup> Record of 62<sup>nd</sup> Liaison Conference, 27 October 1941, in Ike, 1967, p.191

Japan's empire. The two options were: 1) seek further conquests in the Pacific and Indian Ocean and push Allied forces further back, or 2) consolidate Japan's defenses in preparation for the eventual Allied onslaught. The liaison conference of 7 March 1942 decided on the 'General Outline of the Future Conduct of the War', but the paper did not stipulate whether a protracted war, or a short and decisive conflict, was the objective. (Akagi, 2004, 57-58) The paper set out three aims: i) 'to expand on the military achievements already accomplished', ii) to secure 'long-term political and military indestructibility', and iii) to take active measures to force Britain's surrender and make America lose the will to fight. The order of priority remained muddled, and Japan continued to prosecute the war without any concrete ideas of how to defeat the Allies.

When the Allies emerged on the winning side during late 1942 and early 1943, Japan's leaders adopted a strategy of wearing out their opponents' fighting spirit through delay and attrition. In February 1943, when the liaison conference conducted a 'Review of the World Situation', Sugiyama declared that, since the tide had turned against the Axis powers on all fronts, forcing Britain's surrender was a lost cause. (Akagi, 2004, 61-62) While Japan's leaders acknowledged their declining fortunes, they held onto their hopes of breaking Allied morale. In September, IGHQ ordered the IJA to construct an 'Absolute National Defense Sphere', comprising the islands of the western Pacific, the East Indies and Burma. (Hayashi, 1959, 72-73) The army was to hold its positions at all costs, and Allied attacks were to be destroyed by all possible means. Given time, mounting casualties were to compel the Allies to offer a negotiated peace settlement.

The military leadership in Tokyo remained unable to comprehend the size of the forces ranged against them, in spite of the ever-increasing scale of the Allied counter-offensives, and despite the repeated pledges by the US and Britain that they demanded the unconditional surrender of Japan. Although policymakers spoke of waging a 'protracted war', they did not comprehend how the term entailed a fight to the finish, and that the Allies would not cease their effort until they had occupied Japan's home islands, and undertook the total destruction of its military power. (Ikeda, 1952, 144-45) Only when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, did Japan's leaders acknowledge the stark truth that their nation could not hold out. Even then, the military representatives in the cabinet insisted the army and navy be given the opportunity

to stage one final showdown against the Allied invasion of the home islands. (Morgan, 2003, 217) Only Emperor Hirohito's intervention, and his decision to surrender, saved Japan from further carnage.

### **Intelligence and the development of tactical doctrine**

The IJA was largely unsuccessful in using intelligence on the fighting capabilities of its Allied opponents to undertake an improvement in its methods, mainly because its commanders were reluctant to admit the shortcomings of their own forces. To worsen the situation, the swift victories achieved against the Allied forces only served to reinforce the belief that the Japanese army was superior. As a result, the IJA continued to rely on infantry units as the centerpiece of its tactical doctrine, and failed to make any significant progress in the development of modern weapons and training in their use. While the dependence on infantry units was logical in light of Japan's narrow industrial base and the difficulties it faced in producing mass quantities of heavy equipment, perceptual flaws also laid the foundation for the IJA's doctrine. The rank and file was imbued with an institutionalized taboo against suggesting that their troops could face difficulties in prevailing. (Coox, 1988, 34-38) Military traditions also called for a strict adherence to established rules, along with an unquestioned acceptance of orders from higher authority. Practices of this nature gave rise to an exceptional level of discipline. However, the IJA's rigid mindset stifled initiative, and its commanders were perpetually denied the necessary impetus for pushing ahead with improvements in their methods. Field officers were unable to think outside the intellectual parameters fixed by their military education, and held a preconception that Western forces were unable to attain the discipline needed to withstand the strains of prolonged combat. Events in China showed the IJA's tendency to count on tactical skill and spiritual training, leading one US observer to suggest that it showed 'a lack of appreciation of modern firepower and an over-confidence in the mystic virtue of spirit (*seishin*) to overcome material obstacles'.<sup>18</sup>

The IJA's successes during the opening months of the Pacific War reinforced its sense of invincibility. In reality, the rapid conquest of Southeast Asia was not

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<sup>18</sup> NARA 2 RG 165, M-1216, Roll 20, MID 2023-1005, Tactical Doctrine of the Japanese Army, prepared by Captain Maxwell D. Taylor (Field Artillery), received by US Military Attaché (Tokyo), 1 April 1939

entirely due to the IJA's skill. As Edward Drea (1998) has explained, Japanese capabilities in jungle warfare operations were actually not substantial, mainly because training had focused on open country fighting against the Chinese and Soviet forces on the Asiatic mainland. The successes in Malaya and the Philippines were therefore largely a result of good fortune, and due to the fact that the Japanese only had to face poorly trained and ill-equipped opponents.

Yet, the Allies' failure to hold their positions was taken as confirmation that British and US troops were inefficient. When Japanese tactics failed, the universally accepted practice was to adhere to the belief that had been drummed into every soldier, namely that victory went to the side with greater tenacity. Troops were ordered to rely on 'spiritual materialistic strength' to combat the US forces' superior firepower.<sup>19</sup> A field manual captured in New Guinea professed, 'American forces, by virtue of their training, are weak in hand-to-hand fighting, and consequently they are nothing to fear'.<sup>20</sup> Japanese troops were to prevent US forces from making use of their superior firepower by infiltrating their enemy's positions from the rear, and as long the attackers paid close attention to the rules of close quarter combat and maintained their morale, victory was certain. The IJA's mounting setbacks against US forces did not appear to affect its tactical doctrine. A field manual captured in the Philippines during early 1945 stated that, while an army with inferior equipment could not win, in the final analysis, 'a well-trained army, with a firm belief in victory,... [could] overcome material superiority and attain a swift victory'.<sup>21</sup> Because field commanders believed morale factors were sufficient to guarantee victory, they tended to disregard the tactical or strategic situation they faced. Consequently, the Japanese tended to make decisions that entailed a reckless expenditure of lives.<sup>22</sup> So long as the

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<sup>19</sup> UKNA WO 208/1395, Enemy Document Captured at Attu: received from Advanced Intelligence Centre (North Pacific Area), outlining Japanese review of American tactics, 17 June 1943

<sup>20</sup> UKNA WO 208/1403, 'Handbook of the Japanese Army', Chapter XXXIX-3a: Translation of Captured Japanese Document, describing lessons based on experience gained in fighting American and Australian forces in Eastern New Guinea by 805<sup>th</sup> *Butai*, captured on Eniwetok atoll and received at Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas on 10 March 1944

<sup>21</sup> NARA 2 RG 496, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, Psychological Warfare Branch, Box 2726, Daily Collation Summary, 'Challenge adequacy of spiritual force alone', 8 March 1945

<sup>22</sup> NARA 2 RG 165, War Department, 'P' File, Box 341, Allied Translation and Interrogation Section, Southwest Pacific Area, Research Report No.76, Part VI, *Defects Arising from the Doctrine of 'Spiritual Superiority' as Factors in Japanese Military Psychology*, 10 October 1945

Japanese army establishment believed that the tenacity of their troops could assure an eventual victory, it saw no strong reasons to investigate ways to reform its tactics.

### **Conclusion**

Poor intelligence in itself was not the sole cause for the IJA's defeat during the Pacific War. The Imperial Army was defeated because the bulk of its divisions were tied down in a drawn-out conflict in mainland China, and the Allies, particularly the Americans, had vastly superior industrial prowess, which enabled them to deploy greater numbers of troops, equipment, aircraft and ships against Japan's forces in the Pacific. However, misperceptions of Allied capabilities led Japan to embark on a war effort for which it was ill-prepared, and adhere to methods which entailed crippling losses of scarce manpower and raw materials.

In the final analysis, the Japanese wartime experience illustrates how a stagnant military culture, which insists upon an adherence to set beliefs and practices, tends to have detrimental effects on the intelligence process. The Imperial Japanese Army was imbued with a conservatism which hindered any significant transformation, even when wartime experiences proved beyond doubt that its ways were not adequate. A combination of historical factors ranging from an extended period of isolation from the outside world, a centuries' old belief in self-superiority to a contempt for foreign cultures combined to create a situation where the IJA tended to view knowledge of the enemy as a feature which made little or no difference. Army officials made only a minimal effort to gauge the war potential of their British and American opponents, largely because they preferred to base their calculations on the wishful belief that their resolve to fight the war, coupled with good fortune, would guarantee victory. Japan's leaders rarely scrutinized the situation facing their armed forces in an objective or calibrated manner. Because the IJA scorned the value of intelligence, its way of conducting the Pacific War was not adequate to achieve its aims. On the contrary, misconceptions of the enemy led the Japanese to embark on a course of action that in the end resulted in nothing but total defeat.

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