

ADDRESS TO THE OPEN SOURCE INTELLIGENCE LUNCH CLUB, 12 SEPT 95

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I must begin by stating that the views I will express are my own and distinctly do not represent those of the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense. Now I suspect Robert Steele hoped I would speak to you of blood and iron, with the Hestonian thunder of an Old Testament prophet. Instead, I am going to seize this opportunity to talk about an issue that is at once mundane and critical. My remarks are titled:

***INADEQUATE ANSWERS:
BUREAUCRACY, WEALTH, AND THE MEDIOCRITY
OF U.S. INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS***

(by Ralph Peters)

Point One: There is a natural human tendency to concentrate upon what we do well, while avoiding those endeavors we find uncomfortable or with which we are unfamiliar. Now in some spheres of human activity, virtuoso specialization is desirable: the brilliant quarterback need not be a marathon runner or Olympic diver. But in broader areas--especially in government--a willful focus upon strengths that ignores weaknesses leads to a fateful disequilibrium. Popular government, our most sublime collective endeavor, thrives upon conscientious balance--a lesson a bit obscured at the moment.

Point two: Our universities have popularized themselves into failure. The liberal arts and social science faculties babble adolescent fantasies of diversity, having surrendered responsible

citizenship to a hyper-socialist academic cult that enshrines egalitarian research skills and selective tolerance in lieu of meritocratic critical thought. Graduates are incapable of independent thought or authentic creativity, and we are plagued with increasingly-irrelevant academic writing allergic to quality and insensitive to the power of language, in which footnotes substitute for ideas. In general, Americans find abstract thought painful and unsettling, and we, the people, elsewhere virtuous, have a vulgar and self-demeaning tendency to embrace notions, prejudices or appealing slogans as an *ersatz* for examined beliefs. But a further discussion of that would lead us back to the problem of achieving balanced government.

Nowhere in our social organization are these interwoven strains--the instinctive concentration on the easy task and the avoidance of investigative thought--more evident and pernicious than in the U.S. intelligence community--rich as a sultan from *The Thousand Nights And A Night*, overpopulated as Calcutta, and equipped with an array of fantastic equipment that Hollywood could barely imagine. Despite the enormous resources we dedicate to the collection and processing of intelligence, our view of the world remains naive, untimely, dis-integrated, cowardly and inadequate--and, at its worst, dishonest, as we seek to please rather than inform.

We amass a treasury of data on a daily basis, but we rarely get the meaning. We face warlords, pre-modern tyrants, druglords, and Russian butchers of their own kind, only to find that, while *we* possess near-paralyzing amounts of information, *they*, our relatively primitive adversaries, are better able to focus and act upon the essential than are we. As a nation, we squander our blood, wealth and power because the guardians of our frontier watchtowers--the men and women of our intelligence community--focus tenaciously on what we do well, on that which is easy and safe, while shunning innovative thought as career-threatening and, finally, unnecessary. While we have the richest, most technically-capable intelligence system in the world, we frankly do not provide the American people the protection they deserve.

What is it that we do so well? Obviously, we are incomparable in the technological arena. Technological solutions are *American* solutions, machines the millenarian totems of an implicit

religion. When the human animal fails us, we look to laboratories, research institutes and industry to provide a more dependable link in the chain. And not even the most backward romantic can deny that we do marvelous things with machinery, from night vision devices to satellites--and let me state bluntly, I am not arguing against technology, which I treasure, but only for that sort of enlightened balance without which empires fall. Even the most sophisticated intelligence collection systems are most effective when targeted against opposing machines and devices, and computer-driven analysis works best when confronted with an enemy's digitized universe.

The satellite can see the tank. But it has great difficulty looking into the soul of the man driving that tank. Computers--indispensible in so many ways--can break codes and even predict food shortages. But no existing integer-based system contains either an algorithm or logarithm that encompasses the variety and ingenuity of the human mind or heart--if statistics and calculations could predict human behavior, mathematicians would get all the girls. But women, God help them, still fall for musicians, cowboys, and Marines...even for novelists, who are, of course, liars by definition.

Our ability to collect against *things* and against the overt characteristics of men and women who use those things--such as radios, telephones or networked computers--is remarkable. But the incessantly-presaged advent of information warfare is going to demand not just better machines but far more sophisticated analysts, an aspect of the problem we exuberantly ignore. And at the other, unnerving end of the conflict spectrum, the cruder our opponent and the fewer the modern or post-modern devices at his disposal, the harder it is for us to find points of entry into his world. Even when we work against technologically-capable--and thus vulnerable--opponents, their behavior is apt to confound our linear logic.

At his dark core, man is not a logical creature at all, but an intuitive, emotional, and biologically-explosive anomaly. The behavior of ants, bees, dogs and even cats is logical. But man is at once the beast capable of transcending biological logic and too often the ape that fails

to enter the world of reasoning, learned logic the classically-minded among us persist in calling "civilization." And the generations of our monstrous century, by destroying the credibility and terror of religion for the masses, have removed mankind's most effective ordering mechanism for controlling human excess. My own generation did its best to collapse the structures of social order. Man is left with fear neither of eternal damnation nor social censure. We have become self-animalizing--and this is relevant for intelligence, because much of the challenge of being an analyst today lies in this: the unthinkable has become commonplace. At times an officer in today's Army has a sense of serving in one of the last good legions patrolling the barbarian frontier, while the children of Rome intoxicate themselves with self-interest.

As long as our opponents are men and women, the ultimate prediction tools we can wield against them are other men and women. We refuse to accept this fundamental truth--yet it is fundamental, and it *is* a truth. We spend tens of billions with alacrity to buy another generation of machines to peek around corners, then we put the harvest of those machines in the hands of the semi-skilled, the semi-interested, and, if we are to be absolutely honest, second- and third-rate intellects. We are unwilling to pay the comparatively meager amounts of money, attention and patience it would take to discover, attract, develop and retain our country's best, smartest and bravest as intelligence professionals. Except for some genuine eccentrics and a handful of unfashionable patriots who retain the ideals of service about which the rest of us merely speak, much of the intelligence community is made up of people who just want a job that is intermittently interesting, relatively safe, and not too hard.

Now it may be bad form to speak about money, but even sad old Karl Marx recognized its necessity and power. Because we pay analysts badly and treat them as the peasants of the intelligence and policy communities, we have crippled the most important muscle in the intelligence body. We dismiss analysts as "non-players," and leave the playing field to the marginally-informed. The usual way for an intelligence professional to progress in terms of

status and wealth is to leave analysis behind and become a manager, that plumpest and least vigorous of all bureaucratic creatures.

Given the types of threats our country faces now and for the foreseeable future, I would rather enter a conflict with one first-rate, field-tempered analyst who has a good map and a subscription to *The International Herald Tribune* than with a typical intelligence-community analyst backed by the take of every system we've got. As a soldier, I don't want another "analysis" of yesterday's peace talks. I want to know what's going to happen tomorrow, the day after, in the next decade, and beyond that. I know we will never get the future exactly right. The point is to get it "righter" than our potential opponents. Prediction--that hated word--is ultimately what it's all about. All else is secondary.

Beyond the technological reflex, another American response to failure is to pile on more of the same. Our intelligence bureaucracy has been rewarded for its shimmering mediocrity by being allowed to grow to an unwieldy size in which the timid and unproductive continue to replicate themselves. If ten weak analysts can't do the job, we hire ninety more, driving up personnel costs perversely, instead of concentrating on quality--and quality analysts, like good shirts, are much cheaper in the long run. We would be far better served by a numerically much-reduced intelligence community composed of an experiential elite and bright apprentices than we are presently served by the vast bureaucratic Golems currently flanking Washington, D.C.

And now we come to Desert Storm, that misunderstood and mismanaged war. A lesson the dull and powerful within the intelligence community believe they learned was that true regional experts are not necessary in the analytical community, that, in time of crisis, we can pull analysts from whatever they're doing and provide them with the relevant data base. Our success on the battlefield in Desert Storm is cited as proof of this proposition--which, by the way, justifies cutting analysts while preserving the jobs of managerial types and the sort of systems programs that offer comfortable homes to recently-retired managers (whom we, in Military Intelligence,

sometimes call commanders). Yet, had we had better regional analysts, we might not have made the blunders that led directly to that war. And, when the decision-makers were taking their decision to end the war prematurely, where was the veteran, trusted analyst who could warn them of the consequences of their lack of will? You can swap some technical analysts who bean count, but, if you want to get to the heart of today's security problems, to understand the causes and consequences that should inform our actions, you had better have on hand an analyst who understands more about the enemy than the technical specifications of his arsenal.

Yet, even if we could agree in theory that we need experienced, imaginative analysts who can get inside the other guy's skin, we are left with an enduring practical problem: For bureaucracies and military organizations, the brilliant eccentrics who do this sort of thing well are anathema, grotesqueries the normative mass cannot tolerate. The best analysts are born, not made. The seasoning of training and field experience is, of course, vital. But you either have the peculiar talents and off-center brands of courage waiting to be developed, or you don't. The best analysts are the kind of people our ancestors would have burned as witches. The high-socialist pretense that anybody can be trained to do anything may apply in the fast-food sector, but it's a nonsense if we are talking about penetrating the heart of human darkness.

Our recruitment programs--civilian and military--and our assumption that anyone with a reasonably-appropriate education can be an intelligence analyst are lunatic. That is equivalent to supposing that anyone with a degree in music is suited to sing opera at the Met. We in the Army have even tried--and not without some low-level successes--to reduce *tactical* analysis to templates and tables. But, at the end of the long, bloody day, analysis is closer to art than to science. The best analysts I have known have something akin to a sixth sense--they have a visionary touch, the ability to see that which, while still illogical to most, appears inevitable to them. It is a gift. But it is, of course, unacceptable in our Joe Friday world to speak of sixth sense, or vision, or intuition. Yet, I believe that, without that incalculable gift, that visceral understanding of the Other, no one will make a great analyst, or even a very good one.

For me, the correct challenge would be to attract the best of the interested candidates, then, during a long apprenticeship which included rigorous language training and no-frills travel to selective hells, to identify those with good instincts and guts, and to spin off the rest into welfare organizations, such as defense industry or the U.S. Navy. The survivors I would cherish, and train, and reward. The U.S. Army's Foreign Area Officer, or "FAO," program could serve as a model for the entire community, although, as a smaller Army struggles to perfect yesterday's skills, the FAO program has been cut back tragically--it is, generally, the nature of the U.S. military to equip yesterday's men with tomorrow's equipment. But, for all the casualties it has taken of late, the FAO program remains incomparably effective. The Foreign Area Officer is, without doubt, the most cost-effective intelligence "system."

We have to begin recruiting analysts not with apathy and quota lists, but, rather, the way a great orchestra or major league football team goes about building its cadre. Military and civilian, their career paths may have to be handled off-line. In the meantime, the core of a better analytical community is already with us. There are, indeed, quality individuals in our ranks, both military and civilian. Amid the oceans of mediocrity in which we daily swim, I am often pleasantly surprised to find a one-man, or one-woman, raft of excellence. And, let me add, it is wrenching to hear these splendid men and women present their views to an inter-agency committee only to have them pasteurized, homogenized and flavored vanilla before they see the light of day. We are despicable in our bureaucratic terror of being wrong, of presenting an estimate that might not be immediately and demonstrably right, and thus we inevitably get it wrong, again and again and again. Then, loathesomely bureaucratic, we camouflage our mediocrity and insufficiency by hiding behind absurdly-inflated classifications. As an aside, it always amuses me to watch how awed the media remain by classifications such as "top secret," or "secret." They are the bureaucrat's best friends, like well-intentioned tourists giving drug and drink money to the homeless, uncritically propagating evil. If the American people ever learned

how much slop and drivel is disguised by imposing classifications and caveats, they would have our heads--and we would deserve our fates, as surely as Nicholas Romanov deserved his.

How many intelligence reports and estimates have you read in your careers that made you sit up and say, "By God, we've got to do something about this right away?" Or that simply offered you a fresh insight? When was the last time you saw courage on the page or heard it in the briefer's words? The current goal of our intelligence community is not informing the President and subordinate decision-makers, nor is it guarding the republic with knowledge. Our real goal in the intelligence community is self-preservation--and self-perpetuation.

We are so often wrong--or just not right enough--because we are afraid of the risks that haunt the dark hallway leading to the future. So often, that which in retrospect appears inevitable, sounded ludicrous when the maverick analyst tried to brief it to skeptical superiors--who pride themselves on their matter-of-factness and practicality. We like our analysis linear, historically-founded, and documented with hard evidence. Yet there are no satellite photos of the future, no intercepts of tomorrow, and we have entered a spectacularly non-linear age of metastasizing complexity, an age of unprecedented global systemic breakdown and metamorphosis, in which history, far from ending, is exploding in multiple directions, forward, backward and laterally in different parts of the world--and sometimes, simultaneously, in the same country. How can we bear to be such cowards, drinking the taxpayer's money like blood?

In closing, let me break the symphonic rule that one should end with an overpowering crescendo. I have said a great deal about what I think is wrong. But I am an Army officer, and prejudiced in favor of my service. I believe that the most honest, if imperfect, intelligence analysis being done in our community today is being done by the U.S. Army and the Marine Corps. We have few serious analysts, although we in the Army have plenty of them on paper, and our cutting edge is composed of a dwindling number of Foreign Area Officers, who speak the languages--an indispensable quality--and who have taken the tempering risks at the back of beyond. Yet, I daily encounter a collective integrity that I fail to find elsewhere. Personally, I

have never been ordered by anyone in Army intelligence to change analysis to make it more palatable to those at the top, and I treasure this forthrightness and quiet valor on the part of my superiors. Part of this is the legacy to the Army and our country of a succession of remarkable and courageous Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Intelligence. But I think it also has to do with our soldier's awareness that the lives of our brothers and sisters in arms are on the line, and that our analysis *matters*. I rarely find this sense elsewhere, and, for too many intelligence professionals, analysis is, behind a bit of fluffy rhetoric, just a job in which the purpose is to please the boss.

I am personally grateful for the sense of honor and the struggle for competence I see in my uniformed comrades, and, as regards the exemplary Foreign Area Officer program, which, unlike expensive collection systems, has no constituency on Capitol Hill, let me end by paraphrasing myself: in most of the ugly, crude and asymmetrical conflicts we are likely to face in the coming decades, I would trade every glittering platform we have for one good man or woman who has been in those back alleys or backwoods, who speaks the language and knows the culture, and who has instincts honed by experience. As long as this world's troubles are caused by mankind, men and women will remain the ultimate tool for understanding and resolving those troubles. And all the machines in the world will not replace that primitive vitality of flesh and blood.

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