

## IS HISTORY OF ANY USE FOR INTELLIGENCE PREDICTION?

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History is sometimes described, by those who see little hope of learning anything from it, as “just one damned thing after another”.

Others take a more optimistic view of the usefulness of history. Ludvig Holberg, a great Danish historian and dramatist (who was born in Norway) wrote in an essay published in 1748:

*“I consider the study of History, second to God’s words, to be the most useful and the most important of all, when it is read in the proper spirit. I get to know countries; I get to know human beings; I get to know myself; Yes, I learn to prophesy, for one may judge from what is past about what is going to happen in the future, and therefore one may, in some way, consider every learned historian a Prophet. Moral studies can certainly be very useful; but History has a more powerful effect, when it is read with thoughtfulness and when it is of the right kind.”* 2

Closer to our own times, a British historian who was also a most successful intelligence officer, had this to say about history:

*“For ordinary men and women the prime value of the study of history is that it vastly enlarges human experience. The true student forms his judgements, not upon the few and uncertain*

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<sup>1</sup>This paper was written for and presented at the Iafie Conference in Breda 22-24 June, 2016. I am grateful to the organisers of this conference and especially to Professor Bob de Graaff for kind encouragement.

<sup>2</sup>Ludvig Holberg: Epistola CLXII in: Epistler, udgivne med Kommentar af F.J. Billeskov-Jansen, København, 1945, vol.II, p 266-67. First published: København, 1748 (excerpt translated by LB).

The Danish text: Jeg holder det Historiske Videnskab næst GUDs Ord for det nyttigste og vigtigste af alle, naar det bliver læset med rette Øyen. Jeg lærer deraf at kiende Lande: Jeg lærer at kiende Mennesker: Jeg lærer at kiende mig selv: Ja jeg lærer at spaae: Thi man kand af forbigangne Ting dømme om tilkommende, og derfor i visse Maader holde hver grundig Historicum for en Prophet. Moralske Betænkninger ere vel af stor Nytte; men Historien haver kraftigere Virkning, naar den læses med Skiønsomhed, og naar den er udi sin rette Skikkelse .

*precedents of his lifetime, but upon the accumulated experience of the past. He learns the all-important habit of discriminating between the important and the trivial; he establishes for himself a true standard of values; he is not to be stampeded into magnifying unfortunate episodes into catastrophes. In short he gains judgement and balance and wisdom, all based not on the brief experience of a single lifetime but on the truths culled from many generations.”* <sup>3</sup>

During the Second World War, J.C. Masterman chaired the so-called “Twenty Committee” which met every week to decide which pieces of (true) information the British could safely pass to the Germans in order to keep alive the credibility of their “Double Cross-System.” <sup>4</sup>

In intelligence work, trying to find out “what is likely to happen” in the future is generally considered both the most important and the most difficult part of the work. A priori, one should think that a thorough knowledge of history must be pretty helpful in this endeavour.

However, a study of History seems to rank below other recommended methods in intelligence education. One reason for this, no doubt, is because the “lessons” from a specific historical event will often be complex and subject to many different and perhaps conflicting interpretations.

Drawing lessons from History is indeed difficult. When one lives, as I do, in Denmark near the Sound which separates Denmark from Sweden, one must frequently remember the events in 1659 when Copenhagen was under siege by the Swedish army. It is very probable that the Swedish general assault on the city on February 11, 1659, would have succeeded and put an end to Denmark’s existence as an independent nation, if a large Dutch fleet carrying food and soldiers had not fought its way into Copenhagen in the autumn of 1658.

When younger, I used to think that this all happened *because Dutch people are nice*. Later I realised that the Dutch in those years normally supported the Swedes, and it became clear that I should look for other explanations than kindness.

## **HOW SHOULD HISTORY BE STUDIED?**

My youthful mistake illustrates how a *wrong* conclusion can be drawn from a true historical fact, and such conclusions will not make anyone wiser, indeed quite the opposite. So just *how* should History be studied in order to be of any use for an intelligence analyst?

The answer is obvious: History must be studied very broadly – to provide the ‘large picture’ – but at the same time in the greatest possible detail with regard to some selected issues. Such a detailed study is vital in order to make the student familiar with the host of problems and uncertainties which turn up whenever one digs deeper into “what really happened” and “why”. Reading one book of history is never enough; nor are two on the same subject, but comparing different versions may point the way to seeing where the difficulties are and what sort of additional sources are needed to provide a better understanding.

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<sup>3</sup>J.C. Masterman: *The Martyrdom of Man*, in: *Bits and Pieces*. London 1961, p. 83

<sup>4</sup>J.C. Masterman: *The Double-Cross System in the war of 1939 to 1945*. New Haven and London, 1972

Undertaken in this manner, the detailed study of History is perhaps almost identical with the way in which intelligence analysts are trained to go about their work. The historian, too, has to determine, through analysis, the biases of the various sources, their strengths and weaknesses, their vantage points, etc., etc. The big difference is that the historian knows what happened afterwards.<sup>5</sup>

The thesis of this paper is that a thorough knowledge of History *will* help the intelligence analyst to formulate the range of possible outcomes which he may venture to put forward.

Please note the word “help” and the word “range”. History is *not* a blueprint and one cannot from historical examples look up the developments to be expected in any given situation. What one *can* do is to look for the range of possible outcomes that may be reasonably suggested as possible. Perhaps more importantly, one can use history to remind oneself of how complicated a seemingly simple decision-making process typically is, and how often things turn out very different from what those living in the middle of them were expecting.

History, then, for the intelligence analyst is not a tool-box in which he or she can look for the appropriate screwdriver to fit the current problem. Rather, studying history may free the analyst from some illusions as to what is possible or not possible within the range of human affairs.

### **THE FLEETING “NOW” AND THE FIXED HISTORICAL PAST**

How should History be studied in order to obtain the most benefit for an intelligence analyst? What is “history of the right kind” (as Ludvig Holberg wrote in 1748), that may turn the historian into “a prophet”?

A situation in development, something happening ‘right now’, is experienced as having many, perhaps very many, possible outcomes: We are aware of what happened yesterday and we are aware – maybe – of what is happening right now, but as for tomorrow and the day after – there seem to be many possible outcomes, and the number of possibilities appears to increase the longer into the future we attempt to look.

This is true both in a narrow, local perspective: “the tactical level” – will our attack succeed or fail? – will the enemy ship be sunk? And also in a larger perspective: “the strategic level” – will the war be won or lost? Will my nation (or my civilisation) survive and prosper, or are we (as once the Roman Empire) on a downhill path?

In time such questions are answered. There may be much uncertainty and disagreement about the reasons or the precise ways in which the outcome was reached, but there is rarely doubt about the outcome as such: The Roman Empire disappeared; the battleship Bismarck was sunk; the state of Yugoslavia was dissolved and split into its components.

The history of an event or a specific development surprisingly quickly loses the sense of how things might have happened differently from the way they did. There are good reasons for this: a different result would have demanded a different explanation, and the job of the historian is to explain why things happened as they did.

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<sup>5</sup>I am grateful to Mr. Dan Goldberg for important advice here and elsewhere in the paper.

The war in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s is a case in point. As Andreas Ernst (a Swiss historian and journalist based in Belgrade) wrote in 2012 in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*: “Historians know the result of the history they look into. In contrast to the contemporaries, they know who will win the war ... but this advantage also brings risks: It can lead to the prejudice that things happened the way they did because they had to happen that way. What is lost thereby, is a feeling for the openness of the historical process, and an interest in the range of the possible, especially in crises”.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, academic history writing tends to dismiss “an interest in the range of the possible” under the label of “counterfactual history” which is seen, perhaps, more as entertainment and not as serious history.

I am not recommending that analysts who study History as part of their education should take much interest in counterfactual history. There are reasons that things happened as they did, and intelligence analysts, like historians, need to focus on these reasons.

What I *am* recommending, however, is that an intelligence analyst should make a conscious effort, whenever studying History, never to lose sight of the fact that the events under study, at the time when they were happening, still possessed a fluid character and could have developed in several different ways. Indeed, they were just like any complicated situation on which the analyst has to produce an intelligence report after he had finished reading his history book.

Had I been living in Copenhagen in December 1658, I would certainly have been very grateful to the Dutch fleet that so recently brought hope into the besieged city (whatever their motives), but I would also have been very worried about the Swedish army outside the city walls commanded by their famously ruthless and effective King.

I suggest that the study of History, undertaken in this spirit, will serve as an inspiration to the analyst in his daily work. It will train him to look for the range of possibilities that once were seen to exist in situations which now have become a part of the history.

For example - to continue with the story of Dutch kindness towards Denmark: Few Danes now remember that the war against Sweden, which so nearly ended in disaster for Denmark, was deliberately started as a war of aggression by the Danish King Frederik III, who declared war against Sweden on June 1, 1657, in the mistaken belief that King Karl X Gustav was too occupied in his wars in Poland to take effective action against Denmark. As a Danish historian once wrote,

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<sup>6</sup>“Historiker kennen den Ausgang der Geschichte, die sie untersuchen. Anders als die Zeitgenossen wissen sie, wer den Krieg gewinnen wird, welches Land untergehen und welches System die Krise überstehen wird. Dass sie das Ergebnis kennen, definiert ja gerade das Privileg der Geschichtswissenschaften gegenüber anderen Sozialwissenschaften. Aber dieser Vorteil birgt auch Risiken. Denn er kann zum Vorurteil führen, dass die Dinge so kamen, weil sie so kommen mussten. Was dabei verloren geht, sind die Sensibilität für die Offenheit des historischen Prozesses und das Interesse an den Spielräumen des Möglichen - gerade in Krisen.

Ein grosser Teil der Historiografie über das Ende des zweiten Jugoslawien ist ein Paradebeispiel dafür, was geschieht, wenn die Geschichte von ihrem Ende her rekonstruiert wird.”

Andreas Ernst: Jugoslawien ohne Krieg. NZZ 11.1.2012 Feuilleton p.21

”Without any attempt at all to estimate the dangers, they <the Danes> threw themselves into the Unknown”.<sup>7</sup> Well, if it hadn’t been for that Dutch fleet....

The Danes are not alone in such reckless behaviour. In fact, a very large number of famous enterprises or initiatives known from History were started in the belief that they would lead to results far different from what actually happened. The people who took the initiative sometimes had made their plans very carefully and had (unlike King Frederik in 1657) made every effort to procure the best intelligence they could – and yet, they failed.

An early example of impressive planning is this: King Croesus of Lydia, having decided that he needed to do something about the advancing Persian menace on his border in Asia Minor, asked the Oracle in Delphi in 547 B.C. what would happen if he attacked the Persians.

The Oracle gave the famous reply. “When Croesus has crossed the river Halys, he will cause a great power to fall”.<sup>8</sup>

Croesus attacked the Persians across the river Halys and was defeated. Later he complained to Delphi, but the priests at the Oracle were unmoved and told him that he should have followed up, asking “which power?”

It is perhaps less well-known that Croesus, before he even asked the question, made a systematic effort to ensure that he had access to the best intelligence. According to Herodotus, Croesus began to “think about a way in which he could stop the growing power of the Persians before they became too great”. He began by making the following test of all the oracles in the World he could think of – five in Greece and one in Libya. Messengers were sent to each oracle and told to put the same question on a specific day, namely one hundred days after they had left Croesus. The question was: “What does Croesus, King of the Lydians, do right now?”

The response from Delphi was the best. The oracle said:

“I can count the sands, and I can measure the ocean;  
I have ears for the silent, and know what the dumb man meaneth;  
Lo! On my sense there striketh the smell of a shell-covered tortoise,  
Boiling now on a fire, with the flesh of a lamb, in a cauldron, -  
Brass is the vessel below, and brass the cover above it.”<sup>9</sup>

When Croesus received the reply from Delphi, he was impressed. What he did on the appointed day was unusual: He was cooking a tortoise and a lamb in a vessel of copper with a copper covering. The Delphic reply seemed to cover this activity perfectly. So Delphi was chosen for the question about Persia.

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<sup>7</sup>J.A. Fridericia: Danmarks Riges Historie, vol. IV, p. 380. Copenhagen, 1907

<sup>8</sup>H.W. Parke & D.E.W. Wormell: The Delphic Oracle. Volume I: The History. II: The Oracular Responses. Oxford, 1956 (Oracular response no. 53, vol. II, p.24)

<sup>9</sup>Herodotus I, 47 (translation by George Rawlinson, London, 1862 vol. I, p.148)

It is hard to see how an intelligence consumer could have acted more rationally or more methodically to ensure getting good information. In addition Croesus sent costly presents to the Delphic oracle. Yet the Delphic analysts contrived to make a prediction which could cover more than one outcome.

The Oracle in Delphi no longer exists (it uttered its last, sad words in 362 A.D. when the last pagan Roman emperor Julian was told, in poetic language, that the oracle was no longer in business).<sup>10</sup> But it is not difficult to think of contemporary parallels. There is a brisk trade done by companies that offer to do risk analyses and assessments of what is likely to happen in a given country or region of the world. A modern-day Croesus would presumably look into their track record of success or failure before deciding where to spend his money.

To historians, investigating the “track record” of those who in the past initiated great enterprises, History presents a very mixed bag. Failures – or at least nasty surprises – seem to dominate. Perhaps this is why historians tend to be a pessimistic lot. Of course, *everything* in human life does not go wrong, and indeed there is a good case to be made for the view that human life on Earth has improved immensely during the past, say, 10.000 years.

But those who set out to conquer their neighbours, like King Croesus did, most often find that their intelligence and their expectation of success have been flawed. This is certainly the lesson which can be drawn from the beginning of “the Great War” (later renamed World War I) which began in August 1914. That drama was full of surprises, at every level, even for those most people who were in the know.

Germany, it seems, did follow a plan, which in a military sense very nearly succeeded. The “Schlieffen-plan” to knock out France in a few weeks almost did that. But the battle of the Marne instead solidified the war into the terrible murderous slogging match which lasted four years. This probably would not have happened if Britain had not entered the war at the last moment. As late as July 24, 1914, when the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia was first known in London and a few days before the guns started shooting, the British Prime Minister foresaw the war, but did not foresee Britain’s entry into it. Asquith wrote that day to his young and admired friend Venetia Stanley:

*“...At 3.15 we had a Cabinet where there was a lot of vague & not very fruitful talk about Ulster, the provisional government &c; but the real interest was Grey's statement of the European situation, which is about as bad as can possibly be. Austria has sent a bullying and humiliating Ultimatum to Servia, who cannot possibly comply with it, and demanded an answer within 48 hours - failing which she will march. This means, almost inevitably, that Russia will come on the scene in defence of Servia & in defiance of Austria; and if so, it is difficult both for Germany and France to refrain from lending a hand to one side or the other. So that we are within measurable, or imaginable, distance of a real Armageddon, which would dwarf the Ulster & Nationalist Volunteers to their true proportion. Happily there seems to be no reason why we should be anything more than spectators. But it is a blood-curdling prospect - is it not?”* <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>H.W. Parke & D.E.W. Wormell: The Delphic Oracle. Volume I: The History. II: The Oracular Responses. Oxford, 1956 (Oracular response no. 476, vol. II, p.194).

<sup>11</sup>Asquith to Venetia Stanley, 24.7.1914. H.H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley. Selected and edited by Michael and Eleanor Brock. Oxford, 1985, p. 122-123.

As everyone knows now, it was only Germany's decision to march through Belgium that made it possible for the British Government to be united in their decision to support France. The British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, until then had retained his hopes of reaching a negotiated solution to the Serbian crisis (as had been done with success in 1913) and perhaps for that reason he allowed Britain's position - and thus Germany's hope that Britain would stay out of the war - to last a little longer than he should have done.

Grey worried about this for the rest of his life. In his memoirs, "Twenty-Five Years. 1892-1916", he wrote that "...*deliberately to precipitate the waste and suffering of war before it became clearly inevitable was not only unsound policy, but a crime; it was indeed an act likely to bring unforeseen retribution. Further experience and reflection upon the complexity and uncertainty of human affairs have made me question whether any human brain can so calculate the long chain of consequences as to render it safe for anyone to make unnecessary war.*" <sup>12</sup>

Clearly, Grey was here thinking at the strategic level, of big events and their long-term consequences. I believe his advice is wise and that it should have been remembered and heeded in Washington in March 2003 when intelligence - which turned out to be incorrect - was used to justify the war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the long-term consequences of which are still very far from clear.

The study of history, however, can also provide insights and advice for the intelligence analyst at a much more local, even tactical level. It may teach him, for example, that sometimes *even near-perfect advance intelligence is no guarantee of victory.*

A good example is the battle of Crete, May 1941, when the Germans launched an air-borne attack on Crete where the British had substantial forces. Thanks to their ability to decipher the German Enigma messages (known as "ULTRA" intelligence) London knew in advance and in detail the German plan. Warnings were sent to General Freyberg, the New Zealand GOC in Crete as early as 1<sup>st</sup> May and an extensive description of the planned airborne attack was sent five days later, on 5<sup>th</sup> May.

A full week before the attack, on May 13, a detailed summary of the key Enigma decrypts was sent to Freyberg's headquarters. This message has been described as an "*almost comprehensive guide to Operation Merkur, one of the most complete pieces of timely intelligence ever to fall into the hands of an enemy. It revealed the timing of the attack, the objectives and the strength and composition of the attacking force. Moreover, as the success of Merkur depended on surprise - as all airborne operations must do - the revelation of the operation order to General Freyberg was particularly damaging.*" <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Viscount Grey of Fallodon: Twenty-Five Years 1892-1916, vol. I, p.15. London, 1925

<sup>13</sup>John Keegan: Intelligence in War. Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to al-Qaeda. New York, 2003, p. 169

On May 20, at about 6 in the morning, the German aircraft appeared in the sky, just as General Freyberg was having breakfast. A young officer, C.M. Woodhouse, happened to be with him and heard him say: "Well, they are on time." 14

But in spite of all their intelligence, the British in Crete lost and the Germans won. Noel Annan, an intelligence officer in London who was aware of the ULTRA information, remembered being appalled at the defeat:

*"Everything went as Ultra predicted. The Germans, particularly the parachutists, suffered appalling losses - 4000 were killed and 2500 wounded. Fliegerkorps VII was cut to pieces: hundreds of aircraft were destroyed, and the Germans never reconstituted it. One naval convoy was sunk by the Royal Navy and another was mauled and turned tail. Hitler was never again to use the parachutists in that role, as he might have done later in Malta. But the Germans captured the airfields, and the British forces were routed. ... What went wrong? ... The fact remains that on the sole occasion on which intelligence gave our commanders a cast-iron guarantee of success, they had failed. I shall never forget the incredulity and gloom that settled over MII4 when Crete was lost." 15*

What can the intelligence analyst learn from this episode? Perhaps only a negative: That however splendid and however comprehensive the intelligence may be, decisions in war depend on many other factors than knowledge, on brute force and on chance.

The eminent war historian John Keegan stressed the importance of brute force,<sup>16</sup> and Lloyd George the importance of chance, on which he observed towards the end of his War Memoirs (published in November 1936):

*"Chance is the supreme judge in war and not Right. There are other judges on the bench but Chance presides. If Germany had been led by Bismarck and Moltke instead of by von Bethmann-Hollweg and Falkenhayn, the event of the great struggle between a military autocracy and democracy would in all human probability have been different. The blunders of Germany saved us from the consequences of our own. But let all who trust justice to the arbitrament of war bear in*

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<sup>14</sup> "Shortly after dawn on 20 May I had to take a message to Freyberg at his headquarters in Khania (Canea): why, or what about, I cannot recall. He invited me to stay for breakfast on the veranda of his villa. The sky was exquisitely blue - a perfect early summer day; but momentarily looking up, I was startled to see the sky full of gliders and parachutists. Freyberg did not let it spoil his breakfast. He looked up, grunted, and remarked: 'Well, they're on time!'"  
C.M. Woodhouse: *Something Ventured*. London, 1982, p. 13

<sup>15</sup> Noel Annan: *Changing Enemies. The Defeat and Regeneration of Germany*. London, 1995, p. 33-34

<sup>16</sup> "Knowledge, the conventional wisdom has it, is power; but knowledge cannot destroy or deflect or damage or even defy an offensive initiative by an enemy unless the possession of knowledge is also allied to objective force. ... Knowledge of what the enemy can do and of what he intends is never enough to ensure security, unless there are also the power and the will to resist and preferably to forestall him. ....Foreknowledge is no protection against disaster. Even real-time intelligence is never real enough. Only force finally counts. As the civilised states begin to chart their way through the wasteland of a universal war on terrorism without foreseeable end, may their warriors shorten their swords. Intelligence can sharpen their gaze. The ability to strike sure will remain the best protection against the cloud of unknowing, prejudice and ignorance that threatens the laws of enlightenment." John Keegan: *Intelligence in War*, p. 348-49 (the final words in the book)



*mind that the issue may depend less on the righteousness of the cause than on the cunning and craft of the contestants. It is the teaching of history, and this war enforces the lesson. And the cost is prohibitive. It cripples all the litigants.”* 17

By November 1936 when Lloyd George published these words, some people already darkly perceived that a new war might be coming soon. Indeed, Lloyd George himself had predicted as much in 1919, when at the Paris peace negotiations he tried to prevent the creation of a Polish corridor which cut off Danzig from Germany, precisely the issue which became the *casus belli* on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939. Lloyd George’s secretary and mistress (and later wife) Frances Stevenson noted in her diary for March 25, 1919:

*”The great topic is Poland - Poland at breakfast, lunch and dinner, & I presume at the meetings too. D. <David L.G.> is dead against the 'corridor' system, under which a large slice of Germany containing 3 million Germans is lopped off & put under the Poles. D. says it will simply mean another war. The French are furious with him for opposing the idea”.* 18

The intelligence analyst may draw the conclusion that unhappy developments, even when foreseen quite clearly, may nevertheless happen, if some protagonists are convinced that they will derive profit from them – i.e. “win the war”.

It is perhaps not widely known today that Hitler was told by an impeccable source a few days before Germany attacked Poland precisely what would happen in that event: Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain sent a letter to Hitler on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1939. The letter was sent *en clair*, and it was intercepted and translated into German even before Ambassador Henderson presented it to Hitler. In this letter, the British Government said:

*”Your Excellency,                    10 Downing Street, August 22, 1939*

*Your Excellency will have already heard of certain measures taken by His Majesty's Government, and announced in the press and on the wireless this evening.*

*These steps have, in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, been rendered necessary by the military movements which have been reported from Germany, and by the fact that apparently the announcement of a German-Soviet agreement is taken in some quarters in Berlin to indicate that intervention by Great Britain on behalf of Poland is no longer a contingency that need be reckoned with. No greater mistake could be made. Whatever may prove to be the nature of the German-Soviet Agreement, it cannot alter Great Britain's obligation to Poland which His Majesty's Government have stated in public repeatedly and plainly, and which they are determined to fulfil.*

*It has been alleged that, if His Majesty's Government had made their position more clear in 1914, the great catastrophe would have been avoided. Whether or not there is any force in that allegation, His Majesty's Government are resolved that on this occasion there shall be no such tragic misunderstanding.*

*If the case should arise, they are resolved, and prepared, to employ without delay all the forces at their command, and it is impossible to foresee the end of hostilities once engaged. It would be a*

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<sup>17</sup>David Lloyd George: War Memoirs, vol. VI. London, 1936, p. xv

<sup>18</sup>A.J.P. Taylor (ed): Lloyd George. A Diary by Frances Stevenson. London, 1971, p. 176

*dangerous illusion to think that, if war once starts, it will come to an early end even if a success on any one of the several fronts on which it will be engaged should have been secured.”* <sup>19</sup>

The letter turned out to be a precise forecast of what subsequently happened, but it left Hitler unmoved. One is tempted to compare Hitler’s reaction to that of Saddam Hussein who apparently did not believe in 2003 that the United States and her allies really intended to attack Iraq. Again, history may provide useful help in understanding this. In a paper published in 2004, Christopher Andrew praised the usefulness of history for intelligence analysts. Specifically, he underlined the lesson that dictators are only told what they want to hear, but Andrew also wrote that western services are slow to grasp this, even though the historical evidence is abundant. <sup>20</sup>

Did the British Government on August 22, 1939, expect their message to make any impression? It is hard to say – perhaps the main purpose of the letter was to provide solid evidence in the Whitebook published soon after the outbreak of war that Britain had done everything to avert it.

### **SOME TENTATIVE CONCLUDING REMARKS.**

What has been said so far in this paper about history as inspiration for intelligence analysis and prediction may give the impression that the lessons are uniformly negative: They are about what is not understood, not remembered or not heeded. But the history of intelligence in the Second World War which can now be studied based on information which was kept secret for more than 30 years after 1945 contains also many astonishing examples of ingenuity and success – things that worked. (Success, of course, seen from the winning side’s perspective, in the nature of things).

One very important lesson from World War II for the intelligence analyst is that there appears to be *no limit to what strategic deception may accomplish – if it is planned and prepared for a long time.*

I am referring to the so-called “Double Cross System” already mentioned earlier when J.C. Masterman’s views on history were quoted. Space does not permit to go into any detail on this vast subject, but it should be noted that the strategic deception carried out by the Anglo-Americans and especially the British against Germany in World War II appears to have succeeded to a remarkable, even to an incredible degree. Michael Howard’s book *Strategic Deception* (Volume Five of *British Intelligence in the Second World War*) published in 1990 must be required reading for the intelligence analyst.

There is one more lesson which must be mentioned: The British exploitation of their code-breaking ability against the German Enigma machine (and other systems) led to the ULTRA intelligence

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<sup>19</sup>Miscellaneous no. 9 (1939) Documents concerning German-Polish Relations and the Outbreak of Hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939. Presented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament by Command of His Majesty. London, 1939. Cmd. 6106. The letter here quoted is no. 56, p. 96-97.

<sup>20</sup>“The captured documents so far released show how Saddam's distorted understanding of his opponents was reinforced by woefully skewed intelligence reports, leading him first to believe that the United States and its allies would not go ahead with an invasion, then even after hostilities had begun to delude himself into believing that he held the upper hand and could clinch a negotiated settlement through French and Russian mediation”. Christopher Andrew: *Intelligence analysis needs to look backwards before looking forward. History and Policy. Policy Papers. 01 June, 2004.* (I am indebted for this reference to Mr. Adam Svendsen).

which not only helped to win the battles (beginning with el Alamein, the first victory), but also to a large degree made the deception plans successful because intercepted and deciphered German messages often revealed whether a specific deception scheme was working or not.

It is a surprising fact that German cipher specialists during World War II never accepted, in spite of several 'near misses' in British security, that their communications were compromised. Every suspicious incident which should have revealed to the Germans that Enigma was being read by the enemy was explained by some other security weakness. This is an historical lesson for intelligence which is probably relevant also today.

Is history, then, of any use for intelligence prediction? It must be admitted that every event in history is *sui generis* and that therefore nothing which happens today is quite the same as anything that has happened before. Also "prediction" is a strong word, probably too strong for anything that even clever intelligence analysts can hope to achieve.

Perhaps other methods than a study of history may seem more systematic and more intellectually satisfactory for the purpose of putting together a convincing case for the success of a proposed policy. History, after all, tends to show that human expectations are so often wrong.